

HUMOR AND ETHNOGRAPHY IN HERODOTUS' *HISTORIES*

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ABSTRACT

MARK CHRISTOPHER MASH: Humor and Ethnography in Herodotus' *Histories*
(Under the direction of Emily Baragwanath)

This dissertation examines the role of humor in Herodotus' *Histories*. I argue that Herodotus' humor is best understood in the context of his ethnography, and base my analyses on the thoughts of ancient and modern writers on humor. In particular, I incorporate anthropological perspectives on humor, and most notably ethnic humor.

In chapter one, I establish the groundwork for later discussions by situating my work in the context of previous ancient and modern analyses of humor. In chapter two, I examine derision and witty retorts, starting first with Herodotus' own ridicule of mapmakers in 4.36.2. In chapter three, I discuss the role of humorous deception in the *Histories*. In this interplay of humor and deception, I examine three main types: tricks that are revealed in by the instigator, tricks that are uncovered, and tricks that turn deadly. In chapter four, I take up the relationship between didacticism and humor, and show how it appears as an oblique tool by which wise advisors are able to challenge the rigidity of their recipient's thinking. What is more, didactic humor sometimes appears by negative example, as when Cambyses laughs at Egyptian religious *nomoi* (3.29.1-2) or when Xerxes laughs at Spartan *nomoi* (7.101-105). Finally, in chapter five, I discuss memorializing humor, which I find in particular relation to monuments, battles and political disputes.

In all, I argue that by situating humor in the context of ethnography and by recognizing that it usually refers to different people's *nomoi*, we are able to understand better how Herodotus uses humor as part of his narrative technique. Moreover, I find that this same humor often reveals the influence of the current historical and cultural situation in which Herodotus was writing.

For Carrie

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The late Gareth Morgan introduced me to Herodotus and much like Herodotus, combined playfulness with seriousness in his teaching. I think he was one of the best readers of Herodotus' humor I have ever met. My Latin teacher, Reid Wightman, introduced me to the classical world, recognized my potential for future study, and inspired my efforts. The wonderful faculty of the UT Austin Classics Department prepared me well for graduate study and enabled me to reach my fullest potential as an undergraduate. My life over the last decade has been tied to the UNC Chapel Hill Classics Department and its outstanding faculty who challenged me, helped me to grow intellectually and personally, and graciously supported me to the completion of my studies.

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INTRODUCTION

In the work of scholars on the *Histories* and its complex message, humor has been largely excluded either as an oddity or an irrelevant part of the discussion. Indeed, it only takes a quick thumb through the indices of important tomes on Herodotus to see that treatment of humor is lacking. Some scholars, including Felix Jacoby (1913), have even seemed offended at the suggestion that the *Histories* contain any levity—for he lamented the trend of people finding humor in the initial women-snatching explanation to the start of the hostilities between the East and West (484).

Yet humor in the *Histories* is a central component to understanding how Herodotus fulfills the declaration of his proem that the ἔργα μεγάλα τε καὶ θωμαστά of the Greeks and barbarians not be forgotten. It therefore deserves to be studied critically and seriously. Humor contributes to our understanding of the varied character of Herodotus' narrative personas, some of which are less concerned with what we might regard as “serious history.”¹ While scholars have long recognized the presence of humor in the *Histories*, as their scattered remarks bear witness,² few have

¹ On the varied “truths” of Herodotus' different personas, see Lateiner 1977, 175; Marincola 2007, 60-67; and Baragwanath 2008, 55-81.

² E.g., Macan 1908, introduction 11: “Herodotus prefers the concrete to the abstract, the particular to the universal, the anecdote, the episode, the *bon mot*, the *gnome*, to the reasoned description of military movements, or the conscious rationale of political events. Even his record of the second Persian war, much the most closely connected and best sustained achievement in his logography, teems with sportive items (7.56, 120, 147, 194 (239); 8.26, 118, 125, 137-8; 9.33-5, 37, 76, 78-82, 93-4, 108-13, 122). Such things are not history, though they may be, if rightly authenticated, a part of the materials out of which history is to be made, or at least to be made agreeable. In a sense, indeed, they are better than history, they are mostly too good to be true; but in general they are at once either too artful or too

committed themselves to studies on the topic. As we turn to the previous scholarship on humor in the *Histories*, we will see more clearly the truth of Binyamin Shimron's lament that "this topic has hardly been touched on in research" (1989, 58). To be sure, Carolyn Dewald puts it mildly when she says that "[h]umour in Herodotus is not an entirely unstudied subject" (2006, 148).

I. Previous Scholarship

Scholarship on humor in the *Histories* comes up obliquely in connection to folk motifs (Wolf Aly 1921) and puns (J. Enoch Powell 1937), but more directly in several studies over the last 40 years. The earliest research devoted exclusively to humor in Herodotus is a Dutch article by D. F. W. van Lennep (1969),³ which examines the topic of

artless to rank as good historical evidences. In the one case they betray the moral, and in the other case the malignity, which has been at the making of them; or at best they drop out of serious account as pure sports of the humorist, or raconteur"; Carolyn Dewald: "The ironic pleasure in observing misperception and miscommunication shades at times into broad humour" (xl, 1998) and in her note to 3.118-19: "H enjoys narrating witty retorts and paradoxical observations: cf. 1.71, 2.30, 172, 4.142, 144, 7.120, 226, 8.26"; Donald Lateiner 2002, in his critical review of Thomas Harrison (2000): "H[arrison] misapprehends many signs of Herodotus' humor," (374) including the fantastic story surrounding Demaratus' birth: "Any ancient reader would recognize the comic, thoroughly Amphitryonic account" (374, footnote 10). Moreover, Lateiner notes that Harrison misses the opening women-snatching account as "a curious and humorous game with the audience" (376).

³ Whose work has not been acknowledged in any of the subsequent studies on humor in Herodotus, including most recently Dewald 2006. An example of Lennep's general remarks include the following:

"Herodotus' refined style brings about all levels of laughter: from the smile from an incidentally mentioned incident, such as the strip-tease of the Lydian queen in the story of Gyges and Candaules, to the belly-laugh over the dance number of Hippocleides in the story of Cleisthenes. Correction: Herodotus does not laugh. Nothing is more irritating than people who laugh at their own jokes. Herodotus keeps a straight face in the most comical situations. (119; translation by Madeleine Schwartz, whom I would like to thank for her patient help in working through this Dutch article with me).

"Herodotus beschikt over geraffineerde stijlmiddelen om de lach, in al zijn gradaties, te verwekken. Vanaf de glimlach over een achteloos vermeld incident, zoals de strip-tease van de Lydische koningin in het verhal van Candaules en Gyges (Hrdt. 1, 9), tot aan de uitbundige lach over een fortissimo zoals het noodlottig dansnummer van Hippocleides in het verhaal van Cleisthenes en de huwelijkspretendenten (Hrdt. VI, 129). Een rectificatie dringt zich hier op: Herodotus lacht niet. Niets is irriterender dan mensen die lachen over hun eigen geestigheden en een geoefend raconteur past daar terdege voor op."

humor in an ambitious, though often vague manner. Perhaps the most notable work on humor is Donald Lateiner's 1977 article on the theme of laughter and its foreshadowing of impending danger.⁴ In a 1978 article, Stewart Flory examined the theme of laughter, tears and humor, and he also has a few things to say about humor in his work *The Archaic Smile of Herodotus* (1987).⁵ Binyamin Shimron, in his 1989 work *Politics and Belief in Herodotus*, includes a brief chapter on "The Uses of Humour" (pp. 58-71), in which he stresses how Herodotus' humor is purposeful and never frivolous.⁶ In 1995, Alan Griffiths took up the topic for an international conference on humor by proposing two main types of humor in Herodotus, explicit (based upon Lateiner's 1977 work and identified concretely by the presence of the verb γελάω)⁷ and implicit, which he rightly argues is prominent in the *Histories*. Michel Casevitz, in his 1995 article, discusses the terminology of humor in Herodotus and analyzes examples of humor from book one. Most recently in the *Cambridge Companion to Herodotus* (2006), Carolyn Dewald discusses the connection between humor and danger, as well as the different voices through

⁴ See also Lateiner 1989, 28-30, for a brief discussion of laughter and smiles in the *Histories*.

⁵ Flory's most direct analysis of humor comes at the end of his second chapter: "We have found the father of history guilty of sometimes preferring fiction to truth. The only more damning charge to bring is to accuse him of not taking the distinction between myth and history seriously. Yet humor is an important key to Herodotus' attitude to his work as a historian. This humor is not a light veneer of jokes and sly remarks gilding the *Histories*. It is a profound irony about the contradictions surrounding truth and fiction. Truth and fiction should stand in opposition, a quintessential antithesis, and so Herodotus presents this contrast in many of the anecdotes analyzed in this chapter. Yet fiction paradoxically often offers a more important category of historical truth than facts. The style of the anecdotes focuses the reader's attention on this paradox. Herodotus' solution to the problem of the difference between myth and history is not only to admit it but to emphasize it with a characteristically wry wit. He smiles." (1987, 78-79).

⁶ I would like to thank Professor Baragwanath for references to Shimron's chapter on humor and Casevitz' 1995 article (see below in text), neither of which has been noted in any of the previous treatments of humor in Herodotus.

⁷ Griffiths helpfully notes that Herodotus *only* uses γελάω and its compounds, and not even "smiling" (μειδιάω) or "giggling" (κικλίζω) (1995, 39). See also Casevitz 1995, 6.

which the humor in the *Histories* is conveyed, namely in Herodotus' authorial voice or focalized through the voices of his characters.

II. A New Approach

The lack of attention scholars have paid to humor in Herodotus does not reflect the keen attention psychologists and, more recently, anthropologists have paid to the topic. In the scholarship on humor in the *Histories*, by contrast, little attempt has been made to consider this theoretical context for humor and no research has considered how the well-established spectrum of modern humor theories, along with their ancient antecedents, might help us to understand better the humor in Herodotus' text.

From my time studying the theoretical framework for humor, which I will lay out briefly in the next chapter, it has become clear to me that the most productive contextual setting for discussing humor in the *Histories* is anthropological. The acknowledgement in the field of anthropology that humor plays a significant role in understanding different cultures and their self-conceptions invites a parallel question in the case of Herodotus: "Did Herodotus make use of humor in going about his vast project in the *Histories* of examining and understanding the cultures of the known world?" As we will see in the next section, questions of ethnography have stimulated some of the most thought-provoking work on Herodotus, and yet when the research is examined, we find the same neglect of humor in the discussion.

In turning to consider why humor in the *Histories* is significant and in what context must it be understood, we need look no further than the proem. Herodotus signals that an ethnographic framework, while dealing specifically with the war

between the Greeks and barbarians, will underlie the “history” he will convey. In the next chapter, I will introduce the concept of ethnic humor, which anthropologists have recently shown to operate as a powerful tool that cultures use to make sense of one another, particularly in times of war. Humor, as we will see, is seen to operate not predominantly, but often most memorably, in the narrative characterizations of peoples’ *nomoi* as well as in their attempts to understand each other’s *nomoi*.

The presence of humor in the *Histories* should not surprise us, for it is one of the most effective tools by which the narrator can make his characters, events and ideas memorable. Shimron even argues that Herodotus’ choice to include funny stories in his text shows “that he considered humour as a legitimate or even necessary adjunct to his kind of ἱστορίας ἀπόδεξις” (1989, 60). As I will argue, we remember certain episodes so vividly because humor crystallizes these “moments” in the text so that they take on a life that transcends the text. Humor in the *Histories* exposes and is a mark of the oral culture of which Herodotus was a part and in which Herodotus recorded so much of his information. What better way to make memorable his account of Greek and barbarian deeds than to select and shape his text so that it is not simply an analytical experiment in cause and effect, but rather something that may indeed entertain at a surface level, yet also encapsulates through its humor serious issues that would resonate with Herodotus’ fifth-century audience?

Humor connected with the Persians, Spartans, and Athenians thus becomes conspicuous for its relevancy to the historical situation in which Herodotus was writing. Other peoples described in the *Histories* are no less important to my subject, however, because they bring to the fore the ideas of *nomoi* and the importance of

respect for the *nomoi* of others. As we will discover, the relationship of the characters in the narrative to the narrator will help shed light on the overall effect of the *Histories*' humor on the audience. At the same time, Herodotus is reluctant to regard any one people or nation in an unambiguous light, for just when we think we understand his judgment, we are presented with a different perspective that requires our further reflection.

Humor in the *Histories*, approached through the lens of ethnography, belongs in the much-discussed areas of Herodotean ethnography and politics. Therefore, in order to lay the foundations for our subsequent discussions of humor in terms of previous anthropological inquiries into the *Histories*, I will outline some of the key research on Herodotean ethnography and politics.

III. Research on Herodotean Ethnography and Politics

Perhaps the foundation of ethnographic approaches to Herodotus lies in the recognition of the intellectual milieu in which he was writing.⁸ Scholars have shown how the dynamic intellectual movement of the fifth century is reflected in Herodotus' interest in all things ethnographic, and which leads him, importantly, to link geography, temperament and general character.⁹ At the same time, scholars have convincingly shown that Herodotus' ethnographic interests are not at variance with his historical interests. Rather, a shift can be detected in scholarly inquiry from a focus on

⁸ See, for example, Thomas 2000 and 2006, and Raaflaub 2002.

⁹ A type of logic that is seen earliest in Hippocrates' *Air, Waters, Places*. For a recent treatment focusing on the influence of medical writers on Herodotus, see Thomas 2000.

the accuracy of Herodotus' sources and his factual accounting of battles and artifacts¹⁰ to the broader reality that emerges from his text. Or, to put it another way, the *Histories* often present us with a different sort of truth than we might expect to find.¹¹

The anthropological model for Herodotus first surfaced prominently in Francis Hartog's *Le Miroir d'Hérodote* in 1980 (English translation in 1988).¹² Hartog's emphasis on the ability of the text to communicate about both those peoples the narrator explicitly describes and the Greeks, even when they are not explicitly mentioned, marks the beginning of an important shift in the focus of much Herodotean scholarship. Hartog's notable work on the importance of ethnography in the *Histories* expanded the discussion beyond Herodotus' idiosyncratic recordings of peoples and their *nomoi*. He proposed that through Herodotus' ethnographic writings, specifically about the Scythians, it is possible to understand an overarching pattern of significance and insignificance. In Hartog's view, it is the Greeks who dominate Herodotus' thoughts and it is with reference to them that Herodotus structures his text. While he focuses primarily on the Scythians and Egyptians, Hartog also comments generally on the rhetoric of otherness. In the following excerpt, he describes the manner in which Herodotus portrays non-Greeks in his ethnographic discussions:

A narrator who belongs to group *a* tells the people of *a* about *b*; there is one world in which one recounts, another that is recounted. How can the world being recounted be introduced in convincing fashion into the world where it is recounted? That is the problem facing the narrator: a problem of translation.

To translate the difference, the traveler has at his disposal the handy figure of inversion, whereby otherness is transcribed as anti-sameness. It is not hard to see why

¹⁰ Above all Fehling 1971/1989, and Armayor 1978a-d and 1985. For rebuttal, see Pritchett 1995.

¹¹ Cf. Moles 1993, Marincola 2007, and Baragwanath 2008.

¹² See also Rosellini and Saïd 1978, and Redfield 1985.

traveler's tales and utopias frequently resort to this method, since it constructs an otherness that is transparent for the listener or reader; it is no longer a matter of *a* and *b*, simply of *a* and the converse of *a*. It is, furthermore, not hard to see why in utopian discourse this is the most favored of all figures, for the purpose of such discourse is invariably to speak of "sameness." (Hartog 1980/1988, 212-213, tr. J. Lloyd)

While Hartog's study employed well-established ideas about the importance of polarity and analogy in Greek thought,¹³ it has been criticized for its rigidity. Perhaps most notable was Carolyn Dewald in her 1990 review of Hartog's work. Dewald agrees with Hartog's proposal that Herodotus is the most "mobile" of narrators, who can "at one time or another occupy any of the positions in the discourse...[f]rom being the narrator, he can turn himself into the recipient of the narrative and then, when he feels so inclined, switch back to being the narrator... (Hartog 1988, 290)." Yet she sees Hartog's scheme as presenting a "fairly fixed and uncomplicated Same and Other, and a stable vision of the Same (Greek) mediated through a lengthy look at the Other (Scyth)" (220). As Dewald points out, it takes only a review of the proem to see that Hartog's scheme is too rigid, for the opening is a "humorous arabesque" that "for all its humor...suggests that it will not always be easy in the *Histories* of Herodotus to tell the Same from the Other" (220). Here, Dewald hints at an underlying weakness of Hartog's analysis—he misses the humor inherent in the text, a humor that complicates a Self versus Other mentality.¹⁴ As she later states, Hartog's "desire to find structural oppositions organizing the narrative produces too simple a reading and one that also

¹³ See also Lloyd 1966 and Cartledge 2002.

¹⁴ Hartog does mention the presence of humor two times in his study: 1) "We might add that the Black Sea Greeks display something of a sense of humor: they have Heracles sleep with this snake-girl—Heracles who has had, ever since the cradle, a bone to pick with snakes..." (1988, 25 n. 45), and 2) "Thus, when Darius builds eight great fortifications on the banks of the river Oarus, the Scythians, still behaving as cunning quarry, escape from his laughable trap, which then stands in the path of nothing but the desert winds." (Hdt. 4.124)" (1988, 48).

misses most of the text's humor" (222). Moreover, the notion of a single "Greek" audience is simplistic:

Herodotus himself likes to tell us that Greeks were often quite different from each other, city to city, tribe to tribe, and even family to family. Moreover, most of them had kings in their distant past and tyrants in their immediate past; some, like the Spartans, had kings in their present. Both kings and tyrants shaped myth and the recognized family constellations of the gods. (222)

From Dewald's critique of Hartog's study, we see important clarifications of Herodotus' ethnographic discussion. Importantly, her criticisms reinforce the significance of Hartog's focus on ethnography. That is, Hartog's approach creates interesting questions for the discovery of more in Herodotus' text than is explicitly stated, namely ideas of identity and the construction of identity by reflection upon one's own *nomoi* and the *nomoi* of others. Yet, as Dewald convincingly argues, the image that emerges from Herodotus' treatment of different peoples is one of *instability*; cultural interactions do not always reflect only a stable opposition of Greek versus barbarian, as Hartog argues. Moreover, as Dewald brings up several times in her review, it is Hartog's failure to address the humor in the text that oversimplifies and overschematizes his analysis of the *Histories*.

Christopher Pelling provides significant qualifications of Hartog's reading of ethnography in the *Histories*.¹⁵ Like Dewald, Pelling challenges Hartog's assumption that the Greeks were a single entity and in this way shows how the Self and Other dichotomy is destabilized in the *Histories*. As he asserts, "Greece is not a single undifferentiated glob...[and] Sparta is particularly interesting here, often serving as a sort of internal Greek 'Other'" (4). Pelling supports his assertion by citing how the

¹⁵ 1997. While no page numbers are indicated in the html article, I cite pages based upon the default "print preview" settings.

burial customs of Spartan kings are linked to barbarian practices in 6.58-59, how the stories of the Spartan kings Leotychidas and Demaratus have an eastern flavor, how Cleomenes reflects the Persian Cambyses, and how the Spartan movements at Plataea (Book 9) are as baffling to the Greeks as to the barbarians (4). In this way, Pelling argues, the Athenian/Spartan contrast of Thucydides seems to be more apparent than the Greek/Persian dichotomy (4).

Pelling's last point addresses Hartog's 'rhetoric of Otherness' and how it applies to the *Histories* in general. As Pelling formulates his argument, he says that it is "a version of the old question of the relation of the early ethnography to the history of the Persian Wars" (4). While Hartog does not address this question fully, Pelling notes that Hartog's successors have done so by relating "the political Otherness of the Persians to their recurrent expansionism...a sort of pathology of Oriental monarchy, one conceived in Hartog-like Other terms; and the Otherness thus becomes a category of explanation, not just exposition" (4). Pelling's focus on the blurring of categories is informative, for it challenges the rigidity of the schematization Hartog proposes and brings out a richness in the same material that reflects more accurately the complexity of Herodotus' presentation in the *Histories*.

When Pelling moves beyond the scope of Hartog's work to his own proposals, he rightly shows how Croesus, whom Hartog largely ignores, is a difficult figure to categorize in terms of the East/West split, and he suggests that his ambiguous status is indicative of what is to come in the remainder of the *Histories*. While scholars like John Moles (1996, 259-284) have argued that Herodotus' focus on imperial expansion is a warning to Athens, Pelling agrees with Gould (1989) that Herodotus is more of a

memorialist than a warner. My own view is that Herodotus is both a warner and a memorialist, and that his warnings often develop from serious reflection on what is memorialized through humor, as I will argue later in this study.

Rosaria Munson in her 2001 study, *Telling Wonders*, examines Herodotean ethnography in a new way. A central aim of her study is to address the traditional divide between Herodotus' ethnography and history. She shows an appreciation for previous studies of Herodotean ethnography, but notes that scholars' conclusions about its importance are vague and unfocused. Munson's elegant arguments allow her to address diachronic and synchronic analogies, which show horizontal or historic/temporal patterns and vertical or ethnographic/symbolic analogies, respectively. Rather than focus squarely on ethnography, Munson addresses the problem of how to reconcile Herodotus' ethnography with his history.

Munson presents her two major influences as Charles Fornara and Gregory Nagy.¹⁶ She agrees with Fornara that the contemporary political events of the times inform Herodotus' text and "through the narrative of their recent past, [communicate] to the Greeks (Herodotus' implied audience) things they should learn about themselves" (4). Furthermore, Munson underscores Fornara's argument that the narrative is often deliberately silent about recent historical events when given the opportunity, and "capitalizes on the audience's knowledge of how things turned out and draws its force and meaning from those later outcomes" (4). In a departure from Fornara, however, Munson argues that it is not only the historical portions of the *Histories* that offer instruction about the history and politics of the times, but also the

¹⁶ 1971a and 1990, respectively.

ethnographic portions. She finds an opportunity in this gap in Fornara's argument to pose the question of "what [the message Herodotus conveys to his audience] is, whether it informs all of the *Histories* or merely certain parts, and whether the ethnographies dilute and put it on hold or contribute to it in the special way that is consonant with their genre" (5).

In pondering the communication of a political/historical message from text to audience, Munson adopts the idea of performance from Nagy, who "approaches Herodotus' *Histories* as a performance based on that same tradition of the *ainos* that became embodied in other types of performance: in the fables of Aesop on the prose side and in the poetry of Hesiod, Archilochus, Theognis, and Pindar" (5). "[T]he past and the present, the explicit and the implicit, praise formulated in terms of *kleos* and warning about the threat of tyranny for the state, and a message of certain retribution for hubris based on the moral ideology of Delphi are all part of Herodotus' discourse, as they are of Pindar's" (6). As Munson later argues, Herodotus' narrative offers numerous explicit and implicit comments on tyranny as a threat in ethnography and history. She develops these ideas particularly well in her discussions of the monarchical model in Athens and Sparta in her second chapter, "Comparison" (45-133). Munson's rich and detailed study will be important in my own work because she convincingly shows how patterns in Herodotus' ethnography resonate with his audience in ways that encourage reflection about contemporary historical and political events.¹⁷

¹⁷ And in this way, my research will add to scholarship on historical allusion in the *Histories*, including Strasburger 1955; Fornara 1971a; Momigliano 1978; Raaflaub 1987; Stadter 1992; Moles 1996; Dewald 1998, ix-xli; Forsdyke 2006; and Baragwanath 2008.

To the ethnographic richness that Pelling and Munson stress, it is worthwhile to add the summative definition of “politics” articulated by Sara Forsdyke.¹⁸ While earlier scholarship often dismissed the ability of Herodotus’ narrative to comment on history and politics in any section other than the “historical” sections of the work, Forsdyke emphasizes the trends in scholarship that have shown how the political environment of the times in which Herodotus was writing is reflected in the shape of the narrative (224). Like Munson, she takes up the concept of ethnography and argues that it cannot be separated from the history that the narrative presents. Moreover, she addresses the definition of politics and argues that politics, broadly defined, includes the *nomoi* and behaviors of peoples (225). In this way, Herodotus’ narrative addresses politics at every turn, and especially in the ethnographic portions of the work.

As interest in Herodotus’ ethnography has grown, so has the perception that his text in its ethnographic sections communicates about more than food, burial and marriage customs of various peoples. Forsdyke discusses how social memory has provided a new perspective in recent classical scholarship. Specifically, “scholars have recognized that the versions of the past preserved in Herodotus’ narrative reflect what various groups in Greek society (e.g. families and communities such as *poleis*) actively chose to remember, and therefore are not a systematic or inert record of past events” (226). Studies on social memory have shown that a group’s memory is influenced by

¹⁸ 2006, 224-241.

their contemporary needs, including affirmation of their social and political order and norms (226).¹⁹

For the purposes of this study, the conclusions of research on social memory are important because they call attention to the historical setting in which Herodotus was writing. They also emphasize how political thought is reflected through the *Histories*' dominant theme of Persian imperialism and the violation of *nomoi*. Moreover, social memory is inherent to oral cultures and helps to define what stories are passed down and remain vital in communal circulation. It is here that I see a close connection between the power of humor and social memory, for humor acts as a mnemonic device more effectively than almost any other narrative technique.

The events that Herodotus selects for his *Histories*, whatever their origins, become an expression of the social memory of the fifth century because he, as *histor*, preserves them.²⁰ Moreover, social memory provides a means for linking the text to the historical and cultural circumstances affecting Herodotus, who reflects his world through his inquiries.

IV. Conclusion

In the scholarship on the *Histories*, humor and ethnography have largely been regarded as separate areas of inquiry. Through humor, Herodotus explores cultural similarity and difference. It offers a system of safe inquiry and implicit criticism of

¹⁹ Recent studies on social memory include Vansina 1985, Fentress and Wickham 1992, Le Goff 1977/1992, and Assman 1992. Studies that apply the ideas of social memory to the classical world include Thomas 1989, Gehrke and Möller 1996, Giangiulio 2001, and Alcock 2002.

²⁰ For more on the idea of the *histor*, see Dewald 1987 and Connor 1993.

another culture or one's own that shows an active attempt to understand what is happening politically.

This study will contribute to the discussion of humor in the *Histories* in a variety of ways. First, it will focus on the purpose of the humor in a larger cultural and political context. Second, it will add to the ongoing dialogue about historical allusion by showing how humor is another tool that Herodotus uses to invite reflection about recent and current historical events. Third, it will contribute to the rich study of ethnography in Herodotus by incorporating anthropological approaches to humor, and especially ethnic humor. This special category of humor will help to reveal the serious purposes humor serves as cultures attempt to make sense of one another, especially in times of forced interaction in war. Finally, this study will add to the recent discussions of social memory in Herodotus by showing how humor can memorialize peoples and situations in such a way that they transcend the larger context of the work and are thereby remembered in their own right.

In Chapter 1, I will examine ancient and modern theories of humor to establish the background for subsequent analysis of specific examples from Herodotus' text. I will then analyze derision and witty retorts (Chapter 2), and the interplay of humor with deception, didacticism, and memorial (Chapters 3-5). While these categories sometimes overlap, I believe examples arranged according to these groups will be useful for the sake of clarity and will aid our understanding of the various roles humor plays in the *Histories*.

CHAPTER ONE: ANCIENT AND MODERN ANALYSES OF HUMOR

I. Ancient Analyses of Humor

Any discussion of the nature and functions of humor is enriched by taking into consideration the significant thought that both ancients and moderns have paid to the topic. The earliest and perhaps most famous remarks on humor in antiquity come from Plato (*Phil.* 48a-50b, *Rep.* 5.452d-e) and Aristotle (*Poetics* 5.1449a-b, *Rhet.* 3.18.7), who both emphasize the aggressive qualities of laughter and the laughable.¹ In addition, we have from antiquity seven analyses devoted to humor: the *Tractatus Coislinianus* or “Treatise on Comedy,” a work some consider a key to understanding Aristotle’s lost treatise on humor in his *Poetics* II, and which shares many parallel ideas with the *Prolegomena to Comedy* found in the MSS to Aristophanes’ plays,² Demetrius *On Style* (136-172), *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (1.6.10), Cicero *de Oratore* (2.216-290), Quintilian (6.3), and Hermogenes *Περὶ Μεθόδου δεινότητος* (34). While these ancient writers represent both the Greek and Roman worlds and were often writing about humor in the context of rhetoric, they still help bring into perspective universal qualities of humor that are

¹ In Plato’s *Philebus*, Socrates at 48c calls the laughable (τό γελοῖον) a kind of vice (πονηρία), and at 49b those who cannot defend themselves when laughed at (καταγελῶμενοι) truly laughable (γελοῖος). For more on Plato’s relationship with comedy, see Nightingale 1995, 172-192 (chapter five, “Philosophy and Comedy”). Aristotle in *Poet.* 5.1449a says that the laughable (τό γελοῖον) is a species of the ugly (τό αἰσχρόν). In debates, Aristotle says it is useful to use earnestness (ἡ σπουδή) against jest (τό γελοῖον) and vice versa (*Rhet.* 3.18.7).

² Specifically, the analysis of the laughable (Tractate V-VI) and the quantitative parts of comedy (XVII) (Janko 1984, 8).

brought out in modern theorists' discussions.³ At the same time, these ancient discussions offer us the perspectives of writers who lived closer to the time when Herodotus was writing and therefore might offer us a more nuanced understanding of the types of humor that especially resonated in the ancient world.

The *Tractatus Coislinianus*, a tenth-century manuscript that reflects Aristotle's ideas from the fourth century BC, offers the most comprehensive ancient analysis of humor, which has the aim of comic catharsis, as its author argues.⁴ Its summary definition of comedy is worth considering, since, as we will see, it resonates with modern theories and helps to elucidate how humor operates in the *Histories*:

Comedy is an imitation of an action that is absurd and lacking in magnitude, complete, <with embellished language,> the several kinds (of embellishment being found) separately in the (several) parts (of the play); (directly represented) by person<s> acting, and <not> by means of narration; through pleasure and laughter achieving the purgation of the like emotions. It has laughter for its mother. (tr. Janko 1984, 25)

Even though the remarks concern the formalized genre of comedy specifically, the ideas of the absurd, as well as the performance of comedy directly by characters, resonate with Herodotus. As I will show, however, Herodotus as narrator does, at times, signal humor in the text and therefore plays a more direct role than that envisaged in the *Tractatus*' definition of comedy here. From the *Prolegomenon* for the substantive sections V-VI, we have the titles of the subcategories without further definition, sometimes with an example from Aristophanes (Janko 1984, 161-162). The most relevant sections for the discussion of humor come in the sections V-VI:

The sources of laughter (cf. the sources of pity and fear, *Poet.* 13-14).

³ Cf. Halliwell 1991, 280, who draws on a number of different sources—comedy, philosophy, oratory, tragedy, and history—in his seminal article on Greek laughter. See now Halliwell 2008, the first comprehensive study of laughter in Greek society.

⁴ For a reconstruction of the treatise, see Janko 1984.

- (a) In words [from homonyms, synonyms, repetition, paronyms, by addition and subtraction, diminutives, alteration, parody, transference (and misapplication, from things similar) in sound or (some other perception) belonging to the same genus, manner of speaking]
- (b) In actions [from deception, assimilation, impossible, possible and inconsequential, things contrary to expectation, making characters base, using vulgar dancing, when someone who has the power (to choose) lets slip the most important and takes the most worthless, when reasoning is disjointed and lacking any sequence] (tr. Janko 1984, 55 for outline and 27-37 for details)

Demetrius, writing perhaps in the second century BC, discusses *χάρις* not *γέλως*, which is divided into three general categories: “charm” from diction (*λέξις*), style (*ἐρμηνεία*), and content (*πράγματα*). The subcategories are unnumbered without definition or example (following Janko 1984, 164, who notes that Demetrius only refers to *λέξις* and *πράγματα* at the outset and also includes more sophisticated subcategories):

A. From diction	B. From style	C. From content
1. Brevity	1. Imagery	1. Proverbs
2. Arrangement	2. Recantation	2. Fables
3. Figures	3. Parody	3. Release from fear
4. Metaphor	4. Allegory	4. Comparisons
5. Exotic compounds	5. The unexpected	5. Hyperbole
6. Unique expressions	6. The inconsequent	
7. Inverted words	7. Riddles	
8. Application of words	8. Antithesis	
	9. Persiflage	

The *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, written perhaps 86-82 BC, gives only a list of seventeen types, without number, definition or example “in the context of introducing a speech to a restive audience” (Janko 1984, 166):

If the hearers have been fatigued by listening, we shall open with something that may provoke laughter—a fable, a plausible fiction, a caricature, an ironical inversion on the meaning of a word, an ambiguity, innuendo, banter, a naïvety, an exaggeration, a recapitulation, a pun, an unexpected turn, a comparison, a novel tale, a historical anecdote, a verse, or a challenge or a smile of approbation directed at some one. Or we shall promise to speak otherwise than as we have prepared, and to talk as others usually do; we shall briefly explain what the other speakers do and what we intend to do. (tr. H. Caplan 1954)

Cicero's analysis of humor, from 55 BC, is much more comprehensive than the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, but is less complicated than Demetrius'. It falls into the two categories of *in verbo* and *in re*. These have unnumbered subcategories, but unlike the presentation in Demetrius, Cicero does provide examples. An outline of his analysis, following Janko 1984, 165, is given below.⁵

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| A. From diction | B. From content |
| 1. The ambiguous (<i>amphibolia</i>) | 1. Narratives (fables, anecdotes) |
| 2. The unexpected | 2. Comparisons |
| 3. Word-play (paronomasia) | 3. Mimicry or caricature |
| 4. Quotation of verses, proverbs | 4. Exaggeration or understatement |
| 5. Taking words literally | 5. The telling detail |
| 6. Allegory | 6. Irony |
| 7. Metaphor | 7. Innuendo |
| 8. Irony | 8. Assumed incomprehension |
| 9. Antithetical expressions | 9. Hinted ridicule |
| | 10. The illogical |
| | 11. Personal retorts |

Quintilian, writing about a century and a half after Cicero, does not organize his analysis according to a formal division of speech and content, but rather “different types are intermingled in a long and rambling list, with far more sub-types than its extant predecessors...[and as proof, t]o quote Quintilian against himself, ‘si species omnes persequi velimus, nec modum reperiemus et frustra laborabimus’” (Janko 1984, 165). Moreover, Quintilian depended on Cicero for his theory and on “Roman collectors of the dicta of famous men for examples, with no direct recourse to Greek writers” (Janko 1984, 165).⁶

⁵ See Fantham 2004, 186-208, for a recent discussion of this analysis (chapter eight, “Wit and Humour as the Orator’s Combat Weapons”).

⁶ Further discussion of Quintilian’s analysis can be found in Arndt 1904, 41-62; Cousin 1936, 324-346; and Plebe 1952, 78-80.

Hermogenes, writing in the second century AD, describes humor in the following way: “There are three methods of speaking in the style of comedy and at the same time mocking in the ancient way: the figure by parody; by speaking contrary to expectation; and by creating images contrary to the nature of subjects” (translation Kennedy 2005, 259). Hermogenes arranges his examples under these three categories, and not according to words and actions, along with examples from oratory (Janko 1984, 165).

Although the analysis of humor was relatively limited in antiquity as far as we can tell from surviving texts, ancient writers’ elaborate labels for and categories of humor show their active attempt to grapple with the concept of humor. While their ideas often varied in specific details, the following ideas resonate particularly well with the humor of the *Histories*. 1) From Aristotle and Plato: aggression, superiority. 2) From the *Tractatus*: catharsis, absurdity, the importance of characters to humor; in terms of action: deception, contrary to expectation, making characters base, vulgar dancing (think Hippocleides), reasoning that is disjointed and lacking any sequence. 3) From Demetrius: the style of the unexpected, the inconsequent, and persiflage. 4) From the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*: a plausible fiction, a naïvety, an unexpected turn and the historical anecdote, though unfortunately without any explication. 5) From Cicero (and Quintilian): in terms of diction: the unexpected, the quotation of verses and proverbs, and irony; in terms of content: narratives (fables, anecdotes), the telling detail, irony, hinted ridicule, the illogical, personal retorts. 6) From Hermogenes: speaking in the style of comedy and mocking in the ancient way; humor that is contrary to expectation. Thus, while no single definition of humor is proposed by all, important ideas emerge

from their analyses that help build up for us a sense of the different varieties of humor that an ancient reader might have noticed in the *Histories*. As we will see in the next section, moreover, these ancient analyses of humor resonate with modern psychological theories of humor in ways that show the complementary nature of each.

II. Modern Analyses of Humor

A. The Psychological Perspective

It is not until the twentieth century that we see a striking appreciation of humor as an intellectual construct that, while impossible to define succinctly, nevertheless can be broadly characterized in ways that can be traced back to the ancient analyses.

Theories of humor were devised by psychologists and fall into three commonly accepted classes: aggression, release, and incongruity.⁷ Aggression theorists argue that all humor is based upon hostility and they include Plato and Aristotle among their ancient practitioners and Henri Bergson as their most prominent 20th century theorist. In his 1900 treatise, *Le Rire*, Bergson argues that humor is a human phenomenon, is removed from emotion, and involves a group. According to Bergson, laughter is meant to correct an individual's behavior and is meant to humiliate.⁸ Release theorists are linked most notably to Sigmund Freud (1905), who argued that psychological release

⁷ Raskin 1985, Ritchie 2004.

⁸ "Laughter is, above all, a corrective. Being intended to humiliate, it must make a painful impression on the person against whom it is directed. By laughter, society avenges itself for the liberties taken with it. It would fail in its object if it bore the stamp of sympathy or kindness" (tr. Brereton and Rothwell 1911, 197).

was the defining principle for humor.⁹ Finally, incongruity theorists define humor by the presence of “incongruity” or a lack of fit between speech and thought, and major theorists include Northrop Frye (1957), who studied incongruity in literary contexts; Arthur Koestler (1964), who described humor as one type of creative act; and Victor Raskin (1985), who defined humor by the presence of incongruity.

Of these various theories, Bergson’s proposal of aggressive humor resonates in ancient literature and it helps to describe much of what is going on in Herodotus as well. Of the other major theorists, I have found Raskin’s perspective interesting and useful for thinking about the prominent role that humor explained by incongruity plays in the *Histories*.

In his seminal work, *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor* (1985), Raskin applies linguistic script-based semantic theory to humor in order to “formulate a set of conditions which are both necessary and sufficient conditions for a text to be funny” (57).¹⁰ The key word is “text,” since Raskin is dealing specifically with verbal humor, not physical or any other type. A “script,” as defined by Raskin, is “a cognitive structure internalized by the native speaker and it represents the native speaker’s knowledge of a small part of the world” (81). All speakers have scripts based on common sense, individual background/subjective experience, and those shared with a certain group, e.g., family, neighbors, and colleagues. According to Raskin’s main

⁹ “The pleasure in jokes has seemed to us to arise from an *economy in expenditure upon inhibition*, the pleasure in the comic from an *economy in expenditure upon ideation* (upon cathexis) and the pleasure in humour from an *economy in expenditure upon feeling*” (tr. Strachey 1960, 302; translator’s italics).

¹⁰ Raskin asserts that his theory is neutral concerning the three broad classes of humor theories of aggression, release and incongruity, and that it is “easily compatible with most, if not all of them” (40). In recent years, however, scholars have recognized that incongruity is actually the basis of Raskin’s theory (Ritchie 2004, 70).

hypothesis, a text can be considered a “single-joke-carrying text” if the following two conditions are met: 1) the text is “compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts,” and 2) “the two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite” (99). Raskin’s analyses are limited to single-joke carrying texts, though in more complex examples, he argues that scripts are opposed more than once (133).¹¹

While each of these three major classifications—aggression, incongruity, and release—has its own proponents who argue for their theory’s single explanation of humor, no one class of theories convincingly explains every instance of humor. In the process of studying humor in the *Histories*, I have found humor that can be explained by each of these theories, aggression- and incongruity-based humor most frequently, and occasionally release-based humor. In my estimation, these modern psychological theories of humor are helpful because they help us to look beyond the surface level of the text, from which humorous episodes or moments are all too often dismissed, uncritically, as amusing. Moreover, even in the absence of ancient theory that is co-extensive with these modern categories, ancient humor is susceptible to the application of these theories; and indeed the ancient theories of humor I outlined above (pp. 16-21) gesture in these very directions. The brief remarks of Aristotle and Plato supply the foundation for modern aggression theories. The *Tractatus Coislinianus*

¹¹ In order to illustrate Raskin’s script-based semantic theory of humor, I have included one of his sample jokes: “Is the doctor at home?” the patient asked in his bronchial whisper. “No,” the doctor’s young and pretty wife whispered in reply. “Come right in.” (100). In the most basic analysis of this text, Raskin lists script one as “MEDICAL (DOCTOR)” and script two as “ADULTERY (LOVER),” and the type of script opposition as “actual/non-actual, sex related” (127). As the text unfolds, the word “doctor” sets off a certain script that includes, naturally, the idea of a patient. The adjectives used to describe the doctor’s wife, “young” and “pretty,” set off another script, this time related to sex. The wife’s final comment that the patient should “Come right in” specifies that the sex related script concerns adultery, and signals the presence of incongruity. Because the text contains two logically opposed scripts, the result, according to Raskin, is a joke.

discusses the idea of comic catharsis, an idea linked to release theories of humor. Moreover, all of the ancient analyses make mention of reversal or the unexpected, ideas that are associated with incongruity theories. Taken together, these ancient and modern analyses of humor will inform my own analysis of humor in the *Histories*.

B. The Anthropological Perspective

While modern psychological theories of humor dominated humor research in the twentieth century, they represent only one perspective on humor. In the last twenty five years, anthropologists have come to see humor, which had been largely neglected in their field, as an important social construct. Although there were scattered references to humor as an anthropological phenomenon in previous anthropological research,¹² a full-scale study did not come about until Mahadev Apte's research in 1985, *Humor and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach* (Cornell University). In his study, Apte discusses how ethnographic studies have largely ignored the idea of humor as an identifying pattern of societies, and also presents a general theoretical framework that is useful for any anthropological study of humor.¹³ Because Apte's seminal research is still the best work available for the anthropological perspective on

¹² These early anthropological studies were primarily concerned with joking relationships and ritual clowning. See, e.g., Moreau 1943, 386-400; Malefijt 1968; Wallace 1966; and Hieb 1972. Previous comprehensive treatments have focused on individual societies. See, e.g., Edmonson 1952 on rural Spanish American populations of New Mexico and Hill 1943 on the Navaho.

¹³ Indeed, subsequent studies have followed and have taken more specific approaches to humor as an anthropological construct. E.g., Davies 1990 for a comparative study of ethnic humor around the world, Winokur 1996 on American laughter and 1930s Hollywood film comedy, Draitser 1998 on ethnic humor in Russia, Hanania 2007 on ethnic humor and the Arab experience in America, and Reyes and Lo 2009 on ethnic humor and the experiences of Asian Pacific Americans.

humor, I will make frequent reference to his study as I establish the boundaries for my own.

I will first address the terminology associated with laughter, smiling and humor in order to define my own terminology more clearly. Next, I will address the textual nature of my study by discussing the methodology associated with the textual analysis of humor. Finally, I will present the concept of ethnic humor, which offers some useful ideas for understanding Herodotus' humor, especially for its discussion of how humor functions in the context of warfare, how it makes use of group stereotypes, and how it often involves ethnocentric thought. At the end of this chapter, I will present my own understanding of humor in the *Histories*, which draws from ethnic humor, but which also addresses the specific cultural context in which Herodotus was writing.¹⁴

i. Terminology of Humor, Laughter, and Smiling

There is a common tendency to use the terms laughter and humor interchangeably, and to overlook how smiling often indicates a subtle variety of humor. For the purposes of analysis of a text such as Herodotus' *Histories*, it is important to start with the question of its identification, and to eliminate the notion that a discussion of humor in the *Histories* is invariably and only found in instances of explicit laughter in the text. While the subject of laughter in the *Histories* has been analyzed by Lateiner (1977) and Flory (1978), the connection between humor and laughter is of little significance to their studies. Rather, they investigate the significance of textual instances of laughter. In a study of humor in Herodotus, one might assume that its

¹⁴ On laughter in Greek culture, see Halliwell 1991 and 2008.

means of identification is found only in the vocabulary, rather than in the ideas or tone of the work. But Apte's discussion reminds us that the question may be more complicated, and that laughter, smiling and humor must be approached with careful consideration. Let us turn briefly, then, to some theories that will help to clarify the relation of and distinction between these terms and ideas.

Various theories have been developed to explain the cause of laughter and smiling. One of the most prominent was that of Charles Darwin, who considered laughter the expression of joy and who noted that idiots and imbeciles laughed senselessly without external stimuli (1872/1965: 196; Apte 240). Spencer (1860) proposed a physiological theory for laughter that argued that it resulted from excess nervous energy that could not be released through any other emotion (240). In terms of evolution, laughter is related to a "grin face" or silent bared-teeth display, as opposed to the vocalized bared-teeth display that signaled a defensive posture in anticipation of impending danger (244). Another evolutionary antecedent to laughter and smiling is the play face, a relaxed open-mouth facial display that, in primates, accompanied mock fighting and chasing (244). A phylogenetic relationship exists between human smiling and primates' silent bared-teeth display, and human laughter and primates' play face (244; citing van Hooff 1967). Accordingly, there can be witnessed a convergence and overlap of the human smile and laughter, even though they have different phylogenetic origins. Moreover, an evolution can be traced from the bared-teeth expression, connoting a protective/defensive behavior, to submission/non-hostility and, finally, to friendliness (245). All this helps to inform us that we should address smiling along with laughter in considering outward

manifestations of humor. We are also cautioned to recognize that the differences expressed between laughter, smiling, and any intermediate expressions may be due to limitations of vocabulary within a particular language (247).

In general, researchers agree that smiling precedes laughter (248) and that it is innate and involuntary (249).¹⁵ Anthropologists have generally rejected Darwin's proposal that laughter and smiling are expressions of joy and rather consider them culture-specific (256). In a reflection of cultural values, "[l]aughter seems more susceptible than smiling to scrutiny in connection with sociocultural norms because laughter is perceived to reflect less controlled—and more marked—behavior. In many situations where smiling, however inappropriate, may be tolerated, laughter is not" (257).¹⁶

As we have seen, then, it is important to recognize that laughter and smiling, while they often accompany instances of humor, are not a *sine qua non* for the presence of humor. In the specific case of the *Histories*, moreover, we already know from scholarly discussions of laughter and related terminology that Herodotus uses only γελάω and its compounds, and not even "smiling" (μειδιάω) or "giggling" (κιχλίζω).¹⁷ Therefore, we would rob ourselves of a valuable opportunity in exploring Herodotus' humor if we were to limit our investigation to predetermined and even perhaps preconceived ideas about what explicit vocabulary must accompany humor. While sometimes humor emerges from the perspective of characters who aggressively direct

¹⁵ Cf. in the *Histories* the case of the infant tyrant Cypselus, whose smile at his would-be assassins saves his life (θείη τύχη προσεγέλασε τὸ παιδίον, 5.92γ3).

¹⁶ We only have to think of Deioeces in Herodotus, who forbids, along with spitting, laughter in his presence (1.99.1; γελάει τε καὶ πτύειν).

¹⁷ Griffiths 1994, 39, and Casevitz 1995, 6.

it at other characters, it usually emerges from Herodotus' narrative presentation. In subsequent chapters, I will demonstrate how examples from Herodotus can be identified according to the types of humor ancient analysts offer, as well as to those that modern theorists broadly identify.

ii. Humor and Language

The perspective on humor and language is particularly useful for a study of humor in Herodotus' *Histories* because it addresses the mechanics for philological analysis. A basic tenet of anthropological studies on humor and language is that they both have "universal and culture-specific attributes" (178). While Apte asserts that the absence of cross-cultural research prevents more definite assertions, it is likely that mimicry, exaggeration, reversal, mockery, punning, and nicknaming are universal *techniques* found in the humor of all cultures, and proverbs, riddles and verbal games are probably universal *types* of humor (178). As for the culture-specific attributes, Apte says that "what is mocked may vary from one culture to another, like the degree of direction of exaggeration...[likewise], what is considered obscene may be culturally determined, but obscene humor as a category is probably universal" (ibid.). My investigation of Herodotus' text will help test whether Apte's claims of the universal attributes of humor are to be accepted, and at the same time, will uncover what culture-specific attributes of humor emerge from the *Histories*.

Because humor in the *Histories* is found in the context of a long narrative, it is helpful to consider the concept of the "speech event." According to the anthropologist D. Hymes (1962, 1968, 1972, 1974), the various components of speech events are "setting

(in terms of time and place), participants and their sociocultural backgrounds, the linguistic code used, channels of communication, the message form, topics, and cultural norms of interaction and interpretations” (190). Some types of speech acts are more suited to humor than others, and in particular, a casual rather than a formal style for humor is dominant, “although speakers may not always be consciously aware of the existence of such styles or of their distinctive nature” (190). In societies with diglossia, “speakers are not only aware of the ‘high’ and ‘low’ varieties of language but are also likely to use only the low variety for humor” (Apte 1985, 190; Ferguson 1959). These principles of language offer important clues for analysis of humor in Herodotus because they suggest that the use of a casual or low variety of language provides the most fruitful environment for a humorous speech act.¹⁸

Yet humorous speech acts do not have to begin as informal language. In fact, speech acts are rarely uniform, but rather, in the course of social interaction, often “switch” or “mix” (193). In simpler terms, “[i]ndividuals do not always speak the same way but vary their speech in social encounters,” a notion that is the basis for the sociolinguistic phenomenon of the “alternate use of two or more speech styles, registers, varieties of language, or languages in social context and to their respective mixtures” (193). Furthermore, “code switching” is important because it “reflects the norms of speech as they relate to humor” (193). The idea of “code switching” is particularly important for investigating how humor operates in Herodotus because it is seen in the social interactions of the text and therefore reflects the points of contact between different peoples.

¹⁸ For more on the low Aesopic tradition that may have influenced Herodotus’ presentation, see Kurke 2006.

Because the interactions between peoples often occur in formal settings, such as the court of the Persian or Ethiopian kings, the presence of humor must be explained against the proposition that humor occurs informally. Apte notes that code switching is sometimes used deliberately to change the nature of social interactions. In this type of scenario, “[a] speaker may communicate the intention of reducing the rigidity and formality of the situation by switching from a formal to a casual style...[and] because of the association of humor with casual style, humor itself may create an informal atmosphere, although other components of a social situation may not necessarily change” (193). Alternatively—and this will remain an issue in my study—it may be rather that some of the examples from Herodotus invite qualification of the assumption that humor is invariably engendered in informal settings, or perhaps changes to a more informal one.

While scholarly discussions about the humorous potential of the Solon and Croesus episode (1.30-33) are lacking, the idea of code switching helps to describe the situation as it develops. I will address this famous scene in chapter four, but in short, humor complicates the traditional analysis of the episode because Solon refuses to indulge in the expected formalized speech of the court setting and instead injects informal anecdotes that change the register of the social interaction. A similar code switching can be seen in the exchange between the representatives of the Persians, the Fish Eaters, and the Ethiopian king, who shifts the register of the interaction to a more informal one and injects an aggressive, agonistic type of humor into what would be expected to be a formal welcoming of foreign emissaries to his court.

But why is informal speech more suitable for humor? Apte suggests two primary reasons. First, there is the “association of informal speech styles with a relaxed and unrestrained atmosphere...[whereas i]n any formal situation, speakers must pay meticulous attention to their pronunciation, must carefully follow grammatical rules, and must be precise in their choice of vocabulary” (195). According to one researcher, a colloquial style is “for friends, acquaintances, insiders; addressed to a stranger, it serves to make him an insider simply by treating him as an insider” (Joos 1961/1967, 23; Apte 195).

This creation of familiarity brings up a second reason for the strong connection between informal speech and humor: “[h]umor and joking exchanges need a familiar setting in which such barriers to communication as age, rank, and social status are considerably reduced, if not totally removed, and togetherness is emphasized” (Gossen 1976, 138; Apte 1985, 195). Moreover, formal speech structures, such as jokes, riddles, proverbs, ritual insults and verbal duels, develop from this informal register of speech, but once established, “humor must occur within the bounds of their formal, substantive, and symbolic structures” (Apte 1985, 196). This idea represents one important caveat for analysis of humor in the *Histories*, namely that we must be careful not to impose the formal structures of our own cultural understanding of humor, chiefly jokes in western society, onto Herodotus’ text. Without an open mind in seeking to understand the subtlety of some Herodotean humor, we might underestimate or even inadvertently ignore it.

Speech itself often becomes a topic of humor, and in general, “fun is made of languages that are considered ‘inferior,’ ‘primitive,’ or ‘crude’... [and a] negative view of

language is often just one aspect of the overall deprecatory way in which a society and culture are evaluated” (196-197). Specific languages, as well as dialects, may “be so firmly entrenched in the mind of members of a particular culture that mere mention of [a language or dialect] or allusion to [their] structural characteristics may evoke laughter” (197). In the case of the *Histories*, the Spartans and their laconic wit seem to fit this mold especially well, as do the Scythians, whose lack of speech often marks their actions and invites laughter. Where Herodotus shows a complexity of style, however, is in the way in which he plays with these notions so that we actually laugh not at these Spartans or Scythians, but at those who cannot comprehend their messages.¹⁹

In determining whether a speech act is humorous, we must consider the important idea of “key,” which informs us about the “tone, manner, intent, or spirit of speech acts” (Hymes 1972, 62; Apte 1985, 203). While different speech acts may have the same setting, participants and topics, they may differ in their key, so one is mock and the other is serious (203). In my own analyses of Herodotus’ text, the concept of “key” will be an important barometer of what is humorous. Since we do not have performance clues to aid in the discovery of humor, moreover, the textual clues, especially from Herodotus in his authorial voice, and the general tone become paramount.

While linguistic humor offers a productive avenue for analysis of a text, it falls short as a sole means of inquiry in relation to Herodotus because it fails to acknowledge the cultural context in which the humor occurs. As Apte notes, “Although linguistic

¹⁹ E.g., the scenes of the Scythian herald presenting gifts, without a word of explanation, of a bird, mouse, frog and five arrows to the Persians, and their subsequent chasing of a hare at the very moment they are to engage the Persians in a formal, civilized battle (4.131-134). The narrative invites laughter not at the Scythians, who might appear to have a primitive means of communication, but instead at the Persians for their difficulty in understanding the Scythians.

humor draws attention to the structural and semantic peculiarities of a language, it reflects little of the rest of the culture” (188). Furthermore, as I have shown, the failure to situate the humor of the *Histories* in a meaningful context points to deficiencies in the approach of previous classical scholarship. While form alone identifies humorous structures in Herodotus, it tells us little about humor’s cultural significance. The last anthropological perspective on humor I will consider, ethnic humor, offers some insight into the ways that humor and culture intersect.

III. Forms and Definitions of Ethnic Humor

Historically, interest in what anthropologists often call “ethnic humor” did not receive much attention until after World War II, when “pride in nationality and ethnic identity increased worldwide (Emerson 1960)” (Apte 1985, 108). In an interesting parallel to ethnographic studies of Herodotus, in which rigid categories of Self and Other have dissolved into more nuanced dialogues that challenge the existence of homogeneous collective identities, especially “Greeks,”²⁰ the field of anthropology has seen a shift, post World War II, away from the assumption that societies are culturally and linguistically homogeneous and have “discrete ethnic entities with bounded attributes” (110).

The title of Apte’s chapter, “Humor, Ethnicity, and Intergroup Relations” is in many ways the most inclusive and descriptive label for this specific type of humor. Early in his chapter, however, Apte adopts the phrase “ethnic humor,” a popular label in the social sciences that was first used in the 1970s. Previously, this category of

²⁰ Cf. pp. 6-12 above. For more on the concept of Greek ethnicity, see J. M. Hall 1997 and 2002, and Malkin 2001.

humor had been identified by such phrases as “race-conscious humor”/“race” humor (Burma 1946); “racial humor”/“racial jokes” (Middleton 1959); “intergroup humor” (Barron 1950); and “interethnic humor” (Zenner 1970). Whatever its title, the idea of ethnic humor describes a stable and universal phenomenon that “is probably as old as contact between cultures” (Apte 1985, 108). As a starting point for understanding this concept better, I will first present a few researchers’ definitions of ethnic humor, with the caveat that they sometimes too narrowly define it in terms of an ethnic joke and tend to overgeneralize it as negative.

A. Definitions of Ethnic Humor

Ethnic humor mocks, caricatures, and generally makes fun of a specific group or its members by the virtue of their ethnic identity; or it portrays the superiority of one ethnic group over others. In addition, its thematic development must be based on factors that are the consequences of ethnicity, such as ethnocentrism, prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination. (Apte 1985, 139-140)

Ethnic humor...is based on a number of specific scripts and oppositions which have to be internalized by the speakers and hearers of ethnic jokes. The specific scripts are not part of the native speaker’s semantic competence, nor are they part of the native speaker’s knowledge of the world. They have to be acquired separately from linguistic competence and in this sense, they are similar to encyclopedic knowledge. But on the other hand, they capture stereotypes which are at best very crude approximations of reality...[The specific ethnic scripts are] simplistic and schematic, especially in the sense that they are binary or near-binary and thus imply oppositions standardly associated with them...[T]he basic type of script oppositeness used in ethnic humor is predominantly possible/impossible...and the essential feature most frequently utilized in ethnic jokes is good/bad...In other words, most of ethnic humor is functionally deprecatory, or disparaging. (Raskin 1985, 180)²¹

Jokes about peoples consist of short narratives or riddles with comic endings which impute a particular ludicrous trait or pattern of behavior to the butts of the joke. Such jokes are a very old phenomenon indeed but they are particularly widespread and popular in the modern world, where they are often known as ethnic jokes. The term *ethnic* tends to be used in a broad way about a group that sees itself and is seen by others as a “people” with a common cultural tradition, a real or imagined common descent, and a distinctive identity. This judgment is usually related to objective factors

²¹ Raskin deals with ethnic scripts of language distortion, dumbness, stinginess, and craftiness or cunning (1985, 181-194).

such as territory or language, though both of these may relate to the group's past, and to the life led by its members' ancestors rather than today's members. (Davies 1990, 1)²²

[Ethnic humor] is humor primarily based on racial, religious, national, regional, local, social, sex or sexist, age characteristics or other differences. Ethnic jokes almost always involve simplistic and stereotyped thinking, bias and prejudice, usually condescending. While there can be some sympathy and support, if the joke teller shares the same ethnic background, most ethnic humor is disparaging and derisive. (MacHovec 1988, 116)

I find Apte's definition of ethnic groups broadly sufficient as groups that have an "ascribed status, shared cultural traits and values, some degree of internal cohesion and interaction, and self-awareness" (111). Oftentimes, moreover, individuals' ethnic identity is a subjective reality; they share with others in their ethnic group "a conscious identity that is based on traits they perceive to be characteristic of the group" (112). In terms of "ethnicity," Apte cites research that argues it has an inner boundary that is maintained by the socialization process, and an outer boundary that is "established through intergroup relations and interaction" (112). In the *Histories*, it is this outer boundary that is most relevant because it is in the multiple interactions between groups, or more commonly individual representatives of groups, that humor emerges.

As an extension of the ideas associated with ethnic groups and identities, the concept of a stereotype and its relevance to the study of ethnic humor is fundamental. While stereotypes seem universally present in all societies (Bogardus 1950: 28; Harding 1968: 261), the concept was first introduced in 1922 by journalist Walter Lippmann. He defined stereotypes as "mental pictures formulated by human beings to describe the world beyond their reach" (113). According to Lippmann, stereotypes are culturally

²² Davies sees in many ethnic jokes the paired qualities of stupidity and canniness, cowardice and militarism/aggressiveness, inebriation and teetotalism, snobbishness and vulgarity, and boastfulness and understatement (1990, 4).

determined and their contents are factually incorrect. They are products of faulty reasoning and “tend to persist even in the face of knowledge and education” (113). Stereotypes have been considered an extension of ethnocentrism (Brown 1965; Campbell and LeVine 1961; Apte 114) and “when stereotypes include traits that negate the values held by a stereotyping group, the group will cite the stereotype as supplying evidence of lack of culture” (Abrahams 1972, 24; Apte 114). Apte convincingly explains why stereotypes are so important for the development and effectiveness of ethnic humor:

Because [stereotypes] are widely accepted by members of individual cultures, they constitute a shared set of assumptions necessary for ethnic humor. Speed of development is crucial for the effectiveness of any humor, because appreciation slows down when humor depends on a concept that cannot be understood without an effort or when critical examination is invited. In order for ethnic humor to have the desired effect, it needs readymade and popular conceptualizations of the target group(s). Stereotypes fulfill this requirement admirably, and therein lies their significance in the development of ethnic humor. (114)

In terms of Herodotus' *Histories*, consideration of stereotypes will inform my discussions of how humor and ethnography intersect, and will help in understanding the connection of humor to the political/historical realities that underlie those stereotypes.²³ One important result of looking more closely at possible stereotypes in the *Histories* is a greater understanding of the ways in which groups were perceived, regardless of the ultimate connection of those perceptions to reality. While most studies of ethnic humor stop with its definition, I have found Apte's discussions of the forms, techniques, theoretical importance, and contextual setting useful for thinking about this anthropological approach to humor. Therefore, I will continue my discussion by outlining these different aspects of ethnic humor. In my conclusion to

²³ And in particular, stereotypes associated with the Spartans, Athenians, and Persians will be worth considering.

this chapter, I will present my own ideas about Herodotus' humor, which are drawn from the ancient and modern perspectives that I have been discussing in this chapter.

B. Forms of Ethnic Humor

The preceding discussion has introduced much of the terminology that underlies ethnic humor, and it is now necessary to consider some of the primary forms in which this humor appears. In general, ethnic humor is verbal and is often seen in the form of jokes, proverbs, riddles, riddle-jokes, rhymes, tales, anecdotes and legends (Apte 1985, 115). In western societies, ethnic humor appears most frequently in the form of jokes, while in non-western societies, it usually appears as proverbs and tales (Champion 1938; Risley 1915; Apte 1985, 115). The prevalence of this basic dichotomy informs the analysis of Herodotus' text because it reminds us of our own western-biased perspective on humor. We tend to associate humor exclusively with jokes, but in Herodotus humor does not always take this form. Rather, more frequently, humor in Herodotus' text is expressed through proverbs and tales, a characteristically non-western type of humor.

The most common types of ethnic jokes identify individuals as members of a particular ethnic group and portray them disparagingly (115). According to Apte, the portrayal "[u]sually involves developing an incongruity between verbal comments and actions or exaggerating a personality trait or behavior that is stereotypically associated with the group" (115). Furthermore, the targeted group is usually portrayed as "stupid, ignorant, or unclean" (115). The script of stupidity is one which particularly dominates

discussions of ethnic humor,²⁴ though it manifests itself in a different way in the *Histories*, as I will argue in the next chapter.

Connected to the idea of intelligence is another type of ethnic joke that involves competition and one-upmanship (116). In these types of jokes, “two or three individuals of different ethnic groups compete with and try to outsmart each other...[w]inning often means coming up with the cleverest answer in verbal repartee” (116). In the *Histories*, this type of humor is seen in contexts involving the Greeks primarily, and is perhaps most notable in the character of Themistocles, who cleverly outwits his opponents (e.g., 8.125 after Salamis). In connection with interactions between individuals or groups, Apte provides the following theoretical proposition that is useful for thinking about a dominant characteristic of humor in Herodotus:

In social interactions involving individuals of two or more ethnic groups, people with strong group loyalty usually respond to ethnic humor disparaging to their group by retaliating in similar fashion. Such a strategy may lead to competition and one-upmanship in the use of mutually disparaging ethnic humor. (148)

The competitive context for ethnic humor that involves a direct interaction of individuals or groups makes sense, because the humor becomes a verbal tool whereby conflict can be expressed and waged between the two groups.

Ethnic humor also takes the form of proverbs, which “constitute an important genre of oral literature in most societies, more so perhaps in those that do not have a written tradition” (118). In reference to the *Histories*, the frequency of proverb-related humor is not surprising since, not unlike Homer, Herodotus’ early prose text often reflects his still-dominant oral culture. According to Apte, proverbs offer an important

²⁴ Cf. Apte 1985, Raskin 1985, and Davies 1990. This “script” also resonates with Plato’s *Phil.* 49e-50a, where Socrates says that we laugh at “ignorance” (ἄγνοια).

insight into the belief systems of the cultures about which they are created and often make use of dominant stereotypes that reveal prevailing cultural attitudes:

Proverbs often succinctly encode the dominant values of a culture and give expression to its collective, shared perception of the universe, including other human social groups. As part of their sociocultural reality, many cultures encapsulate their view of outsiders in proverbs that are then used as folk wisdom not only for passing judgments on outsiders but also for the perpetuation of the existing stereotypic images of other people and prejudicial attitudes toward them. Investigation of proverbs and their textual analysis may therefore provide useful insights into a culture's perception of other groups. (118)

In addition to the important cultural information encapsulated in proverbs, Apte says that their creation is often the result of intergroup hostilities in which each side creates proverbs that target the other. Moreover, proverbs and jokes “are perhaps the single factor most responsible for attitudes that one group holds with respect to another” (119). In the *Histories*, humor akin to proverbs is often seen in the memorable exchanges between advisors and eastern monarchs.²⁵ These anecdotes emerge as a sort of folk wisdom that informs the audience's perceptions of the fifth-century foreigner.

C. Techniques used in Ethnic Humor

Proverbs, jokes, tales and other forms of ethnic humor make prominent use of imitation and exaggeration, which “suggest the physical appearance, clothing, behavior, body movements and gestures, and language considered to be characteristic of the target groups” (119). One particularly prominent type of imitation centers on foreign languages, in which “parodying the language of an outgroup involves nonsense manifestations” (120).²⁶ As well as in speech, imitation can be found in the nonverbal

²⁵ Ancient discussions of the chreia that contain “jest” will be helpful in this regard. On the chreia more generally, see Hock and O’Neil 1996 and 2002, and Kennedy 2003.

²⁶ Cf. Raskin 1985, 181-185, on the script of language distortion.

ridicule of ethnic groups because of their dress and occupational behavior, especially in festival contexts (120). In the *Histories*, the interaction between the Fish-Eaters and the Ethiopian king (3.22) offers a rich example for testing the application of this idea.

D. Theoretical Importance of Ethnic Humor

Apte uniquely provides a theoretical framework that addresses ethnic humor as a cultural text, its contextual determinants, and its functions (120-146). His theoretical framework, in turn, helps establish a valuable foundation for my own discussion of humor in Herodotus. The Persian Wars created dynamic situations in which individuals were forced to contemplate the cultural norms of their foes, their compatriots, and themselves. As a cultural text, Apte says that ethnic humor, like all humor, is an important part of expressive culture:

It reflects a group's perception and evaluation of other groups' personality traits, customs, behavior patterns, and social institutions by the standards of ingroup culture, with its positive or negative attitudes toward others. Judgments proceed from intergroup interactions, but once established, they tend to become a part of cultural heritage and do not change substantively unless they are affected by significant historical events. (121)

The textual analysis of ethnic humor finds common territory with textual analyses of other forms of humor, such as those discussed earlier in connection with linguistic humor. The main goal of these textual studies, a major part of the research on ethnic humor, is to uncover “underlying stereotypes, and the covert attitudes, beliefs, and motives, regarding the targeted ethnic groups” (121). While certain traits belong to specific ethnic groups, cross-cultural research has identified “stupidity, dirtiness, brute force, and excessive sexuality” as typically negative characteristics that are expressed in stereotypes (127). While some textual studies of ethnic humor based

on collections of ethnic jokes lack contextual information “so that it is difficult to relate the analyses to external historical events and to sociocultural reality” (128), this is not the case with the study of Herodotus’ *Histories*. Although we do not know the specific times or locations of the *logoi* Herodotus relates, the general time and location—fifth-century Greece,²⁷ at least one trip to Athens²⁸ and likely others to locales noted in his narrative—are able to be fixed with confidence.

During the course of my analyses in the *Histories*, it will be useful to consider a basic tenet of ethnic humor: that a member of a particular group is often labeled as typical of an entire group (130). The practice of overgeneralization is considered to be a matter of convenience, and the stereotype that emerges from the ethnic humor may not reflect an objective reality (131). Rather, as Apte states, “portrayals of groups in ethnic humor...should properly be regarded as ‘concept-systems with positive as well as negative functions, having the same general kinds of properties as other concepts, and serving to organize experience as do other concepts’ (Vinacke 1957:229)” (132). The two groups that will merit the most attention in this regard are the Persians and Spartans, though the portrayals of minor groups will also figure into my analysis.

²⁷ See further discussion of the contextual setting of the *Histories* below, pp. 42-44.

²⁸ Evidence for Herodotus’ contact with Athens includes the following: Diyllus *FGrH* 73 F 3=Plutarch *De Malign. Herod.* 862 B: “An Athenian, Diyllus, who is not one of those who has been disregarded in history-writing, said that (Herodotus) received ten talents from Athens on the motion of Anytus” (ὅτι μέντοι δέκα τάλαντα δωρεὰν ἔλαβεν (sc. Ἡρόδοτος) ἐξ Ἀθηνῶν, Ἀνύτου τὸ ψήφισμα γράψαντος, ἀνὴρ Ἀθηναῖος οὐ τῶν παρημελημένων ἐν ἱστορίαι Δίλλος εἴρηκεν); Eusebius, *Chron.* Olymp. 83.4 (=445/444 BC): “Herodotus the historian was honored by the council of the Athenians after he had read his books to them” (Ἡρόδοτος ἱστορικὸς ἐτιμήθη παρὰ τῆς Ἀθηναίων βουλῆς ἐπαναγνοὺς αὐτοῖς τὰς βίβλους).

E. Contextual Setting of Ethnic Humor

One important question addressed in this study is why humor would be prevalent at the particular period in history in which Herodotus was writing and the period about which he was writing in his *Histories*. Anthropological studies into ethnic humor provide a useful dichotomy of macro- and micro-level contextual determinants that help to define why this particular type of humor occurs. Because these two levels of contextual determinants are crucial for understanding the presence of humor in the *Histories*, and particularly the macro-level factors, I provide below extended definitions of these concepts:

Macro-level contextual factors include the following: the nature of individual societies (whether they are simple or complex, small-scale or large-scale, homogeneous or heterogeneous); the nature of contact and interaction between societies; historical events of significant nature that affect societies (for instance, international conflicts, wars, large-scale migrations, social movements, and religious upheavals); major intrasocietal conflicts of a political and economic nature; and sociocultural change over a period of time that affects the social status of many ethnic groups within a society. **Contextual factors at the micro level (sic)** include among others, the nature of settings in which ethnic humor occurs, such as informal social gatherings at home, among friends, in daily routine interaction at the place of work, and so on; the intentions and motivations of individuals when they engage in ethnic humor; and the responses of participants to ethnic humor directed at others and at themselves. (Apte 1985, 132; my bold text)

In the analysis of Herodotus' *Histories*, the macro-level contextual factors are obvious because of the proem's announced plan for the work to explain why the Greeks and Persians came into conflict. More elusive is reference to the events of the Peloponnesian War, yet there is scholarly consensus that Herodotus knew about and was affected by events of the Peloponnesian War.²⁹ Therefore, as we consider the

²⁹ Cf. Thomas 2000, 1-2: "Herodotus must have been pursuing his research in the decades of the highest pinnacles of Athenian power (450s to 420s) and in a period when that power was justified by Athenians through their contribution to the Persian defeat, but he ceases his narrative strictly at the end of the Persian Wars, on the very verge of the creation of the Delian League by Athens in 478 BC. The *Histories* have always been an essential source for archaic Greek history (pre-470s) and the Persian Wars

functions of Herodotus' humor, we must always bear in mind the macro-level contextual factors created by both the Persian Wars and "intrasocietal conflicts of a political and economic nature," as Apte discusses above, that reflect a greater tension between various Greeks themselves. For it is against the backdrop of the Persian Wars and the increasing Athenian-Spartan tensions that we can best understand the nature of humor in the *Histories*.

In the course of my analysis in the remaining chapters, it will be important to keep this larger framework of war and intrasocietal conflicts in mind since, as I will argue, this historical/sociocultural context ultimately steers the ways in which the work is composed. As Apte argues, ethnic humor is "much less likely to occur in small-scale homogeneous societies simply because no ethnic groups are likely to be part of it...[but] ethnic humor disparaging various groups is much more likely to occur in many traditional and contemporary multiethnic societies" (133). The pan-Hellenic event of

themselves, and in that sense Herodotus seems a writer of the past, immersed in events long before his own time. Yet he is also a figure of the mid to late fifth century. He was travelling within the massive boundaries of the Persian empire, and writing (down to the 420s) at a time of important intellectual developments in 'science', natural philosophy and the art of argument." Likewise, see Irwin and Greenwood 2007, 12 n. 24: "Whenever the text of Herodotus was circulated as a written text and in the form in which we have it, the text constructs an *inferred* audience of the 420s by making the last certainly datable events in the *Histories* belong to the period immediately preceding," for which they cite 7.233 (spring 431 BC), 7.137 (430 BC), and 6.98, which "may gesture to the death of Artaxerxes I in 425/4 BC" (cf. Fornara 1971b and 1981). For Herodotus' textual references to events of the Peloponnesian War, see Thomas 2000, 20 n. 59 and 60. At 9.73.3, we find Herodotus' statement that still in his own time of the Peloponnesian War the Spartans continued to honor the Deceleans—this gives a *terminus ante quem* of 413, in that Herodotus would surely have mentioned the Spartan occupation of Decelea if that had occurred by the time he wrote his *Histories*. For a publication date of 425 BC based upon parody in Ar. *Acharnians* (523-529~Hdt. 1.4; published in 425 BC), see Cobet 1977. Contra, see Fornara 1981 and Pelling 2000, 154-155, who argues that Aristophanes was not parodying Herodotus, but rather that both authors were parodying a popular historical model for how wars begin. Based upon textual references to Herodotus in works published after the Archidamian War (431-421 BC), especially Ar. *Birds* (published in 414 BC), 1124-1138~Hdt. 1.179, Fornara (1971b) even suggests a publication date as late as 414 BC. While the precise date is impossible to prove, I agree with the majority of scholars who believe Herodotus was shaped by early events of the Peloponnesian War. Raaflaub 2002, 152-153, puts it well: "...Herodotus certainly experienced the early years of the Peloponnesian War and much of the intellectual ferment of the Periclean and immediate post-Periclean years. We should expect these experiences to have left a mark in his work."

the Persian Wars forced the isolated Greek city-states to interact with one another to a greater degree than before and this new multi-ethnic nature of their identity, along with the confrontation of a foreign invader, created the necessary recipe for cultural expression through different types of humor.

IV. Conclusion

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, ancient and modern thinkers have devoted considerable energy in their attempts to understand humor. Ancient analysts' discussions of humor offer insight into ancient views on humor, which I argue is generally more aggressive and subtle than we might expect. Moreover, as I have shown, the three classes of modern psychological humor theories—aggression, incongruity, and release—share common elements with their ancient antecedents. In my effort to understand the way humor and culture intersect in the *Histories*, I have found anthropological discussions of laughter and smiling, humor and language, and ethnic humor helpful.

Herodotus' humor is purposeful, often cerebral, and never frivolous.³⁰ From my time studying and thinking about this topic, I have identified the following types of humor most frequently in the *Histories*: derision, witty retorts, acts of humorous deception, remarks and actions that are contrary to expectation, the telling detail, puns, persiflage, and vulgar dancing, all of which are grounded in ancient analysts' discussions and which fit further into various modern psychological theories. Additionally, as I turn to the cultural aspect of Herodotus' humor, I find that his

³⁰ Cf. Lateiner 1977 and Shimron 1989.

characters exemplify particular *nomoi* or try to make sense of others' *nomoi* in a way that encourages us to appreciate striking cultural differences. As I will show, humor in the *Histories* shows a particular relevance to the cultural practices, stereotypes, and perceptions of the various peoples that Herodotus portrays. In their interactions with one another, Herodotus' characters use humor to grapple with their own and others' identities, a phenomenon we often see as they exhibit or expose ethnocentric thought. While at times Herodotus' characters direct aggressive varieties of humor at the objects of their derision and we experience the humor of these instigators vicariously, more often we find that humor emerges most clearly from Herodotus' narrative presentation. Occasionally, too, Herodotus uses humor more directly in his authorial voice.

Although Herodotus often illuminates the differences between Greek and barbarian peoples and their *nomoi* through humor, he also commonly employs a political humor (in reference to the Greek *poleis*) that brings out the stereotyped characteristics and perceptions of various Greeks. By presenting contradictory portraits of different Greek peoples, moreover, Herodotus repeatedly challenges our attempts to pin them down. In such a way, Herodotus offers insight into the identities of the Greeks, and gestures, in the case of the Spartans and Athenians especially, toward their future conflicts in the Peloponnesian War.

CHAPTER TWO: DERISION AND WITTY RETORTS

In the only explicit example of his authorial laughter in the *Histories* (4.36.2), Herodotus offers an example of aggressive verbal humor.¹ As Lateiner observes here, “Derision is clear in the chuckles of Herodotus himself at the maps of his fellow Greeks (4.36.2):”²

γελῶ δὲ ὄρων γῆς περιόδους γράψαντας πολλοὺς ἤδη καὶ οὐδένα νόον ἐχόντως ἐξηγησάμενον. οἱ Ὠκεανόν τε ῥέοντα γράφουσι πέριξ τὴν γῆν, εὐῶσαν κυκλοτερέα ὡς ἀπὸ τόρνου, καὶ τὴν Ἀσίην τῇ Εὐρώπῃ ποιούντων ἴσην. ἐν ὀλίγοισι γὰρ ἐγὼ δηλώσω μέγαθός τε ἐκάστης αὐτέων καὶ οἷη τίς ἐστι ἐς γραφὴν ἐκάστη.

I laugh when I see that many people have previously drawn maps of the world and none has given an intelligent explanation. They draw the Ocean running around the earth, which is circular as if drawn from compasses, and make Asia equal to Europe. In a few words, I will show the size of each of these and how each should be on a map.

–Herodotus, *Histories* 4.36.2

Herodotus laughs at those who have mapped the earth incorrectly and he seems intent to assert his authority as *histor* by superseding a previous judgment with a more

¹ This and other examples in the chapter demonstrate well what Halliwell calls “consequential laughter,” which “is marked by, first, its direction towards some definite result other than autonomous pleasure (e.g. causing embarrassment or shame, signalling hostility, damaging a reputation, contributing to the defeat of an opponent, delivering public chastisement); secondly, its deployment of an appropriate range of ridiculing tones, from mild derision to the vitriolic or outrageously offensive; finally, its arousal of feelings which may not be shared or enjoyed by all concerned, and which typically involve some degree of antagonism...once the playful is exceeded, laughter is invariably regarded in Greek texts as having a human object or target, and it is the intended or likely effect of ‘pain’, ‘shame’ or ‘harm’ on this target (either in person or through his reputation and social standing) which is the primary determinant of its significance” (1991, 283). Cf. Halliwell 2008, 12 n. 31: “In popular thinking, laughter is now dissociated, in very un-Greek fashion, from aggression.”

² 1977, 176 n. 9.

carefully reasoned and logical explanation.³ Herodotus' laughter marks a declaration of his own *sophie*, and also the lack of it in those who draw geographically incorrect maps. Once Herodotus has polemically and confidently said he will “demonstrate” (ἐγὼ δηλώσω) the way the world really looks “in a few words” (ἐν ὀλίγοισι, 4.36.2), he devotes a significant section of his *Histories* to detailing the world's geography into five main continents (4.37-45), and thereby provides implicit proof of his own *sophie* and his assertion that other mapmakers are wrong.

We might suspect Herodotus reflects on the success of his own demonstration when he immediately afterwards identifies the areas around the Black Sea as “most ignorant nations” (ἔθνεα ἀμαθέστατα, 4.46.1), with the exception of the Scythians. Moreover, in a parallel thought, Herodotus remarks that these ignorant nations have no learned man other than Anacharsis (4.46.1).⁴ Continuing in this vein, Herodotus further identifies the “cleverest” (σοφώτατα, 4.46.2) of the Scythians' customs, their nomadic way of life that makes them harder to attack. In this brief transition, then, from Herodotus' own implicit demonstration of his *sophie* to the explicit commentary on the peoples in the area where Darius was campaigning, we sense Herodotus'

³ For Herodotus' fondness for disputation, see Lateiner 1989, 91-108, and R. Thomas 2000, 214-221. Thomas views Herodotus' interest in polemic as reflective of his intellectual milieu. In keeping with his contemporary sophists and scientists, “He seems to enjoy criticizing individuals, Hecataeus, ‘the Ionians’, and other traditions” (218). At the same time, there is a natural connection between polemic and demonstration, as we see in Herodotus' words in 4.36.2—“I will show...” (ἐγὼ δηλώσω). For more on this topic, see Thomas 2000, 221-228. On Herodotus' geographical interests, see Gould 1989, 86-94, Romm 1989, 97-113, Thomas 2000, 75-101, and Munson, 2001, 82-87. For a contrary example in which Herodotus makes the same sort of assumption of symmetry he criticizes in 4.36.2, see Lloyd 1966, 341-345, on Herodotus' discussion of the course of the Nile (2.33-34).

⁴ For more on Anacharsis, see Hartog 1980/1988, 62-84.

obsession for asserting and documenting his own *sophie*, as well as that of the peoples he describes.⁵

As I outlined in the first chapter, one of the most common so-called “scripts” in the anthropological approach of ethnic humor is the targeting of the stupidity of a group. By obvious implication, we acknowledge to different degrees the wit or cleverness of the individual who uses this type of humor. In the *Histories*, we find that the humor in the narrative focuses more on the *sophie* of the characters who use it than upon the stupidity of the targeted group. A character’s facility in using derision or witty retorts provides proof of his or her cleverness, and by extension, the cleverness of those in his or her culture. Instead of offering a simple statement of a character’s *sophie*, Herodotus allows for a reenactment of verbal exchanges (a phenomenon we will examine in this chapter), or situations (discussed in the next chapter), either of which offers extended proof of a character’s abilities to best other characters. In these confrontations, we see characters not only trying to prove their wit, but also cultural representatives providing an opportunity for the audience to consider whether any culture demonstrates greater *sophie* than another.⁶

⁵ Immerwahr notes that in Herodotus σοφίη “usually means ‘skill,’ ‘cleverness,’ or ‘practical intelligence,’ and has little, if anything, to do with theoretical or moral ‘wisdom’; even Solon’s σοφίη is eminently practical and empirical” (1966, 320 n. 36). On the importance of *sophie* in the *Histories*, see e.g., Camerer 1965, Detienne and Vernant 1974/1978, and Bencsik 1994. See also 7.102.1 on the connection between *sophie*, *nomos*, and *arete*, and 3.108.2, where Herodotus characterizes divine providence as *sophe*.

⁶ Cf. 1.60, an episode we will discuss further in the next chapter. While Herodotus here is more direct about the cleverness of the Athenians (τοῖσι πρότεροις λεγομένοις εἶναι Ἑλλήνων σοφίην), his statement, understood in its larger context, is not unambiguous. Moreover, Herodotus also characterizes the Egyptians as the “most learned by far of all the peoples I have questioned and visited because they carefully work out a record of the past” (2.77.1; μνήμην ἀνθρώπων πάντων ἐπασκέοντες μάλιστα λογιώτατοί εἰσι μακρῶ τῶν ἐγὼ ἐς διάπειραν ἀπικόμην). While Herodotus here does not refer to the Egyptians’ *sophie*, he provides numerous examples of Egyptian *sophie* throughout the *logos*.

In keeping with Herodotus' explicit thoughts on cultural relativism (3.38.1), it is no surprise that there is a constant fluidity so that no one group consistently dominates these displays of cleverness. In this way, derision and witty retorts serve to emphasize the struggles of war and the clash of *nomoi*, which, as Immerwahr eloquently argues, are products of men's *sophie*:

In several places Herodotus emphasizes the ruling character of *nomos* as "king" or "master" (3.38.4 and 7.104.4), i.e. *nomos* preserves ethnic identity. At the same time, *nomos* is the cause of ethnic independence: thus the Scythians fight for the tombs of their fathers (4.127.2-3), and the Athenians for the common customs of the Greeks (*êthea homotropa*: 8.144.2). Hence *nomos* has an important *historical* function... as a product of human intelligence *nomos* provides man with the means of solving problems put by his environment. This aspect of *nomos* is emphasized whenever Herodotus judges customs for the practical intelligence (*sophiê*) they embody. (1966, 319-320)

In this chapter, I will demonstrate how Herodotus' characters best other characters through verbal demonstrations of their wit or cleverness. As we move through these examples, I will show humor targeted at the Greeks broadly, and also at representatives of specific subgroups—Aeginetans, Samians, and even Athenians. I will also consider the broader political implications of the examples and the ways in which "associative thinking" might be operating.⁷

I. Persians/Greeks

Cyrus to Spartiates about the Greeks (1.153)

After the Ionians sent a delegation to Sparta in an attempt to receive her assistance against Cyrus' Ionian campaign, the Spartans rejected the request yet still sent a delegation to reconnoiter the situation in Ionia. The narrative resumes from

⁷ A term first coined in relation to Herodotus by Raaflaub 1987, 224-225. Cf. Dewald in her introductory remarks to Robin Waterfield's translation of the *Histories* (1998, xxi-xxii).

1.141, where Cyrus tells the fable of the pipe-player and the fish to the Ionian delegation that was seeking reassurance about their terms of subjugation under him.⁸ Cyrus' harsh treatment of the Ionians foreshadows his response to a citizen of Sparta who told Cyrus not to destroy any city of the Greek land since they would not tolerate it (γῆς τῆς Ἑλλάδος μηδεμίαν πόλιν σιναμωρέειν ὡς αὐτῶν οὐ περιοψομένων, 1.152.3):

ταῦτα εἰπόντος τοῦ κήρυκος λέγεται Κῦρον ἐπειρέσθαι τοὺς παρόντας οἱ Ἑλλήνων τίνες ἔόντες ἄνθρωποι Λακεδαιμόνιοι καὶ κόσσοι πλῆθος ταῦτα ἐωυτῶ προαγορεύουσι. πυνθανόμενον δέ μιν εἰπεῖν πρὸς τὸν κήρυκα τὸν Σπαρτιήτην· Οὐκ ἔδεισά κω ἄνδρας τοιούτους, τοῖσί ἐστι χῶρος ἐν μέσῃ τῇ πόλι ἀποδεδεγμένος ἐς τὸν συλλεγόμενοι ἀλλήλους ὀμνύντες ἐξαπατῶσι. τοῖσι, ἦν ἐγὼ ὑγιαίνω, οὐ τὰ Ἰώνων πάθεα ἔσται ἔλλεσχα ἀλλὰ τὰ οἰκίγια. ταῦτα ἐς τοὺς πάντας Ἑλληνας ἀπέριψε ὁ Κῦρος τὰ ἔπεα, ὅτι ἀγορὰς στησάμενοι ὦνῃ τε καὶ πρήσι χρέωνται· αὐτοὶ γὰρ οἱ Πέρσαι ἀγορῆσι οὐδὲν ἐώθασι χρᾶσθαι, οὐδέ σφι ἔστι τὸ παράπαν ἀγορή. (1.153)

After the herald said these things, it is said that Cyrus asked those present which Greeks the Spartans were and with how big an army were they addressing him in this way. Once he had found out, he said to the herald: "I have not yet feared such men, who have set aside a place in the middle of their city where they gather and swear false oaths to one another. If I am healthy, they will not be talking about the sufferings of the Ionians in the future but of the ones at home." Cyrus hurled these words at all the Greeks, because they are accustomed to set up agoras for buying and selling. For the Persians themselves are not at all accustomed to have agoras, nor does the idea of an agora even exist for them. (1.153)

We know from Cyrus' previous dealings with the Ionians that he does not have a favorable view of them, and we expect that Cyrus will not accept in kindly fashion the direct threat from the Spartan herald.⁹ Cyrus' factual questions about the identity and size of the Spartan force¹⁰ present an incongruous scenario that helps to signal his aggressive response. That is, since Cyrus' inquiries about the Spartans come only *after*

⁸ While this fable from Aesop is the only one that explicitly appears in the *Histories*, Griffiths notes, with examples, how "patterns characteristic of fable permeate Herodotean narrative" (2006, 139). See also Aly 1921/1969 and Kurke 2006.

⁹ Lateiner writes about how "chronological logic yields to the opportunity for dramatic confrontation and contemptuous rhetoric (1.153.1, as with Croesus and Solon, or Hydarnes and the Spartan heralds)" (1989, 123).

¹⁰ For similar formulations of the Persian questions about who various Greek peoples are, cf. 5.105 and Aesch. *Persae* 230-245.

the Spartan herald has threatened Cyrus and Persians, we know this is not a simple fact-finding question. What is particularly surprising in Cyrus' exclamation, however, are the specific details that Cyrus uses to ridicule not only the Spartans, but the Greeks in general.¹¹ His knowledge of specific Greek customs after his apparent ignorance of Greek *nomoi* proves his *sophie*.

Cyrus' response to the herald recalls his use of a fable to answer the Ionian delegation earlier and the condescending air that goes along with it. He mocks the political customs of the Greeks, who allow for free democratic exchange, which he labels as false oaths. As Munson notes, too, the "[t]hreat of war and conquest is...implied in πάθεα...οικήια πάθεα"¹² so that Cyrus with these words confirms the hostile tone of his remarks directed against Greek *nomoi*.

The narrator also emphasizes the nature of Cyrus' words when he says that "Cyrus hurled these words at all the Greeks" (ταῦτα ἐς τοὺς πάντας Ἑλληνας ἀπέρριψε ὁ Κύρος τὰ ἔπεα). The explanatory narrative gloss that the Persians cannot even conceive of an agora (οὐδέ σφι ἔστι τὸ παράπαν ἀγορή)¹³ demonstrates Persian ethnocentrism and invites us to think particularly in terms of the relative nature of *nomoi* and the appropriateness of derision of another's *nomoi*.

¹¹ I detect here, too, an aggressive pun on the Greek agora (ἀγορή) in the verb that Herodotus reports that Cyrus uses: προαγορεύουσι. See Halliwell 2008, 233-234, on the agora as "a place where scurrility, ridicule and abuse can thrive with little or no interference, and one whose 'demotic' atmosphere of close-packed bustle and informality allows people to sit or move about joking and mocking others."

¹² 2001, 227 n. 232.

¹³ H. van Wees (2002, 324) uses this passage to show, by comparison to 8.144.2, how Herodotus seeks to challenge Greeks' notions of their own identities: "Trading in the market-place was thought of as a typical Greek activity (1.153.1-2), but it was the Lydians who were 'the first of all people we know to strike and use gold and silver coins, and also the first to become retailers' (1.94.1)."

Michael Flower notes an important connection to Persian customs mentioned earlier in the narrative that resonates here: “When the focalization is that of truth-loving Persians, men who consider telling lies and owing money to be the two most disgraceful things (1.138), the Greeks seem like perjurers and cheats.”¹⁴ At the same time, Donald Lateiner discusses the contradictions about the Persians’ love of truth: “...the Persians’ lauded devotion to the truth (1.136.2, 1.138.1) seems ludicrous when subject to such self-serving, casuistical interpretations as the Persian Amasis’ fraudulent (δόλω) covenant of security when the attack on Barca failed to capture it (4.201).”¹⁵ In this way, we see how Cyrus’ ridicule of Greek *nomoi* in this anecdote encourages the audience to consider the validity of his criticisms of Greek *nomoi*. Cyrus’ remarks also serve as a narrative signal of Persian disregard for and mockery of Greek *nomoi*, a harbinger of danger to come.¹⁶ While this anecdote focused on the Greeks generally, I will show in the next section humor that helps define Spartan character more clearly.

II. The Spartans

One of the most memorable intragroup conflicts in the *Histories* is that between Cleomenes and Demaratus over the Spartan kingship. As Dewald has written in connection to the extended section about the Spartan kingship (6.51-60), “Sparta is the

¹⁴ 2006, 286.

¹⁵ 1989, 153.

¹⁶ But, as Lateiner argues, just as Cyrus’ response is a sign of his own ignorance, the Spartans’ threat is “a message whose peremptory tone reveals the Spartans’ naive underestimation of the Persians’ power” (1987, 102).

only Greek state whose customs H[erodotus] extensively describes, as if Spartans were as foreign as Lydians or Persians (1.93-4, 131-40)” (1998, 684).¹⁷ Humor shows how the personal conflicts between Cleomenes and Demaratus are intertwined with their quests for power. While some may discount the importance of humor in the tales of Cleomenes and Demaratus, upon further reflection we find that it helps draw our attention to the very real issue of legitimacy, and highlights, in contrast to the united Spartan front that we see at Thermopylae, how strife-ridden the Spartans could be:

The Spartan dual kingship distinguished Sparta from the rest of the Greek *poleis*, and assimilated it more to Lydia or Persia. As with these countries, in speaking of Sparta Herodotus focuses on the actions and quarrels of the kings, to the almost complete exclusion of other internal politics... A king’s position, though exalted, was never secure: Cleomenes challenged Demaratus’ legitimacy, and drove him from the throne; he himself had to flee Sparta when his tricks were discovered; Leotychidas went into exile after being accused of accepting bribes (6.72). (Stadter 2006, 243-244)

As Stadter shows, the personal quarrels of the kings are the quarrels of Sparta, and therefore reflect the greater *nomoi* of the Spartans. In Herodotus’ account, in fact, he presents the Spartans’ version of their dual kingship by relating the anecdote about the twins Eurysthenes and Procles (6.52), who show how innate internal strife is to the Spartan state, for Herodotus says these brothers fought with each other their entire lives and so do their descendants (6.52.8).¹⁸ Herodotus provides several further examples of how the Spartan kings Cleomenes and Demaratus attempt to blacken one another’s names (6.51-52; 61-69). He first reports that while Cleomenes was trying to subdue the Aeginetans, who had surrendered their island to the Persians, Demaratus was slandering (διέβαλλε) his fellow king (6.51). It is not until ten sections later in 6.61,

¹⁷ For more on the foreignness of the Spartans, see also Munson 1993, 43-44.

¹⁸ τούτους ἀνδρωθέντας αὐτούς τε ἀδελφεοὺς ἔοντας λέγουσι διαφόρους εἶναι τὸν πάντα χρόνον τῆς ζῆς ἀλλήλοισι, καὶ τοὺς ἀπὸ τούτων γενομένους ὡσαύτως διατελέειν.

after he has given an account of the origin of the dual Spartan kingship and described the customs of Spartan kings (6.56-60), that Herodotus resumes his discussion of how Demaratus was slandering Cleomenes (6.61.1):

Τότε δὲ τὸν Κλεομένεα ἐόντα ἐν τῇ Αἰγίνῃ καὶ κοινὰ τῇ Ἑλλάδι ἀγαθὰ προεργαζόμενον ὁ Δημάρητος διέβαλε, οὐκ Αἰγινητέων οὕτω κηδόμενος ὡς φθόνῳ καὶ ἄγῃ χρεώμενος.

Then, while Cleomenes was in Aegina and working for the common good of Greece, Demaratus slandered him, not because he was concerned with the Aeginetans, but because of jealousy and envy.

Herodotus does not give any further details, however, about how Demaratus was slandering Cleomenes except to say that Demaratus did so not out of concern for the Aeginetans (οὐκ Αἰγινητέων οὕτω κηδόμενος) but out of jealousy (φθόνῳ) and envy (ἄγῃ). Thus, the narrative sets up a stage on which we witness how humor found in the various stories concerning his birth (6.62.1-2 and 6.68-69) draws our attention to the political conflict between Demaratus and Cleomenes, and which reflects the conflicts found within the Spartan kingship more generally.

A. Demaratus to Leotychidas' messenger (6.67.1-3)

After presenting the account of how Demaratus was deposed (6.65-66), Herodotus explains why he ended up in exile. In his account of why Demaratus fled to the Persians, Herodotus relates that Leotychidas, now a king of Sparta as a result of his arrangement with Cleomenes, sent a messenger to Demaratus, who had been deposed from the kingship and had now been elected to office (6.67.1-3):

...ἔφυγε δὲ Δημάρητος ἐκ Σπάρτης ἐς Μήδους ἐκ τοιοῦδε ὄνειδος· μετὰ τῆς βασιλείης τὴν κατάπαυσιν ὁ Δημάρητος ἤρχε αἰρεθεὶς ἀρχήν. ἦσαν μὲν δὴ γυμνοπαιδία, θεωμένου δὲ τοῦ Δημαρήτου ὁ Λευτυχίδης, γεγονώς ἤδη αὐτὸς βασιλεὺς ἀντ' ἐκείνου, πέμψας τὸν θεράποντα ἐπὶ γέλῳ τε καὶ λάσθῃ εἰρώτα τὸν Δημάρητον ὁκοῖόν τι εἶη τὸ ἄρχειν μετὰ τὸ βασιλεύειν. ὁ δὲ ἀλγίστας τῷ ἐπειρωτήματι εἶπε φὰς αὐτὸς μὲν ἀμφοτέρων ἤδη πεπειρηῆσθαι, κεῖνον δὲ οὐ, τὴν μέντοι ἐπειρώτησιν ταύτην ἄρξειν

Λακεδαιμονίοισι ἢ μυρίας κακότητος ἢ μυρίας εὐδαιμονίας. ταῦτα δὲ εἶπας καὶ κατακλυψάμενος ἦε ἐκ τοῦ θεήτρου ἐς τὰ ἐωυτοῦ οἰκία, αὐτίκα δὲ παρασκευασάμενος ἔθυε τῷ Διὶ βοῦν, θύσας δὲ τὴν μητέρα ἐκάλεσε.

Demaratus fled from Sparta to the Medes as a result of the following insult. After the end of his kingship, Demaratus was elected to office. While Demaratus was looking on during the Festival of the Unarmed Dancing, Leotychidas, who was himself already king in place of him, sent his attendant to ask Demaratus for the purpose of laughter and insult what it was like to hold office after he had been king. The question caused him pain, and he said in response that he had already experienced both, but that Leotychidas had not; this question, however, would be the beginning of either a great deal of misery or a great deal of good fortune for the Lacedaemonians. After he said this, he covered his head and went out of the theater to his own home. He immediately got ready and sacrificed an ox to Zeus. After he performed this sacrifice, he summoned his mother.

Herodotus explicitly states the purpose of Leotychidas' question to Demaratus, γέλωτί and λάσθη,¹⁹ which indicate an aggressive humor that emphasizes Demaratus' inferior standing.²⁰ Demaratus, "grieving" (ἀλγίσας, 6.67.3) from the remark, recognizes the condescending mockery and replies with his own aggressive and witty retort: he had already experienced both what it was like to be king and to rule, but Leotychidas had not (αὐτὸς μὲν ἀμφοτέρων ἤδη πεπειρήσθαι, κεῖνον δὲ οὐ, 6.67.3). Demaratus is able to

¹⁹ Scott observes that "λάσθη, mockery or insult, is a very rare word outside the lexicographers; it was perhaps a dialect word in Lesbos and Ionia, as γέλωτα καὶ λάσθην occurs in an epigram by Aeschryon of Mytilene (fourth century: fr 4 Lloyd-Jones and Parsons). The expression ἐπὶ γέλωτι is at 9.82.2 and Ar *Ran* 404, but not again until Hellenistic times" (2005, 271).

²⁰ Munson (1993, 44 n. 28) compares Leotychidas' mockery with Harpagus' mockery of Astyages after Cyrus had conquered Astyages: "How did he like his slavery in place of kingship?" (ὅ τι εἶη ἢ ἐκείνου δουλοσύνη ἀντὶ τῆς βασιλείης, 1.129.1; tr. Munson). Nicholas Richer (1999, 106 n. 64) offers the following valuable observation: "Leotychidas wanted to make people laugh (ἐπὶ γέλωτι) at Demaratos' expense by posing him an insulting question through the medium of his servant (how does the position of magistrate [cf. τὸ ἄρχειν, to *archein*] feel after that of king); it seems worthy of note that the only other occurrence of the same expression in the *Histories* appears at the moment where Herodotus recounts (9.82) how the Spartan Pausanias has a meal prepared in the Lakonian fashion in order to demonstrate the contrast between such a meal and the usual meal of the Medes 'who, having the means to live as' the spectators could see, had come to attack the Spartans in order to take away from them the little on which they lived. It is perhaps not too hazardous to imagine that the expression in question is picked up from Lakonian vocabulary and that this usage translates a social practice applied for religious reasons: one invokes Gelōs as one can also do when forging a γελοῖον, i.e., according to Delcourt (1957, 113-14), an object which 'obliges people to laugh' and leads to the breaking of an evil spell, a state of stupour or of passivity." See also Halliwell 2008, 49.

rearrange cleverly the two concepts of being a magistrate and being king so they are not ranked hierarchically but equally as positive and respectable positions. In this way, Demaratus is able to show himself still superior to Leotychidas. Moreover, Demaratus' subsequent remark that Leotychidas' question will bring the Lacedaemonians "a great deal of misery or a great deal of good fortune" (ἢ μῦρις κακότητος ἢ μῦρις εὐδαιμονίας, 6.67.3) indicates the beginning of Demaratus' transformation into the role of advisor.²¹

As Ephraim David has well demonstrated, laughter was a fundamental component of Spartan culture.²² From Plutarch's *Cleomenes* 9.1, we know that in Sparta Laughter (Gelōs) was even worshipped as an abstract divinity, along with Fear (Phobos) and Death (Thanatos).²³ Spartans were trained in the use of witty ridicule, and their facility in this signaled their ability to lead.²⁴ It manifested itself particularly in the *sysitia* and at the expense of helots, who once drunk were mocked by the Spartiates for didactic purposes.²⁵ Thus, in Demaratus' hostile and witty response to Leotychidas' messenger, we find a striking example of this particular Spartan custom.

²¹ Lateiner, in his seminal article on laughter in the *Histories*, reminds us of the serious implications of Leotychidas' mocking insult: "The abuse, a grievous insult, meets its just reward. Herodotus opines pointedly that Demaratus later got revenge for *this* jeering mockery at his deposition, when afterwards Leotychidas was caught red-handed in bribery, went into exile, had his house destroyed, and died an outcast in Tegea (6.72)." (1977, 178; Lateiner's italics).

²² 1989, 1-25.

²³ Laughter (Gelōs) is also mentioned in Sosibios, *FGrH* 595 F 19 *ap.* Plutarch *Lycurgus* 25.4 (Richer 1999, 92).

²⁴ 1989, 4.

²⁵ 1989, 3-7. David generally follows the humor theorist Henri Bergson to help explain the most typical sort of aggressive laughter in Spartan culture, and how important it was to maintain a cohesive society and a strict hierarchical order. For a complete list of the ways laughter was particularly characteristic of the polity, see 1989, 17.

Demaratus' actions after his mocking retort to Leotychidas' messenger likewise reveal typical Spartan behavior. Specifically, he covers his head (κατακλυψάμενος, 6.67.3) as a sign of shame and goes home,²⁶ later endures his mother's incongruously long-winded answer to his simple question about who his father was (6.68-69), and then leaves for Persia shortly thereafter. And as David points out, the reason for Demaratus' voluntary exile is connected to Leotychidas' mockery:

According to Herodotus (6.67) it was the torture of being mocked (not that of being dethroned) which determined Demaratus to defect. This example is particularly significant, since in all probability Herodotus accurately reproduced the story as it had been recounted by his Spartan informants. Hence, regardless of the psychological vector which really prompted Demaratus' reaction, the relevance of his case for generalizing is vindicated by the current belief of the Spartans that he was motivated by vulnerability to mockery. (1989, 16).

Nicholas Richer shows here how Laughter (Gelōs) is portrayed in the service of Shame (Aidōs),²⁷ which is closely related to that of Fear (Phobos). In this way, Demaratus' ultimate respect for Aidōs explains his later actions:

So, when Leotychidas wants, by recourse to Laughter, to underline sharply the current situation, which sees him ruling while Demaratos is no more than a magistrate, the latter answers by assuming an attitude of Aidōs; he shows that he is a true Spartiate: not only is his response in the form of an apophthegm (he says that he has to his advantage the experience of magistrate and king, which Leotychidas does not), which is perhaps a way of trying to make people laugh in his turn (to invoke Gelōs?), but in the end he displays his respect for Aidōs, whose general characteristics he adopts. We could indeed see in this a play on the notions which ruled life at Sparta. (1999, 96-97)

Thus, in this brief episode, we find not just a personal exchange that uses malicious ridicule, but also an example of Spartan *nomoi* concerning the use of laughter.

²⁶ Richer observes similar actions in Pausanias' description of the story of Penelope's departure from Sparta when she was first given to Odysseus by her father, Ikarios. After Ikarios had repeatedly begged Penelope, as her chariot was departing, not to leave, Odysseus finally ordered her to follow willingly or return to Sparta. Penelope then silently veiled herself for her response (ἐγκαλυψαμένης δὲ πρὸς τὸ ἐρώτημα), her father understood her wish, and then dedicated a statue of Aidōs at that very spot.

²⁷ Evidence for the abstraction of Shame (Aidōs) at Sparta comes from Xenophon, *Symposium* 8.35 and Pausanias 3.20.10-11 (Richer 1999, 92).

Demaratus' reactions, then, reflect a serious and well-established part of the Spartans' culture, and his exchange with Leotychidas' messenger demonstrates the power of laughter. For a Spartan audience, no doubt, the mocking humor of Herodotus' text would have resonated well.

B. Cleomenes to Crius (6.50)

The Spartan king Cleomenes provides another example of typical Spartan humor in his dealings with the Aeginetan leader Crius (6.50). When Aegina offered Darius the symbolic earth and water of surrender, the Athenians feared the Aeginetans might help Persia to attack Athens, and therefore went to Sparta and accused the Aeginetans of betraying Greece (προδόντες τὴν Ἑλλάδα, 6.49). Cleomenes then set out to arrest those Aeginetans who were most guilty (Αἰγινήτων τοὺς αἰτιωτάτους), but when he tried to make arrests he met with opposition, especially from Crius, one of the Aeginetan leaders. After Crius accused Cleomenes of being bribed by the Athenians (for otherwise he would have brought Demaratus, the other Spartan king, with himself to make the arrests), Cleomenes makes a hostile pun on Crius' name as he is being driven off the island (6.50):

πρὸς ταύτην δὲ τὴν κατηγορίην Κλεομένης ὁ Ἀναξανδρίδew βασιλεὺς ἐὼν Σπαρτιητέων διέβη ἐς Αἴγιναν, βουλόμενος συλλαβεῖν Αἰγινήτων τοὺς αἰτιωτάτους. [2] ὡς δὲ ἐπειρᾶτο συλλαμβάνων, ἄλλοι τε δὴ ἐγίνοντο αὐτῷ ἀντίξοοι τῶν Αἰγινήτων, ἐν δὲ δὴ καὶ Κριὸς ὁ Πολυκρίτου μάλιστα, ὃς οὐκ ἔφη αὐτὸν οὐδένα ἄξιον χαίροντα Αἰγινήτων ἄνευ γὰρ μιν Σπαρτιητέων τοῦ κοινοῦ ποιεῖν ταῦτα, ὑπ' Ἀθηναίων ἀναγνωσθέντα χρήμασι· ἅμα γὰρ ἂν μιν τῷ ἐτέρῳ βασιλεί ἐλθόντα συλλαμβάνειν. [3] ἔλεγε δὲ ταῦτα ἐξ ἐπιστολῆς τῆς Δημαρήτου. Κλεομένης δὲ ἀπελαυνόμενος ἐκ τῆς Αἰγίνης εἶρετο τὸν Κριὸν ὃ τι οἱ εἶη τὸ οὖνομα· ὃ δὲ οἱ τὸ ἐὼν ἔφρασε. ὃ δὲ Κλεομένης πρὸς αὐτὸν ἔφη ἤδη νῦν καταχαλοῦ ὦ κριεῖ τὰ κέρα, ὡς συνοισόμενος μεγάλῳ κακῷ.

For the purpose of this charge, the Spartan king Cleomenes, son of Anaxandridas, crossed to Aegina, wanting to arrest the most guilty of the Aeginetans. When he tried to arrest them, the other Aeginetans were hostile to him and especially Crius the son of

Polycritus, who said that he would not take away any of the Aeginetans unpunished. For Cleomenes did these things without the consent of the Spartans, but had been bribed by the Athenians. For [if this were not true] he would be making arrests coming along with the other king. Crius said these things based on a letter from Demaratus. But Cleomenes, while sailing away from Aegina, asked Crius what his name was, and Crius told him the truth. Cleomenes said to him, “Now bronze your horns, Ram, since you will meet with a great evil!”

While the depth of this brief quip is limited, it forces the audience to reread/rethink the first matrix of meaning that Crius somehow needs to get his horns bronzed (!), until they are able to resolve the incongruity that results from the other meaning of the vocative κριέ, namely that it is also the name for a ram. In the text, the superiority/aggression theory of humor helps to explain Cleomenes’ attitude toward Crius best. Dewald relates a suggestion of Griffiths about this episode that underscores its aggressive tone: “...sacrificial victims have their horns gilded, [which adds] a sinister undertone to the overt threat, that Crius will need additional defensive armour.”²⁸ It is one of the only kinds of aggressive blows he can strike from a distance as he is being driven off Aegina, and we see that the humor here characterizes the Spartans through their representative Cleomenes. With his aggressive pun, Cleomenes offers a characteristically Spartan verbal demonstration of wit.²⁹

In connection to this passage, Hows and Wells observe that Cleomenes seems to concede that Crius had a valid point about the lawlessness of his attempt to arrest the islanders without the presence of his co-regent. At the same time, however, we see the effective use of a pun here: Cleomenes trumps Spartan law with Spartan wit, and in this

²⁸ 2006, 162 n. 15.

²⁹ Dewald cites Cleomenes’ quip in her recent article on humor and danger in Herodotus as a type of humor that “seems to be distinctively marked by city or *ethnos*, as emerges from the apparent consistency of some subsets of national anecdote” (2006, 149). As she observes, it offers an example of the “eccentric but gifted sixth-century Spartan king, [who] seems to have left a string of witticisms behind him” (ibid.).

sense still attacks Crius with an aggressive pun that incorporates an outright threat of misfortune to come. We will see this threat fulfilled in 6.73.1-2 when Cleomenes, after he has taken care of Demaratus, immediately (αὐτίκα, 6.73.1) returns to Aegina with his new co-regent Leotychidas.³⁰ At this juncture, because both kings are present, Herodotus tells us that the Aeginetans “did not think it right still to resist” (ἐδικαίευν ἔτι ἀντιβαίνειν, 6.73.2), and Cleomenes and Leotychidas took ten wealthy and influential prisoners, including Crius.³¹ Thus, we see in the fulfillment of Cleomenes’ threat the underlying seriousness of the aggressive pun in 6.50.³²

³⁰ Cleomenes also has revenge against Aegina on his mind when he makes a deal with Leotychidas his co-regent if he would join him in his expedition against the island (6.65). In connection with his acquisition of the kingship, see pp. 54-58 above about Leotychidas’ mockery of Demaratus in 6.67.2, an action that results in his own destruction in 6.72. See Lateiner 1977, 178, for the idea of Leotychidas as a predecessor of Xerxes in his use of laughter.

³¹ The Athenians use the same excuse Demaratus described in his letter to Crius in 6.50—they tell Leotychides they “did not think it right” (οὐ δικαιοῦν) to return to one king what had been entrusted to them by two (6.86α). See Munson 2001, 188-194, for a discussion of the ancient enmity between Aegina and Athens in the *Histories*. We are reminded of Crius again at the Battle of Salamis when his son, Polycritus, whom Herodotus names first in his list of the most distinguished individuals at the battle (8.93.1), shouts over to Themistocles and mocks him for throwing the charge of medism against the Aeginetans (βώσας τὸν Θεμιστοκλέα ἐπεκερτόμησε ἐς τῶν Αἰγινήτων τὸν μηδισμόν ὀνειδίζων, 8.92.2). Herodotus further tells us that he “hurled these insults after ramming a ship” (ταῦτα μὲν νυν νηὶ ἐμβάλων ὁ Πολύκριτος ἀπέρριψε ἐς Θεμιστοκλέα, 8.92.2) and in this way, punctuates yet another instance of aggressive verbal humor. Note too the same verb, ἀπέρριψε, that we saw in Cyrus’ ethnic slur in 1.153 (p. 50 above). Herodotus offers a morbid little joke, as well, about how the ship Polycritus rammed was that of Pytheas, whom the Persians had kept on board after they hacked him up because they admired his courage (first reported in 7.181, repeated in 8.92.1). Because this Pytheas was on board the Persians’ ship, Herodotus tells us that he really did “return home to Aegina safe and sound!” (ὥστε Πυθέην οὕτω σωθῆναι ἐς Αἴγιναν, 8.92.1). After the battle of Plataea, we meet Pytheas’ son, Lampon, who offers what Herodotus calls “an unholy word” (ἀνοσιώτατον...λόγον, 9.78.1) to Pausanias that he impale Mardonius’ body and thereby exact revenge for Xerxes’ similar treatment of Leonidas (7.238), Pausanias’ uncle. Herodotus tells us that Lampon thinks he will please Pausanias, but the Spartan commander chastises him for suggesting the mistreatment of a corpse, the sort of thing “you would expect more from barbarians than from Greeks, and we regard *them* [sc. the foreigners] with indignation <for such an action>” (τὰ πρέπει μᾶλλον βαρβάροις ποιεῖν ἢ περ Ἑλλήσι· κακείνοισι δὲ ἐπιφρονέομεν). Pausanias tells Lampon he is lucky to avoid his punishment and then sends him away (9.79.2).

³² Cf. 6.85 for potential proof of the Aeginetans’ learning the lesson of 6.50—they are wary of future payback, upon warning from the prominent Spartan Theasidas, and so stop their attempt to remove Leotychides.

Boedeker discusses the more general situation with Cleomenes and Demaratus as a larger issue of Sparta's "inconsistent policies towards Athens," first in 5.74-75 when Cleomenes "attempts to reinstate a tyrant in Athens but is foiled when Demaratus departs," and second here in 6.50 where "Cleomenes pursues Athens' anti-Persian policies against Aegina, but again is thwarted by Demaratus."³³ If Boedeker is right—and I think she is—that Cleomenes' and Demaratus' different policies toward Athens "emphasize the volatile and inconsistent relationship between the two cities, which receives a prominent but perhaps anachronistic focus in Herodotus' accounts of the early fifth century," then Cleomenes' seemingly insignificant hostile pun directed at the Aeginetan Crius characterizes the conflict between the two Spartan kings in a striking way. While Crius is the figure at whom Cleomenes directs his mocking humor, the narrative tells us that he acted as he did because of the information he received in a letter from Demaratus,³⁴ who uses Crius as an agent of his "envy and hatred" (φθόνῳ καὶ ἄγῃ) for Cleomenes (6.61). In this way, Cleomenes, while directing humor at a member of another group, is ironically victimized by Demaratus via his covert letter that helps to create Crius' hostile attitude toward Cleomenes.

³³ 1987, 198.

³⁴ Cf. Demaratus' other written message in 7.239, which only Gorgo can decode. See Boedeker 1987, 185 and 194, for further discussion.

C. Spartans and Samians (3.46)

Not long after Polycrates proved he was too successful and could not lose his ring, we encounter some of those men the Samian tyrant had exiled. In an effort to seek assistance, they sailed to Sparta (3.46):

ἐπεῖτε δὲ οἱ ἐξελασθέντες Σαμίων ὑπὸ Πολυκράτεος ἀπίκοντο ἐς τὴν Σπάρτην, καταστάντες ἐπὶ τοὺς ἄρχοντας ἔλεγον πολλὰ οἷα κάρτα δεόμενοι. οἱ δὲ σφι τῇ πρώτῃ καταστάσει ὑπεκρίναντο τὰ μὲν πρῶτα λεχθέντα ἐπιλεληθέναι, τὰ δὲ ὕστερα οὐ συνιέναι. μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα δεύτερα καταστάντες ἄλλο μὲν εἶπον οὐδέν, θύλακον δὲ φέροντες ἔφασαν τὸν θύλακον ἀλφίτων δέεσθαι. οἱ δὲ σφι ὑπεκρίναντο τῷ θυλάκῳ περιεργάσθαι· βοηθέειν δ' ὧν ἔδοξε αὐτοῖσι.

When those Samians who had been driven out by Polycrates arrived at Sparta, they stood before the magistrates and spoke at length, as they were very much in need. At their first hearing before them, the Spartans answered that they had forgotten the first things the Samians had said and didn't follow the later things. After this the Samians stood before the Spartans a second time and said nothing else, but brought a sack and said that the sack needed grain. The Spartans answered, however, that "sack" was superfluous, but they then decided to help them.

Humor operates on a number of levels in this brief account. Dewald suggests that humor results when the exiled Samians' request for help is met not by an answer about Spartan willingness or unwillingness to help, but rather by the Spartans' critique of the long-windedness of their request.³⁵ We sense a frustration on the part of the Samians—they do not attempt further discourse with the Spartans, but instead brusquely go away and return with a sack along with their own elementary caption, "This sack needs grain." The Spartans play with their own stereotype and reinforce its veracity by demonstrating, with a witty retort, that the Samians' terse response was still overly verbose.³⁶ We would expect that the Samians' pithy reply would be embraced by the

³⁵ 2006, 149.

³⁶ Along with the previous example of Cleomenes, Dewald cites this as another example of humor that particularly characterizes the Spartans, who in Herodotus "tend to exhibit a dry verbal wit that expresses itself (of course) laconically" (2006, 149). Other examples of this Spartan trait of terse speech are found at 9.91 and at 5.49-50, an anecdote I will discuss in chapter four. For more on Spartan speech, see Cartledge and Debbar 2006, 574-580.

laconic Spartans, but instead, the Samians are shunned because they use one too many words in their reply. In the end, then, the humor of the situation comes not from the Samians' mimicry of the Spartans' verbal economy, but from the Spartans' demonstration of their quick wit. While the Spartans coyly force the Samians to make a ridiculous display of themselves in their repeated efforts to communicate with and to win the support of the Spartans, the Spartans in the end do actually help the exiled Samians, joining in their attack on the island.

In addition to the stereotypical Spartan speech, the Spartans' behavior is also reflected in this brief anecdote. For example, Sara Forsdyke discusses how this story "is in accord with the pattern of representation of Sparta as being hostile to speechmaking. Representations of Spartan laconism probably reflect the disciplined and authoritarian nature of the Spartan social and political system (2002, 527)." Carolyn Dewald argues that this anecdote represents the Spartan suspicion of getting involved in others' business,³⁷ an idea that resonates well with the anecdote of Aristagoras and Cleomenes in 5.49-51, as I will discuss in chapter four.

III. The Athenians

Themistocles' quick wit,³⁸ refusal to be mocked, and ability to silence his opponents with harshly-toned and self-defensive humor can be seen as a reflection of

³⁷ 2006, 163 n. 16.

³⁸ Themistocles' wit carries with it a wily variety of wisdom that Plutarch remarks has made the Athenian compared frequently to that wily Odysseus (*De Malig.* 869F). See Evans 1991, 80, for similarities between Themistocles in Herodotus and Odysseus in Sophocles' *Ajax*. Cf. Thucydides' praise of Themistocles' genius in 1.138.

his Athenian character. Immerwahr's remarks about Themistocles and the way he embodies Athens are noteworthy:³⁹

The foremost characteristic of Athens is...her adaptability, an indication of which is the favor she receives from the divine. The representative of adaptability and good fortune is Themistocles, the trickster who comes out on top in any situation. Much has been written on the supposedly unfavorable picture of this statesman in Herodotus. It is true that Themistocles was represented in a partially unfavorable light by Athenian sources reflecting contemporary party traditions, on which Herodotus depended. The portrait he derived from these traditions, however, has the function of exemplifying the Athenian character: Themistocles compares to the Athenians as Croesus compares to the Lydians, and Darius to the Persians. The main characteristics of Themistocles are therefore his egotism, his adaptability, his patriotism, and his good fortune. (1966, 223)

The Athenian general forcefully ridicules his opponents when challenged by them in order to maintain a superior social and political standing, and in this way, his wit functions as a means by which he defends himself and his position, and on a larger scale, embodies Athens' emerging empire by his intolerance of criticism and brutally swift actions to squash anyone who opposes him. While I read his remarks to Adeimantus in 8.59 and 8.61 as witty retorts of this variety,⁴⁰ I will offer a more obvious example from after the battle of Salamis. Second, I will offer Themistocles' encounter with the Andrians, who mimick his own aggressive style in their response to him, as a typical example of Herodotus' tendency to play with the symmetries that he establishes.

³⁹ Others who have noted the connection between Themistocles and Athens include Wood 1972, 185-186; Raaflaub 1987, 227; Munson 1988, 100, and 2001, 57 n. 43; Evans 1991, 79-80; and Blösel 2001, 179-197, and 2004.

⁴⁰ Cf. Shimron 1989, 67, and Shapiro 2000, 105, who observes that "Herodotus treats [Themistocles' and Adeimantus'] altercation with some humor." Themistocles' remarks in 8.61 even break down into slurs against the Corinthians in general. Cf. Pl. *Phil.* 49b, where Socrates says that the truly ridiculous (γελοῖους) are those who cannot revenge themselves when mocked (καταγελῶμενοι).

A. Themistocles to Timodemus (8.125.1-8.126.1)

After the battle of Salamis, Themistocles failed to win the first honor of those who fought at Salamis. He did, however, win a majority of the second place votes and so he went to Lacedaemon “hoping to be honored” (θέλων τιμηθῆναι, 8.124.2).⁴¹ Themistocles is characterized as “by far the most clever man among all those in Greece” (ἀνὴρ πολλὸν Ἑλλήνων σοφώτατος ἀνὰ πᾶσαν τὴν Ἑλλάδα, 8.124.1) and won an olive crown for his “cleverness and skill” (σοφίης δὲ καὶ δεξιότητος, 8.124.2). In this brief episode, a certain Timodemus from Aphidnae challenges Themistocles for failing to credit those to whom credit is due.⁴² Herodotus emphasizes in this exchange how Themistocles manipulates the language of his abuser with a forceful and witty retort. In this way, too, we see Themistocles display the “cleverness and skill” (σοφίης δὲ καὶ δεξιότητος, 8.124.2) for which he had been recognized in connection with Salamis (8.125-126.1):

ὡς δὲ ἐκ τῆς Λακεδαίμονος ἀπῆκετο εἰς τὰς Ἀθήνας, ἐνθαῦτα Τιμόδημος Ἀφιδναῖος, τῶν ἐχθρῶν μὲν τῶν Θεμιστοκλέος ἑὼν, ἄλλως δὲ οὐ τῶν ἐπιφανέων ἀνδρῶν, φθόνῳ καταμαργέων ἐνεΐκεε τὸν Θεμιστοκλέα, τὴν εἰς Λακεδαίμονα ἄπιξιν προφέρων, ὡς διὰ τὰς Ἀθήνας ἔχοι τὰ γέρεα τὰ παρὰ Λακεδαιμονίων, ἀλλ’ οὐ δι’ ἑωυτόν. ὁ δὲ, ἐπεῖτε οὐκ ἐπαύετο λέγων ταῦτα ὁ Τιμόδημος, εἶπε· Οὕτω ἔχει τοι· οὐτ’ ἂν ἐγὼ ἐὼν Βελβινίτης ἐτιμήθην οὕτω πρὸς Σπαρτιητέων, οὐτ’ ἂν σὺ, ὦνθρωπε, ἐὼν Ἀθηναῖος.

Ταῦτα μὲν νυν εἰς τοσοῦτο ἐγένετο, ...

When Themistocles came back to Athens from Lacedaemon, thereupon Timodemus of Aphidnae, one of Themistocles’ enemies but otherwise not well-known, was stark mad

⁴¹ In *De Malig.* 871C-D, Plutarch suggests that Herodotus wrongly and intentionally robbed Themistocles of his due honors from the Battle of Salamis and even used the Pythian Apollo to spread his lie that Aeginetans deserved the greatest credit for the victory. Moreover, Plutarch seems to acknowledge the influence of Aesop on Herodotus: “No more fictions now, in which Scythians and Persians and Egyptians are made to speak as Aesop uses crows and monkeys: he uses the Pythian god himself to put down Athens from pride of place at Salamis” (*de Malig.* 871C-D; tr. Bowen 1992, 87). Cf. Kurke 2006.

⁴² Flory 1987, 180 n. 8, calls our attention to the pun found in the name Timodemus (“honored by the people,” my translation).

with jealousy and upbraided Themistocles. He brought up his departure to Lacedaemon, how through the Athenians he had the honors from the Lacedaemonians, but not through his own efforts. When Timodemus did not stop saying these things, Themistocles said, “You’re right. If I were from Belbina⁴³ I wouldn’t have been honored in this way by the Spartiates, but you, man, wouldn’t have been honored even even if you were from Athens!”

This matter, then, went only this far...

The first part of his comment, given by Herodotus in *oratio recta* to give the fullest effect to Themistocles’ insult, is conciliatory—Themistocles agrees that his affiliation with Athens helped him to receive honors in Sparta. The second half of Themistocles’ witty reply, however, isolates Timodemus for ridicule. More like 8.59 than 8.61, Timodemus’ attack and Themistocles’ response are personal, for they concern the individual honors due (or not due) to Themistocles, rather than the prestige that Athens deserves for her role in saving Greece. Themistocles plays on the attack only to show that Timodemus is missing the real point—Timodemus is a nobody.⁴⁴ Herodotus signals this succinctly and unobtrusively in the vocative address “O man” (ὦνθρωπε) that removes all distinction from Timodemus and reduces him to the position of a generic man.

Herodotus provides a clue for the humor of this brief phrase in Themistocles’ reply when he first introduces Timodemus in the passage. Through authorial comment, Herodotus establishes that Timodemus’ whole identity is due to

⁴³ How and Wells (1912/1928) note that “Belbina is a rocky islet about ten miles south of Sunium at the entrance of the Saronic gulf, now St. George. It remained a separate community (Scylax, 52), paying tribute as late as 425 B.C. (C. I. A. i. 37; Hicks, 64). It is here a mere example of an utterly unimportant place (Teles in Stobaeus, xl. 8 ὀνειδίζουσι μὲν ὅτι Κύθνιος ἢ ὅτι Μυκόνιος ἢ ὅτι Βελβινίτης), the assailant of Themistocles being an Athenian (§ 2) of Aphidna (§ 1), and the saying meaning, ‘I should not have received this honour had I been of Belbina, nor will you though you are (like me) an Athenian.’ Plato (*Rep.* 329 E, followed by Cic. *de Sen.* 3. 8, Plut. *Them.* 18) spoils the double point of the story by making the assailant himself a Seriphian.”

⁴⁴ As Macan points out, Herodotus is vague with his use of ἔων, and if he is questioning, as I have translated, whether Timodemus is even Athenian, the humor of the insult is that much more biting: “The first ἔων is obviously hypothetical: why not the second too? In which case the retort of Themistocles has the added sting of insinuating ξενία against this ἄνθρωπος” (1908, note to 8.125).

Themistocles (τῶν ἐχθρῶν μὲν τῶν Θεμιστοκλέος ἐών, ἄλλως δὲ οὐ τῶν ἐπιφανέων ἀνδρῶν). Moreover, Herodotus' report of Timodemus' behavior before he addresses Themistocles further emphasizes his insignificance: he was "raging with jealousy" (φθόνῳ καταμαργέων). Indeed, Henry Immerwahr characterizes this entire exchange by saying that "the idea of envy is central to the famous anecdote of Themistocles and Timodemus of Aphidna."⁴⁵ Timodemus can exist only under the shadow of the Athenian general because he has no concerns of his own other than Themistocles. He cannot even have his own desires, but rather is only jealous that Themistocles has achieved a high social and political standing. By his use of these verbal cues, then, Herodotus presents the audience with a feed before he delivers the punchline, ὦνθρωπε, through the mouth of Themistocles.

Herodotus offers one last clue to the effectiveness of Themistocles' humorous insult by the succinct phrase Ταῦτα μὲν νυν ἐς τοσοῦτον ἐγένετο... (8.126.1). We are invited to consider the role of Themistocles' response here as part of an escalation in Athenian intolerance of free speech, something we will see in the next example (8.111) not in Themistocles' speech, but in his actions.⁴⁶

Immerwahr uses this anecdote to characterize the Greeks at Salamis as a whole: "Thus the story of Salamis ends in discord, but not without reference to the greatness of both Themistocles and Athens."⁴⁷ It is informative to contrast the general image of

⁴⁵ 1966, 286.

⁴⁶ Most shockingly, we think of the Athenians' stoning of the dissenter Lycides in 9.4, which, as Raaflaub (2006, 209) points out, belies their adherence to "the principal of general *isēgoria* (equality of speech, 5.78)." The Athenians' intolerance is further emphasized at the end of 9.5, when the Athenian women subsequently go to Lycides' home and stone his wife to death, thus extending the outrage from the public to the private sphere and grimly punctuating the episode.

⁴⁷ 1966, 286.

the fracturing of the Greek forces with the other source of information about the battle of Salamis: Aeschylus' *Persians*. As Griffin has recently noted in an article on Herodotus and tragedy, the Greeks in the *Persians* appear to be united without the same sort of squabbling that we see here:

All this shady stuff, besmirching the radiance of Our Finest Hour, still distressed Plutarch centuries later; no trace of it appears in Aeschylus' play, which presents the Greeks as united, sailing out together for battle in determined mood (*Persae* 384-411). The wrangling and dissension were too complex for tragedy, too 'political' in the wrong sense; they blurred the clear contrast of Greek and barbarian, and the purposes of heaven... Details of individual achievements are not for the austere taste of tragedy, which will not even name Themistocles. (Griffin 2006, 55)

As I have argued and scholars on Herodotus' ethnographic interests have well demonstrated, the complexity of the Greeks and others make it such that simple dichotomies break down repeatedly. Thus, Themistocles' witty retort here brings out the fractured nature of Greek relations following the battle of Salamis.

B. Andrians to Themistocles (8.111.2-3)

While Binyamin Shimron asserts that "Themistocles is never the object of humour,"⁴⁸ we will see that this is not the case in this episode. Themistocles here seeks to extort money from the Aegean islanders after Eurybiades and the other Peloponnesian commanders have rejected his suggestion that they destroy the Hellespont bridges.⁴⁹ Themistocles tells the Andrians that he has come bringing the gods "Persuasion and Necessity" (Πειθῶ τε καὶ Ἀναγκαίην, 8.111.2) and therefore the

⁴⁸ 1989, 68.

⁴⁹ 8.108. See 8.109 for Themistocles' disingenuous speech to the Athenians in which he says he agrees with Eurybiades' advice not to destroy the Hellespont bridges, and 8.110 for his covert message to Xerxes (via his slave Sicinnus) that *he* had done Xerxes a favor by preventing the Greeks from destroying the bridges!

islanders should pay him money. In their response to Themistocles' demands, the Andrians play with his aggressive and witty words and dangerously mock him and the Athenians by extension:

...ὑπεκρίναντο πρὸς ταῦτα λέγοντες ὡς κατὰ λόγον ἦσαν ἄρα αἱ Ἀθῆναι μεγάλαι τε καὶ εὐδαίμονες, <αἷ> καὶ θεῶν χρηστῶν ἦκοιεν εὖ· ἐπεὶ Ἀνδρίους γε εἶναι γεωπέινας ἐς τὰ μέγιστα ἀνήκοντας, καὶ θεοὺς δύο ἀχρήστους οὐκ ἐκλείπειν σφέων τὴν νῆσον ἀλλ' αἰεὶ φιλοχωρεῖν, Πενίην τε καὶ Ἀμηχανίην, καὶ τούτων τῶν θεῶν ἐπηβόλους ἔοντας Ἀνδρίους οὐ δώσειν χρήματα· οὐδέκοτε γὰρ <ἄν> τῆς ἐωυτῶν ἀδυναμίας τὴν Ἀθηναίων δύναμιν εἶναι κρέσσω. οὗτοι μὲν δὴ ταῦτα ὑποκρινάμενοι καὶ οὐ δόντες χρήματα ἐπολιορκέοντο.

[The Andrians] answered to these things saying that Athens was, as word was, great and prosperous, and flourished with useful gods. Since the Andrians were the poorest in terms of land and two useless/cruel gods of theirs were not leaving the island but were always happy to be here, Poverty and Helplessness (Πενίην τε καὶ Ἀμηχανίην), and since they had gained possession of these gods, the Andrians would not give money. For never would the power of the Athenians be more powerful than their own impotence! These men, then, answering thus and not giving money, were placed under siege.

Just as Themistocles often manipulates the language of his abusers,⁵⁰ the Andrians, from whom Themistocles is trying to extort money, do the same in a reversal of roles.⁵¹ At the same time, though, and in keeping with Themistocles' character and the Athenians' character more generally, we see here again Themistocles' unwillingness to be mocked. As opposed to the previous example in which Themistocles responded with a wittier, more aggressive response, however, Themistocles here responds to the Andrians' best line—"For not ever would the power of the Athenians be more powerful than their own impotence!" (οὐδέκοτε γὰρ <ἄν> τῆς ἐωυτῶν ἀδυναμίας τὴν Ἀθηναίων

⁵⁰ Cf. 8.59, 8.61, and 8.125.

⁵¹ Blösel 2001, 189-190, argues that the episode is anachronistic and refers rather to the imperialistic Athens of Pericles since "no one could possibly have characterized Athens in the autumn of 480 as 'rich'; after all, the Persians had burnt it to the ground just a few weeks earlier." Schellenberg 2009, 140, suggests that Blösel misses the humor in the passage: "What is ignored here is the evident sarcasm of the Andrians' speech."

δύναμιν εἶναι κρέσσω)—not with a witty comeback, but instead by besieging them (ἐπολιορκέοντο, 7.111.3).

Munson notes that 8.111-112 is “affected by contemporary rhetoric and [refers] to fifth-century oppressive Athenian diplomacy toward smaller states” (2001, 204 n. 175), as is supported by the many scholars who have noted parallels to Thucydides’ Melian Dialogue (5.84.1-111).⁵² Themistocles’ treatment of the Andrians upon being bested in the verbal exchange shows again the growing Athenian intolerance of free speech and the crushing power the Athenians exerted in collecting tribute from their imperial subjects.⁵³ Flory discusses how the Andrians in this episode speak of Athens as a “prosperous aggressor,” that is “prosperous” in relation to themselves, who show greater parallels to the proverbial poverty of the Persians and the Greeks. Flory also focuses on the Andrians’ depiction of their gods:

The Massagetae worship only one god, the Scythians two. The Andrians’ pantheon is similarly reduced to only two divinities: poverty and inability. The Andrians’ response also gives an illustration of native wit, for their two gods, like the two Athenian gods Themistocles mentions, also have names that begin with the letters pi and alpha. The competition in gods between Athens and Andros also recalls the competition in gifts between Cambyses and the Ethiopian king, in which luxurious trifles are weighed against a simple bow. The Athenian and Andrian gods, like the Persian and Ethiopian gifts, symbolize the difference in resources and values between the prosperous aggressors and the noble savages. Although the Andrians modestly do not mention their toughness and bravery, we may presume it, since the Athenians never do conquer

⁵² See Aly 1929, 99; Strasburger 1955, 21; Gigante 1956, 136 and n. 1; Stadter 1992, 795-798; Munson 2001, 204 n. 175. Although the ultimate effect of Thucydides’ Melian Dialogue is the same, its style is very different—it is much longer and it lacks the victimizing humor seen in Herodotus’ example. Evans importantly notes how after Andros refused Themistocles’ demands, Karystos, Paros, and likely “other islands that Herodotus left unnamed” also paid (1991, 78; cf. 8.112). Thus, it seems that the other islanders learned from the Andrians’ experience not to resist the Athenian Themistocles, a situation similar to the Aeginetans’ subsequent respect for Spartans after Cleomenes fulfills the threat he makes to Crius in 6.50.

⁵³ Several scholars, including Immerwahr (1966, 200 n. 29, and 322 n. 40) and Raaflaub (1987, 227), have identified this moment in the text as an early demonstration of Athenian imperialism. This idea seems to describe the effect of the aggressive humor in this example well and helps to show how under the surface of the malicious humor, there lurks a dangerous and serious narrative message.

Andros in the *Histories* (8.121). Other islands capitulate rather than share the Andrians' plight. (1987, 116).

Flory rightly emphasizes the idea of prosperous aggressors versus poor victims, as well as the transformation Athens, as seen via Themistocles, has undergone. Also interesting is the parallel he draws to the episode of the Fish Eaters and the Ethiopian king (3.17-25), an episode we will examine in the next chapter. I do think, however, that Flory overstates the reduction of the Andrians' pantheon of gods to two. Rather, the significance of their two-god scheme is specifically in direct answer to Themistocles' aggressive humor that he had brought "Persuasion and Necessity" (Πειθῶ τε καὶ Ἀναγκαίην, 8.111.2) with him. In this way, as I have argued, the Andrians' answer very much resembles Themistocles' earlier manipulation of language (8.125) and likewise offers proof of their *sophie*.

IV. Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, various Greek peoples are the focus of derision and witty retorts. Their degree of *sophie* and speech are linked, though in the case of the Spartans, in ways that we might not suspect. Emphasized also is a lack of unity among the Greeks, especially seen in the anecdote about Salamis, as well as a subtle portrait of the Spartans as dangerously clever and powerful. Then again, perhaps the Scythian sage Anacharsis was right when he said of all the Greeks that none demonstrated *sophie* except for the Spartans, the only Greeks with whom you could hold a sensible conversation (Ἑλληνας πάντας ἀσχόλους εἶναι ἐς πᾶσαν σοφίην πλὴν Λακεδαιμονίων, τούτοισι δὲ εἶναι μούνοισι σωφρόνως δοῦναί τε καὶ δέξασθαι λόγον,

4.77.1). Or maybe, Herodotus is again playing with symmetries, for he tells us that this story about Anacharsis comes from the *Peloponnesians*, and he further describes it as a sort of joke made up by the Greeks themselves (ἀλλ' οὗτος μὲν λόγος ἄλλως πέπαισται ὑπ' αὐτῶν Ἑλλήνων, ὁ δ' ὢν ἀνὴρ ὥσπερ πρότερον εἰρέθη διεφθάρη, 4.77.2). So, we don't know what to think, but perhaps the point is that we are thinking about the validity, importance, and consequences of cultural identities.

The cultural stereotypes exposed in this sort of humor function at a surface level to attract attention and rapidly draw the audience into the narrative, for it probably appealed to Herodotus' fifth-century audiences, which would have been familiar with them. Particularly noteworthy is the way we see that derision and witty retorts emphasize not the barbarians, but rather the Spartans, who are never bested, and the Athenians, who are rarely bested though if they are, in the case of Themistocles and the Andrians, they react forcefully. Thus, when this humor emerges, it moves swiftly as a tool of thought, for Herodotus is able to draw in his audience by means of stereotypes with which they were familiar, Spartan and Athenian particularly, but then he manipulates and plays with these stereotypes to reveal serious messages about power underneath, and at the same time implicitly suggests his authorial *sophie*.

CHAPTER THREE: HUMOROUS DECEPTION

Although scholars have long noted the roles that deception and trickery play in Herodotus' *Histories*,¹ few have addressed the interplay of humor and deception. Just as with derision and witty retorts, we find the same emphasis on *sophie* in Herodotus' accounts that incorporate humorous deception. In these situations, however, the characters' schemes provide proof of their cleverness and their ability to outwit others.

A good starting point for my discussion is an article by Donald Lateiner on deception and delusion in the *Histories*,² which he contextualizes appropriately in the larger corpus of Greek literature, where the "Hellenes admired the lies of shrewd Odysseus, worshipped Hermes, patron of thieves and sharp entrepreneurs, and found admirable the hedgehog deceits and shams of Aristophanes' comic heroes."³ In line with this tradition, Lateiner characterizes Herodotus' own partiality to narratives of deception:

Herodotus prizes artful deception and quick-thinking acts that promote self preservation. Particularly when the otherwise defenseless individual outwits the powerful autocrat, or the group to be victimized outthinks the armed and threatening aggressor, Herodotus recounts in detail the survival of the (mentally) fittest. The phenomenon represents the Odyssean facet of Homeric Herodotus, indeed, but also such glorification of cleverness, moral *and* amoral, permeates not only Greek literature but Greek life, so far as we can reconstruct its reality as well as the response to literary

¹ E.g., Immerwahr 1966, 243-244, where he focuses on deception and trickery in the context of battles and military sieges, and also notes the connection between Sophocles and Herodotus in their focus on human trickery as opposed to a Homeric divine trickery. Lateiner remarks that "[d]eception is thematic in Herodotus when Greek and oriental despots pursue power...Pisistratus, Gelon, the Magus, and especially Darius gain power by deceiving their fellows" (1989, 276 n. 32).

² 1990, 230-246.

³ 1990, 230.

representations...Herodotus clearly admired conspicuous exemplars of human wit and presumed that Hellenic audiences would enjoy hearing tales of both ordinary and prominent men deluded, especially when their motives were ignoble and the upshot produced a form of poetic justice. *Μηχανή, τέχνη, σοφία, δόλος, ἀπάτη, false ἐπιστήμη*, with their related verbs and adjectives, are vocabulary keys to a storehouse of Herodotus's humor and narrative art. Oral informants then and now emphasize the roles of individuals, their self-serving motives, and foibles, mercenary and sexual. In an age of tyrants and despots, the whims and delusions of the mighty and the desperate maneuvers of subjects can be significant historical factors. (1990, 231; Lateiner's italics and my underlining)

As Lateiner shrewdly argues, Herodotus shows a fondness for acts of deception that highlight the wit, skill and cleverness of individuals who perform them. Moreover, he demonstrates the bond between *sophie* and deception in the recurring vocabulary I have already examined and which I discuss further in this chapter. Lateiner suggests that Herodotus' fondness for humorous deception lies in the social and intellectual milieu of his times, in which craftiness was admired and recounted because it provided a proof of mental agility.

As part of her recent essay on humor and danger, Carolyn Dewald discusses tricksters in the *Histories*.⁴ She argues in a similar vein to Lateiner in his 1977 article on laughter and danger and his 1990 article on deceptions and delusions referenced above, and also revisits, with a particular focus on humor's role in the narrative episodes, some of the same episodes she analyzes in her 1993 article on the significance of objects. Unlike Lateiner, however, Dewald discusses how tricksters' actions invite the audience to reflect on the nature of meaning itself:

Tricksters inside the narrative of Herodotus often exploit and thus expose to the reader of the *Histories* the political machinations that lie beneath a seemingly innocuous surface. The best of them act themselves as postmodern commentators about the seductiveness of symbolic structures: Amasis lecturing the Egyptian nobility on the mutability and extreme deceptiveness of appearances—their holy statue has recently been a footbath/vomitorium/pisspot—is also asking them to adopt a Derridean

⁴ 2006, 145-164.

scepticism about meaning itself. Yes, the Egyptians have misread the origins of the golden religious statue, but they are also misreading him, Amasis, if they do not accept the profound mutability of things: he really now is Pharaoh, to the extent that that term means anything at all, just as the erstwhile footbath is really now a statue of divinity. Meaning, Amasis believes, is largely contextual. (2006, 154)

What we ascertain in Dewald's comments on Amasis and his footbath is a didactic element that we touched upon in the previous chapter and will address most explicitly in the next chapter. She is right to emphasize the serious undertones to humorous deception, and we will see the same sorts of messages emerge from other examples in this chapter. The majority of Dewald's subsequent discussion of tricksters focuses on an extreme form of humorous deception that results in death or violence: the Egyptian queen Nitocris and her underground dining chamber (2.100), the Macedonian prince Alexander and the Persian guests (5.20-21), and Hermotimus and Panionius (8.106). The most pertinent of these episodes to Dewald's argument, in my opinion, is the account of Alexander and the Persian guests that I will discuss later in this chapter.

On the other hand, while the Egyptian queen Nitocris and Hermotimus certainly qualify as tricksters because they use deception, the connection between their deception and humor is sometimes unclear, especially in the Hermotimus episode, which Herodotus himself calls "the greatest revenge" (μεγίστη τίσις, 8.105).⁵ What is more, I will argue in the last chapter that the story of the Egyptian queen Nitocris must be read in light of the anecdote concerning the Babylonian queen Nitocris (1.187), who exhibits more obvious humor and who acts as an effective and explicit foil for her

⁵ The inclusion of the Hermotimus episode seems to me to have something to do with the dedication that prefaces a collection of essays in honor of George Forrest (Derow and Parker 2003). As Dewald explicitly notes, "The connection between humour and horror in Herodotus is suggested in the concluding lines of the verse that graces the front of the volume honouring George Forrest in which Hornblower's article [on puns in the episode] appears: 'Put them on, dear reader, / Your best pair of spectacles: / Look what can be done with / Hermotimos' testicles!'" (2006, 164, n. 29). While there may be some humor based on the idea of incongruity in the Hermotimus episode, it seems here that Hornblower's witty humor is based on but does not result from Herodotus' story of revenge.

Egyptian counterpart. At the same time, Dewald omits from her discussion of tricksters an example of humorous deception that she rightly incorporates elsewhere in her essay on humor in the *Histories*: Democedes and Atossa (3.129-138), an episode that I will present later in this chapter.

In his article, “The Manipulation of Signs in Herodotus,” Alexander Hollmann brings out the *sophie* that tricksters demonstrate when they perform acts of deception.⁶ Hollmann argues for a connection between Herodotus’ presentation of the *sophie* of his tricksters and his own *sophie* as narrator in recounting these tales.

The actions of the trickster call forth a certain reaction in the audience, a feeling of wonder, admiration, and amusement. The admiration of the manipulator’s *sophiê* and *tekhnê* is experienced by two kinds of audience, the first being the immediate audience of the trick, the second being the audience of Herodotus’ work. In this way the manipulator’s *tekhnê* and *sophiê* become in a sense Herodotus’, too, and Herodotus as narrator and conveyor of manipulations receives a share of the audience’s admiration. This is not, however, to say that Herodotus himself is a manipulator of signs or a trickster, only that he presents himself as master reader of signs. (2005, 310)

Hollmann reminds us of Herodotus’ authorial persona in 4.36.2, where he laughs at those who map the earth incorrectly and then goes on to demonstrate (ἐγὼ δηλώσω, 4.36.2) his own *sophie* by describing it in detail (4.37-45). On the other hand, Hollmann shies away from analysis of the interplay of humor and deception. Indeed, his mention of “amusement” is the furthest extent to which he recognizes a humorous aspect to some deception, though in his cursory use of the term, we leave with the impression that humorous deception is inconsequential and frivolous.

In this chapter, I analyze the interplay of humor and acts of deception. Herodotus warns the audience to be cautious about reveling in tricks and deceptions that make victims out of others. We never know how a situation will turn out for a

⁶ 2005, 279-327. I would like to thank Professor W. H. Race for supplying me with this article.

character when a trick is involved, and we rely more than ever on Herodotus as *histor* to guide us. The audience can find relief when characters are not fatal victims of humor and in this way can enjoy the trick even more. At the same time, the relief we experience at a non-violent resolution to a trick serves as a warning because violence is sometimes the unexpected result of a trick. In this way, the trick serves a didactic purpose. Furthermore, it is the ethnographic relevance of the examples that helps us understand a deeper level of significance of humorous deception.

In this chapter, I will examine three main types of humorous deception: tricks where the manipulator revels in the deception, tricks where the manipulator's deception is discovered and therefore fails, and tricks that result in death. I will first consider an example of humorous deception that serves as an exemplar of this type of humor: the disguising of Phya as Athena in order to allow Pisistratus to return to power (1.60). Reading back from later episodes in the *Histories* that characterize the Athenians, through their leader Themistocles, as witty, aggressive, and almost unable to be duped (see above, Ch. 2, pp. 63-71), we find here an example that challenges this apparent stereotype. What is more, unlike the later scenes in which a certain stereotype of the Athenians emerges from Themistocles' speeches and without much direct authorial comment, we see a rare and blatant expression of humor from the narrator that characterizes the Athenians and offers the audience instruction on how to interpret the scene.

As part of Herodotus' discourse on Athens in the Croesus *logos*, we meet Pisistratus and learn of his many acts of deception, which enable him to become or return as tyrant three different times (1.59-64). Framing the whole portrait of

Pisistratus, however, are the introductory notes that Herodotus offers about the tyrant's origins. First, Herodotus says that Croesus found the Attic people "oppressed and fractured" (κατεχόμενον τε καὶ διεσπασμένον, 1.59.1) by Pisistratus, son of Hippocrates. We also learn of Pisistratus' inauspicious beginnings—the Spartan sage Chilon gave his father a warning, based upon miraculous boiling pots at Olympia, not to bring home a child-bearing (τεκνοποιόν) wife; if he had a wife, to send her away; and if he happened to have a son, to disown him (ἀπείπασθαι, 1.59.2). Since we know that it is never a good idea to disregard the advice of a sage,⁷ even if he is from a rival city-state, we expect that there will be consequences for Hippocrates' rejection of Chilon's admonition (1.59.3).

Pisistratus' first act of deception comes after he forms a third party of Attic uplanders in addition to Lycurgus' plains peoples and Megacles' coastal peoples, gathers his supporters together, and creates the *appearance* that he is their champion (τῷ λόγῳ τῶν ὑπερακρίων προστάς, 1.59.3). His second act of deception leads directly to his first ascendancy to power. He contrives (μηχανᾶται, 1.59.3) to win a private bodyguard from the Athenians by self-wounding, and is successful. Herodotus tells us that the Athenians were "completely deceived" (ἔξαπατηθεῖς, 1.59.5) and Pisistratus came to rule Athens well after he had started an uprising with the help of this private guard (1.59.6).⁸ It is here that we find the first suggestion that the Athenians are

⁷ For seminal treatments of the wise advisor motif, see Bischoff 1932 and Lattimore 1939.

⁸ Scholars have observed the positive portrait of Pisistratus' tyranny here. Lateiner 1989 notes Pisistratus' unusually good behavior for a despot in 1.59.6 (though he also contrasts 1.61.1—a violation of custom that results in his exile and also brings to mind Otanes' speech in 3.80 on the negative characteristics of monarchs). Nagy 1990, 293, n. 87, remarks here that "from the ostensible standpoint of Croesus the initial importance of Athens is viewed almost exclusively in terms of the achievements of the tyrant Peisistratos (1.59-1.64.3)." N.B. also Kallet 2003, 117-153.

susceptible to deception, and in this way this trick serves as a precursor for Pisistratus' most climactic act of deception of the Athenians: that involving Phya.⁹

Once Pisistratus had been driven out of power by Megacles and Lycurgus, who subsequently began to quarrel amongst themselves again with Lycurgus gaining the upper hand, Megacles offered Pisistratus the opportunity to be restored to power if the former tyrant would marry his daughter. Unlike the previous example of Pisistratus' deception of the Athenians in 1.59.5, however, Herodotus here seems amused at the Athenians for their naïveté in falling for the trick (1.60.3):

ἐνδεξαμένου δὲ τὸν λόγον καὶ ὁμολογήσαντος ἐπὶ τούτοισι Πεισιστράτου μηχανῶνται δὴ ἐπὶ τῇ κατόδῳ πρῆγμα εὐηθέστατον, ὡς ἐγὼ εὐρίσκω, μακρῶ (ἐπεὶ γε ἀπεκρίθη ἐκ παλαιτέρου τοῦ βαρβάρου ἔθνεος τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν ἔδν καὶ δεξιώτερον καὶ εὐηθίης ἡλιθίου ἀπηλλαγμένον μᾶλλον), εἰ καὶ τότε γε οὗτοι ἐν Ἀθηναίοισι τοῖσι πρώτοισι λεγομένοισι εἶναι Ἑλλήνων σοφίην μηχανῶνται τοιάδε.

After Pisistratus had received the message and agreed to the terms, they devised the silliest plan by far for his return, as I find, since the Greek race has long distinguished itself from the barbarian race as both more clever and more free from stupid nonsense, if even then these men devised such things among the Athenians, who are said to be the most intelligent of the Greeks.

The trick involved dressing up a tall and beautiful Greek woman (μέγαθος ἀπὸ τεσσέρων πήχεων ἀπολείπουσα τρεῖς δακτύλους καὶ ἄλλως εὐειδής, 1.60.4) named Phya¹⁰ from the deme of Paeania as Athena, riding along in full armor in a chariot, and

⁹ Connor 1987, 42-47, discusses the richness and complexity of interpretations associated with this scene. He stresses the seriousness of the episode and the layers of archaic tradition, myth, religion, and visual portrayal of the chariot scene and argues this was a social ritual meant to welcome back Pisistratus. Forsdyke 2006, 236-237, supports Connor's interpretation since, she argues, it is more plausible: "...we know that the Athenians of the archaic period did not revile tyranny as did their fifth-century descendants, and therefore had no need to be deceived into accepting Peisistratus. In this narrative, therefore, we see an example of how Herodotus and his oral sources preserve a feature of archaic politics, but reinterpret it to make sense in terms of their own political values and conditions." Flory 1987, 127-128, brings out important parallels between the stories of Pisistratus and Deioces (1.96-97).

¹⁰ Scholars have noted the pun on the name of Phya (= "stature"). See, e.g., Flory 1987, 128, and Immerwahr 1966, 196, who suggests a punning play between Phya and Pisistratus, whose name he translates as "the Persuader of the People" (ibid.). As justification of his translation of the στρατός

striking an appropriately goddess-like pose. The Athenians, who by contrast to the barbarians usually would be expected not to trust their eyes but instead to use their power of reasoning to judge that such a spectacle as this is ludicrous, are duped by this “most simple-minded scheme” (πρῆγμα εὐηθέστατον) of Megacles and Pisistratus. Heralds were sent forward to announce the coming of Athena and the reentrance of Pisistratus (1.60.5):

Ὡ Ἀθηναῖοι, δέκεσθε ἀγαθῶ νόῳ Πεισίστρατον, τὸν αὐτὴ ἡ Ἀθηναίη τιμήσασα ἀνθρώπων μάλιστα κατάγει ἐς τὴν ἑωυτῆς ἀκρόπολιν. οἱ μὲν δὴ ταῦτα διαφοιτέοντες ἔλεγον, αὐτίκα δὲ ἕξ τε τοὺς δήμους φάτις ἀπίκετο ὡς Ἀθηναίη Πεισίστρατον κατάγει, καὶ <οἱ> ἐν τῷ ἄστεϊ πειθόμενοι τὴν γυναῖκα εἶναι αὐτὴν τὴν θεὸν προσεύχοντό τε τὴν ἄνθρωπον καὶ ἐδέκοντο Πεισίστρατον.

“Athenians, receive Pisistratus with a kind attitude, whom Athena herself has honored most of men and brings back to her own acropolis.” They reported these things all about, and immediately word arrived to the demes that Athena was bringing back Pisistratus. Others in the town believed that the woman was the goddess herself and both prayed to the woman and received Pisistratus.

By recounting the details of the trick, Herodotus reenacts it for the audience and thereby offers a sort of evidence for his assertion that the Athenians were particularly foolish to fall for this trick.¹¹ Jonathan Hall suggests that Herodotus’ remarks here serve as a latent indication of Athenocentrism and that the point of the story may be “a reaction to what he perceived as Athenian cultural arrogance.”¹² While Herodotus does not say so explicitly, his comments about the Athenians at this second deception seem targeted at their failure to learn the lessons from Pisistratus’ first trick with which he gained the tyranny. In this way, the unattributed ancient maxim that “[i]t is not

element in “Pisistratus” not as “army” but as “people,” Immerwahr notes that “στρατός originally means ‘people’” (ibid.).

¹¹ Binyamin Shimron (1989, 69): “In 1.60.2 Herodotus laughs at the Athenians—themselves the most intelligent ἔθνος on earth—who were taken in by a silly trick.”

¹² 2002, 203. Cf. the similar verb κερχωρίσθαι in 1.4.4 that is used to describe how the Greeks and barbarians became “separated off” from one another.

characteristic of a wise man to make the same mistake twice” (Τὸ δις ἔξαμαρτεῖν οὐκ ἄνδρὸς σοφοῦ) seems applicable here.

While this passage is especially important for the way it calls attention to the gullibility of the Athenians, it might also be argued that Herodotus here emphasizes the rarity of this sort of foolish moment for the Athenians and therefore makes his own judgment more ambiguous. He does indeed express some doubt about the veracity of the account: εἰ καὶ τότε γε οὔτοι ἐν Ἀθηναίοισι τοῖσι πρώτοισι λεγομένοισι εἶναι Ἑλλήνων σοφίην μηχανῶνται τοιάδε (1.60.3). Furthermore, Tim Rood brings out the significance of ἀπεκρίθη in this passage, which he notes is “the same verb...that cosmologists used for the separation of elements out from an undifferentiated mass. The implication is that Greeks have developed from the same basis as barbarians.”¹³ Thus, in light of Rood’s argument, we see how Herodotus further complicates the certainty of his message by actually bridging the gap between barbarians and Greeks.

Although Pisistratus and Megacles do come up with an effective trick that restores the tyranny to Pisistratus, Herodotus never gives them any credit here. In fact, Herodotus never characterizes Pisistratus, Megacles, or the trick itself as clever, but instead he focuses on the childish credulity (*euethie*) of the Athenians. By contrast, Herodotus does focus on Pisistratus’ *sophie* two other times in the *logos* from 1.59-64. The first is his immediate and correct understanding of the “tunny fish” oracle presented by the seer Amphilytus before the battle of Pallene, which, as we will see, emphasizes Pisistratus’ *sophie* at the same time that it reinforces Herodotus’ comments on the *euethie* of the Athenians (1.62.4).

¹³ 2006, 303.

ἔρριπται δ' ὁ βόλος, τὸ δὲ δίκτυον ἐκπεπέτασται,
θύννοι δ' οἰμήσουσι σεληναίης διὰ νυκτός.

The cast has been made, the net has been spread out,
and the tunny fish will dart through the moonlit night.

In a fascinating article on the significance of the oracle based upon ancient, as well as some modern, evidence about tunny fishing, Brian Lavelle notes that “the metaphorical equivalents and the meaning of the verses are as clear to us as they would have been to any Greek in Herodotos’ audience: the Athenians are the ‘tunnies’; Peisistratos and his forces are the ‘fishermen’; and Amphilytos, of course, is the ‘tunny-watcher’ or ‘hooer’ (θυννοσκόπος) whose instructions to the ‘fishermen’ determine the success or failure of the enterprise.”¹⁴ By his decision to include this oracle, then, we see here how Herodotus might be further emphasizing the *euethie* of the Athenians, as we can understand from Lavelle’s investigations into ancient tunny fishing:

The consensus among ancient authors was that the taking of the tunny was a thoroughly uncomplicated operation for Greek fishermen, entirely in their favour, owing partly to the unusually cooperative behaviour of the rather stupid and spiritless fish and partly to the intellectual superiority of their human hunters. Tunnies habitually swim straight for fishermen's nets without altering course...Philostratos (*Eik.* 1.13 [315k. 11-15]) describes the bounty resulting from tunny-fishing: ‘At a loss as to how they will use so many fishes, the fishermen open their nets and allow some to get away and escape. To such a degree are they enriched by their haul.’...Once encompassed in the net, according to Aelian (*NA* 15.5), the fishes went still in the water, incapable of any action, least of all resistance: the timidity of the fish was renowned... Oppian states that the fishes were impelled into the nets in their numbers either by madness resulting from a pestilential infestation (*Hal.* 2.506-20) or by their own witlessness (3.596-604). They would, at times, jump into the very boats of the fisherman. Their folly, too, was renowned. ...It was because the tunny was so regular in its habits, so stupid and infirm, and thus so easily taken and in such great numbers that Oppian termed the tunny the natural prey of Greek fishermen. In fact, ancient Greek tunny-fishing was so one-sided and unsporting that even the landlubbing Boiotian Plutarch decried it calling it αἰσχρόν.

What provided the ancient fishermen's absolute superiority over the tunny was intelligence and, in particular, the special knowledge of the hooer. Philostratos (*Eik.* 1.13 [= 314k.22-3]) says that the *thynnoskopos* is ‘quick at numbering’ and ‘sharp of eye’, and Aelian (*NA* 15.5) that he is possessed of a ‘certain *sophia*’ which is ἀπόρρητος.

¹⁴ 1991, 321.

Aelian's pronouncement undoubtedly reflects common Greek opinion that the tunny-watcher's exceptional talent derived from a special source, an opinion which many Greeks in Herodotos' time must have shared. In earlier times, the source of the tunny-watcher's skill would surely have been reckoned supernatural or even divine. (1991, 321-322).

Just as the background information about the nature of tunny fish helps us to understand the importance of this metaphor of the Athenians as witless and doomed, so too does a similar reference to tunny fish in *Persae* 424-426, which Lavelle notes (1991, 322). In this instance, it is the Persians who are compared to tunny fish as they are slaughtered at Salamis: “as (they would) tunnies or some other cast of fishes” (tr. Lavelle; ὥστε θύννους ἢ τιν’ ἰχθύων βόλον).

The second and most explicit reference to Pisistratus' *sophie* comes in connection with a trick he came up with to keep the Athenians from regrouping. Herodotus calls it a “most clever plan” (βουλήν...σοφωτάτην) in 1.63.2. Peisistratus instructs his men to tell the fleeing Athenians to go home, and they do. Such simple-minded behavior, in combination with their association with tunny fish—easy to trick and senseless—makes the contrast between the fisherman, Pisistratus, and the prey, the Athenians, even more striking. What is more, it is Pisistratus' deceptions at Pallene that secure his third and most lasting power as tyrant of Athens.

Munson talks about the thematic juxtaposition of the Athenians' *sophie* and *euethie*, which besides these examples above, she demonstrates for Miltiades' deception in 6.136.1 and Themistocles' deception in 8.110.1. In her view, the contradiction in the characterization of the Athenians serves a serious political message:

To the ambivalence of Athens in the ethical sphere corresponds a contradiction at the level of knowledge and intelligence. This factor cuts the image of Athens down to size. We are reminded of the besotted Demos in Aristophanes' *Knights* or, more strikingly, of the assembly that in Thucydides deliberates on the Sicilian expedition—sovereign, vociferous, and ready to go, but not competent or truly in charge...When it comes to

euethie, the people of Athens in the *logos* has much in common with the audiences Herodotus' *logos* addresses, both Athenian and not (cf. 2.45.1). Other than communicating a more abstract moral message, the *histor* takes it on himself to display and to cure through his own, non-Aristagorean brand of speech this shared naïveté about the reality of foreign peoples and lands, the shape of the world, the motives of leaders, and the correct and falsified signs of divine support. Ignorance in these matters affects public decisions and brings about the "evil" of unnecessary wars. (2001, 210-211)

Munson's suggestion of a didactic authorial voice here serves as an appropriate foil to the behavior of the Athenians in the Pisistratus episode. As they have not learned to be cautious and have a second time been duped by the tyrant's deception, it seems that Herodotus as *histor* feels obligated to address explicitly the need for the most intelligent of the Greeks to live up to their stereotype. Moreover, the idea that Herodotus' depiction of the naïveté of the Athenians at several points in his narrative functions as a direct warning to his fifth-century audience shows how serious his remarks in 1.60.2 really are. Thus, under the veneer of Herodotus' remarks here is the serious and stern warning to the Athenians to be vigilant of political deception.¹⁵ In this way, Herodotus might be inviting the Athenians to consider their current political situation.

While Lavelle finds it hard to believe that Herodotus would preserve stories about the Athenians that make them look "ridiculous" and that rather Herodotus reports stories that were purposefully preserved by the Athenians as a way of demonstrating their earlier ancestors were doomed to be "caught out by a cleverer, indeed divinely-inspired 'angler'" (1991, 324), I think his argument slights Herodotus' ability to present information in a meaningful way. Rather, Lateiner's view that "Herodotus' sardonic account of Pisistratus' Athenian political strategies...[is] probably

¹⁵ Cf. Moles 1996.

a relic of the tyrant's own propaganda and policies as well as his opponent's allegations" (1993, 184) seems more plausible.¹⁶

I. Reveling in the Trick

We often find instances of humorous deception where revelation of the trick is the main point. Characters employ this variety of humor when they wish to instruct aggressively, to provide proof of their intellectual superiority, and to victimize others.¹⁷ As we will see in these examples, the narrative draws our attention to the clever actions of the tricksters, so that we tend to disregard any feelings of pity for the victims of the humorous deception. For the next section of this chapter, let us turn to three individuals who use humorous deception as a way of ostentatiously proving their *sophie* and of victimizing others.

¹⁶ I find problems with Lavelle's characterization of Herodotus' *Histories* as "markedly Athenocentric" (1991, 324). This evaluation, in my view, oversimplifies Herodotus' aims and material too much.

¹⁷ In an article on practical jokes that involve the animation of the dead at Irish wakes, I. Harlow helpfully argues the following on narrative responses to practical jokes: "Accounts of practical jokes praise those who violate the values, who are affectionately dubbed 'the local character,' a 'clever fellow,' a 'blaggard,' or a 'fellow up for devilment.'...The narratives encourage people to overlook feelings of victimization and to focus instead on the creative aspect of the prank and the characters who carried it out...the telling of such narratives is linked to the restoration of social relations temporarily disrupted by the victimization and potential alienation which accompany pranks. While the narrated event can be divisive, the narrative event can be unifying...The antics of practical jokers differ from the deceptive activities of tricksters. Tricksters often engage in their deceptive activities for purposes of personal gain and are usually just as happy if their victims never find out what has transpired (Tallman 1974:240). But practical jokers revel in the revelation to the victims that they have been duped; part of the structure of the practical joke as a genre is for the victims to experience the violation of expectations" (Harlow 1997, 156-157). As we will see, Amasis, Democedes, and Atossa perform deception that lies somewhere between a practical joke and a trick.

A. *Amasis, the footbath and the bow* (2.172-173)

Amasis is described as a philhellene (φιλέλλην, 2.178.1) who gives the Greeks the city of Naucratis (2.178), marries the Greek woman Ladice likely for the purpose of a political alliance with Cyrene (2.181), and dedicates several statues in Greece (2.182). Amasis' many ties to Greece are significant because they remind the audience of the growing dependence of Egypt on Greece in face of the Persians, who occupied Egypt shortly after Amasis' death in 525 BC. Herodotus refers to this event shortly thereafter in 3.12, when at Papremis the Athenians tried to help king Inaros overthrow Persian rule. This is an allusion to the events of 450 BC that Herodotus' audience was sure to know.

Amasis' identity in the narrative is also inseparable from that of his predecessor, Apries, through whose person we come to understand Amasis better. Herodotus describes Apries as the "most fortunate" (εὐδαιμονέστατος, 2.161.2) of the earlier kings besides Psammeticus, but who was fated to suffer a bad end (οἱ ἔδεε κακῶς γενέσθαι, 2.161.3).¹⁸ To an alert audience, Amasis' dealings with the fortunate Apries resonate with his later dealings with all-too-fortunate Polycrates. The content of his advice, likewise, seems to reflect his experiences with Apries. What is more, during the course of the narrative we see Amasis emerge as more of a Greek sage, like Solon, with whom he is explicitly linked because of Solon's adoption of his law requiring citizens to account annually for their source of income (2.177.2).¹⁹ This reference reminds us of

¹⁸ Cf. the phrase Herodotus uses in speaking of Gyges at 1.8.2: χρῆν γὰρ Κανδαύλη γενέσθαι κακῶς.

¹⁹ Herodotus here also offers authorial approval of Amasis' law, which he says "[the Athenians] should always have, since it is a blameless law" (τῷ ἐκεῖνοι ἐς αἰεὶ χρέωνται, ἐόντι ἀμώμῳ νόμῳ, 2.177.2).

the Solon–Croesus episode (1.30–33), where of all the peoples Solon visited, Herodotus mentions only Amasis and Croesus (1.30.1).²⁰ Thus, we find explicit proleptic and analeptic references to connections between Amasis and Solon that we will explore later in this section.

Apries’ unsuccessful attack on Cyrene, in which he sends many Egyptians to their certain deaths, makes the Egyptians resentful of him. To quell their rebellion, Apries sends Amasis, and the rebels subsequently interrupt his attempts to negotiate with them and appoint him their leader by putting a helmet on his head (2.162.1). While seemingly insignificant, this moment when Amasis accepts the involvement of the people in his justification for rule reflects the way in which he will later interact with them as their king, and at which moment Amasis learns the effectiveness of physical metaphor in dealing with the Egyptian people.²¹

We are first acquainted with Amasis’ witty and aggressive defiance as he sends a fart back in response to Apries’ request for his return and he couches an ominous threat that he will arrive ‘with some company’ in a sort of menacing humor (παρέσεσθαι γὰρ καὶ αὐτὸς καὶ ἄλλους ἄξειν, 2.162.4).²² In his bodily functions and

²⁰ αὐτῶν δὴ ὧν τούτων καὶ τῆς θεωρίας ἐκδημήσας ὁ Σόλων εἵνεκεν ἐς Αἴγυπτον ἀπίκητο παρὰ Ἀμασιν καὶ δὴ καὶ ἐς Σάρδις παρὰ Κροῖσον.

²¹ Kurke discusses the helmet in relation to the story of Psammeticus (2.151–152), and deduces from the parallel mention of helmets that Amasis’ must be bronze. “Whatever crowning with a helmet signifies within the native Egyptian tradition, to a Greek audience it represents a radical inversion of the symbolic meaning of gold and bronze. The bronze helmet, emblematic in form and substance of the warrior function, is here used as if it were a golden crown, to elevate Amasis to the status of a sovereign” (1999, 91).

²² Plutarch is annoyed by this passage of Herodotus, which he cites as a means of characterizing Herodotus’ *modus operandi*, and I would say his humorous *modus operandi*: “There would be no objection to these omissions [about the words of Leonidas] in another author, but this is Herodotus, who gave us Amasis’ rude retort to Apries (2.162.3), the thief and his donkeys and the wineskin (121), and lots of other such stuff, so that one can hardly think he omits noble deeds and noble sayings from

words, Amasis makes Apries a sort of grotesque Other and in this way solidifies his bond with the rebels.

After Apries mutilates Patarbemis for not bringing back Amasis, the Egyptians flock to Amasis in horror at their king's behavior, and at the same time, Apries collects 30,000 Greek mercenary soldiers from Caria and Ionia for the battle (2.163). Kurke calls this an “*agōn* of the body” between Amasis and Apries, and points out that in the case of Amasis, he “chooses the bodily code of the message in this narrative...[and] valorizes the grotesque body and uses it to destabilize the existing hierarchy, challenging not his own claim to the throne, but that of the reigning pharaoh Apries.”²³ Lloyd suggests that we should be cautious about accepting the reason for Apries' defeat, which “could well have been inspired by Gk. national pride as a face-saving explanation for the discomfiture of Carian and Ionian mercenaries.”²⁴

Thus, no matter how historically accurate Herodotus' account is here, it is interesting for his treatment of a mixed-up and topsy-turvy sort of internal warfare that challenges who is really Egyptian and at the same time makes it clear that these ethnic boundaries are blurred. As Herodotus tells us, “Those around Apries went against the Egyptians, and those around Amasis went against the strangers” (καὶ οἱ τε περὶ τὸν Ἀπρίην ἐπὶ τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους ἦσαν καὶ οἱ περὶ τὸν Ἄμασιν ἐπὶ τοὺς ξείνους, 2.163.2).

carelessness and oversight: to certain people he is neither friendly nor fair” (*de Malig.* 866c-d; tr. A. J. Bowen, 1992, 67).

²³ 1999, 92.

²⁴ 1988, 202.

Amasis later experiences another sort of warfare with the Egyptian people in which he, like Apries earlier, is recognized as an Other. Suddenly the Egyptians find Amasis' kindly treatment of Apries in his palace intolerable. While this fact alone may not be striking, their subsequent treatment of Apries is, once Amasis releases him into their custody, for they strangle and bury him in his paternal tomb (οἱ δέ μιν ἀπέπνιξαν καὶ ἔπειτα ἔθαψαν ἐν τῆσι πατρωίησι ταφῆσι, 2.169.3). True, the circumstances are quite different because Apries sent Egyptians to their deaths at Cyrene (2.161.4) and mutilated the innocent and prominent Egyptian Patarbemis (2.162.5-6). But the vengeance with which the people act is still striking. In this way, we see a divide between the Egyptian people's vengeance and Amasis' tolerance that underscores how much of an Other Amasis still is.

It is not until Amasis develops a clever plan to show the Egyptians that he really has transformed into their leader that they seem to change their opinion of him. In a way, Amasis' action with the footbath, as we will see, is a physical demonstration that he embodies the *sophie* that is a mark of a true Egyptian king. We have only to think of Herodotus' own declaration that the Egyptians are the "most learned" (λογιώτατοί, 2.77.1) people he has ever encountered to understand the identifying quality that their intelligence presents (2.172.2-5):

τὰ μὲν δὴ πρῶτα κατῶνοντο τὸν Ἄμασιν Αἰγύπτιοι καὶ ἐν οὐδεμιῇ μοίρῃ μεγάλη ἦγον, ἅτε δὴ δημότην τὸ πρὶν ἐόντα καὶ οἰκίης οὐκ ἐπιφανέος· μετὰ δὲ σοφίῃ αὐτοῦς ὁ Ἄμασις, οὐκ ἀγνωμοσύνη προσηγάγετο. ἦν οἱ ἄλλα τε ἀγαθὰ μυρία, ἐν δὲ καὶ ποδανιπτῆρ χρύσεος, ἐν τῷ αὐτὸς τε ὁ Ἄμασις καὶ οἱ δαιτυμόνες οἱ πάντες τοὺς πόδας ἐκάστοτε ἐναπενίζοντο· τοῦτον κατ' ὧν κόψας ἄγαλμα δαίμονος ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἐποίησατο καὶ ἴδρυσε τῆς πόλιος ὄκου ἦν ἐπιτηδεότατον· οἱ δὲ Αἰγύπτιοι φοιτῶντες πρὸς τῷγαλμα ἐσέβοντο μεγάλως· μαθὼν δὲ ὁ Ἄμασις τὸ ἐκ τῶν ἀστῶν ποιούμενον, συγκαλέσας Αἰγυπτίους ἐξέφηνε φὰς ἐκ τοῦ ποδανιπτῆρος τῷγαλμα γεγονέναι, ἐς τὸν πρότερον μὲν τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους ἐνεμέειν τε καὶ ἐνουρέειν καὶ πόδας ἐναπονίζεσθαι, τότε δὲ μεγάλως σέβεσθαι. ἤδη ὧν ἔφη λέγων ὁμοίως αὐτὸς τῷ ποδανιπτῆρι πεπρηγέναι· εἰ γὰρ πρότερον εἶναι δημότης, ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ παρεόντι εἶναι αὐτῶν βασιλεύς· καὶ τιμᾶν τε καὶ

προμηθέσθαι ἑωυτὸν ἐκέλευε. τοιοῦτω μὲν τρόπῳ προσηγάγετο τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους ὥστε δικαιοῦν δουλεύειν.

At first the Egyptians abused Amasis and held him in no great respect, since he was previously a commoner and was from an undistinguished family. Afterwards Amasis won them over to his side with *cleverness*, not with *thoughtlessness*. He had countless riches, and among these was a golden footpan, in which Amasis himself and all the invited guests washed their feet on each occasion. He then cut this up into pieces and made a statue of a divinity out of it and he set it up where it was most suitable in the city. The Egyptians visited the statue frequently and worshipped it greatly. After Amasis learned what the townspeople were doing, he called the Egyptians together and revealed [the matter] saying that the statue had been made from the footpan, into which earlier the Egyptians vomited and urinated and washed their feet, but which then they were greatly worshipping. He said that he was made like the footpan, for if earlier he was a commoner, at the present he was their king. And he bid them to both honor and show respect to him. In such a way he won over the Egyptians to think it right they should serve him.

As the narrative suggests, Amasis had two options available to him to make his subjects respect him: he could use “thoughtlessness” (ἀγνωμοσύνη)²⁵ or he could use his “cleverness” (σοφίη). The latter option, which he adopts, demonstrates well his tendency and willingness to interact with the people in a way that Apries did not, and at the same time recalls the physical demonstration by which the Egyptian rebels appointed him their king. We also see that Amasis reads the Egyptian people well in arranging this trick. Amasis uses his *sophie* to stage his humorous deception, which we might call a purposeful practical joke, and in this way is able to “win over” (προσηγάγετο) his Egyptian subjects. In addition, the broad theme of the unreliability of appearances resurfaces. As Carolyn Dewald puts it, “Our wonderful golden religious statue too may turn out to have a most peculiar past, and we are better readers and actors in the present, more like Herodotus’ own trickster figures ourselves, if we

²⁵ Kurke translates ἀγνωμοσύνη as “stubbornness,” and notes how it is “a rare word in Herodotus, [and] always designates an action (regarded by the actors themselves as noble) from a hostile perspective that condemns it as ‘foolhardiness’ or ‘stubbornness’ (cf. Hdt. 4.93, 5.83.1, 6.10, 7.9b1, 9.3.1, 9.4)” (1999, 94, n. 62).” She argues further that here the term “is a very negative way of describing the aristocratic cult of sameness and consistency” (ibid.). For her analysis of this episode in terms of the language of metals, see Kurke 1999, 92-94.

recognise this—but we have to accept the lived realities of the present as well” (2006, 155-156).

When the people have worshipped the golden statue, they prove that their respect for religious *nomoi* is greater than their consideration for the golden statue’s origin: for once the base object has been transformed into a religious object, its past is no longer important, only its present form and reality. In accordance with a pattern we have seen, the underlying message of this anecdote at the end of the long Egyptian *logos* seems to invite readers to reflect on the relevance of Egypt’s past to her present greatness. It invites the audience to consider Egypt’s changed position from its ancient past to its present weakened state, as well as Athens’ recent dealings with the country.

Yet, while the narrative tells us that the Egyptians came to accept Amasis after his demonstration with the footbath-turned-statue, we immediately meet further proof that the Egyptian people do not fully accept him as king because he gets too close to them and thereby is an “other” with respect to their notion of a king. While Amasis has perhaps proven his *sophie* with the footbath, it is now his behavior that causes some of his subjects to disapprove of him: after business is over, he drinks, jokes with his drinking buddies, is frivolous, and plays around (ἔπινέ τε καὶ κατέσκωπτε τοὺς συμπότας καὶ ἦν μάταιός τε καὶ παιγνιήμων, 2.173.1).²⁶ When his Egyptian subjects tell him that he is not behaving like a king (νῦν δὲ ποιεῖς οὐδαμῶς βασιλικά, 2.173.2), he

²⁶ Herodotus emphasizes Amasis’ unusual behavior as a king in 2.174 by making note of his similar behavior to an ordinary citizen (2.174.1): φιλοπότης ἦν καὶ φιλοσκώμων καὶ οὐδαμῶς κατεσπουδασμένος ἀνήρ. In addition, we learn that he played the role of thief when he ran out of drink and supplies, and those oracles that had convicted him of theft, he honored once king; those which let him off he disregarded (2.174.2). Thus, we see a curious blend of trickster turned just ruler, where Amasis condemns his former self, perhaps his more “Egyptian” self, in favor of his Greek-loving new and just persona.

presents them with another object, a bow, though this time not as a physical object, but as a metaphor (2.173.3-4):

Τὰ τόξα οἱ ἐκτιμένοι, ἔπεαν μὲν δέωνται χρᾶσθαι, ἐντανύουσι, ἔπεαν δὲ χρήσωνται, ἐκλύουσι. εἰ γὰρ δὴ τὸν πάντα χρόνον ἐντεταμένα εἴη, ἐκραγείη ἄν, ὥστε ἐς τὸ δέον οὐκ ἂν ἔχοιεν αὐτοῖσι χρᾶσθαι. οὕτω δὲ καὶ ἀνθρώπου κατάστασις· εἰ ἐθέλοι κατεσπουδάσθαι αἰεὶ μηδὲ ἐς παιγνίην τὸ μέρος ἐωυτὸν ἀνιέναι, λάθοι ἂν ἦτοι μανεῖς ἢ ὅ γε ἀπόπληκτος γενόμενος. τὰ ἐγὼ ἐπιστάμενος μέρος ἐκατέρω νέμω.

Those who have bows string them whenever they need to use them, and unstring them whenever have used them. For if they were strung all the time, they would break, so that they would not be able to use them when there was need. This is also the condition of man. If he should wish always to be serious and not allow himself a measure of playfulness, he would, without noticing, become mad or crippled. Since I know these things, I grant a measure to each of the two [pursuits] (τὰ ἐγὼ ἐπιστάμενος μέρος ἐκατέρω νέμω).

Amasis becomes more cerebral as the narrative moves along, so that by the time of his dealings with Polycrates (3.40), he no longer needs props, physical or metaphorical, but speaks to the Samian tyrant like a Greek sage.²⁷ With the “bow,” we see a transition from his victimization/didacticism with the footbath to a more purely didactic message that justifies his own fondness of joking and play. Moreover, we see a shift away from the vulgar and ribald humor that he demonstrates in his dealings with Apries (via Patarbemis) and the Egyptian people.

²⁷ Indeed, How and Wells (1912/1928) note how this saying is found as a proverb in Hor. *Odes* ii.10.19 (Neque semper arcum tendit Apollo), and how “Greek fancy wove a web of legends round Amasis, as round Croesus and many other historical persons of the sixth century...[though Herodotus] as usual avoids the exaggerations of later writers, e.g. that Amasis was a great magician.” I find Herodotus’ character Amasis similar to Herodotus in varieties of humor he uses. In support of my assertion, I find striking Phaedrus’ fable (3.14) about an Athenian man who witnessed Aesop himself in a crowd of boys playing with nuts. The Athenian man laughed at Aesop as if he were crazy (quasi delirum risit), and when Aesop, “who was one to ridicule others than to be ridiculed” (derisor potius quam deridendus), noticed this, he put an unstrung bow (arcum retensum) in the middle of the street and asked the Athenian, whom Aesop mockingly called a “wise man” (sapiens), to decipher his message. When the Athenian could not, Aesop told him that if his bow was always strung, it would eventually break, but if it stayed unstrung, it would be ready to use whenever he needed it. Thus, as a character in this fable, Aesop demonstrates the importance of playful humor. This fable, to me, suggests Herodotus’ own debt to the low Aesopic tradition that Leslie Kurke (2006) has recently discussed, for Phaedrus was likely working from traditions of Aesop that Herodotus also knew and perhaps is incorporating here through his Egyptian character Amasis. Cf. Ch. 2, p. 65, n. 41.

We might think of Amasis' anecdote with the bow as a sort of global message on the importance of humor that informs us about the way Herodotus uses it at times in his narrative. The bow offers an addendum to the wisdom of Solon's advice, which focuses on the human condition at the end of life, and instead offers us insight into the importance of a playful kind humor to the human condition (ἀνθρώπου κατάστασις) during life. As we can see from Amasis' wisdom here, humor is not frivolous, but is a necessary part of avoiding a subtle shift to madness and paralysis (λάθοι ἄν ἦτοι μανεῖς ἢ ὅ γε ἀπόπληκτος γενόμενος). While usually serious, our narrator, too, presents a measure of playful humor (τὰ ἐγὼ ἐπιστάμενος μέρος ἑκατέρω νέμω).²⁸

While the narrative seems to emphasize the consistency of Amasis' behavior by referring to his youth when he was fond of drinking, jokes and being silly (φιλοπότης ἦν καὶ φιλοσκώμμων καὶ οὐδαμῶς κατεσπουδασμένος ἀνὴρ, 2.174.1), it also offers new information about his youthful thefts and occasional convictions by oracles (2.174.1). While Apries had been cruel and heavy-handed with the Egyptian people, however, Amasis consistently displays *sophie* in his actions,²⁹ or here in defense of his actions, and in this way he avoids violence.

Even in his death, moreover, we find that Amasis provides proof of his *sophie*, for he outwits the mad Cambyses, who has his men attempt to exhume, desecrate and

²⁸ E.g., in the proem (1.1.-5) and the story of Rhampsinitus' treasury (2.121). See Halliwell 2008, 21, on this Amasis' bow metaphor as an example of "playful laughter" (versus what he calls "consequential" laughter, for which see Ch. 2, p. 46 n. 1).

²⁹ He is bested by the Halicarnassian Phanes (καὶ γνώμην ἱκανὸς καὶ τὰ πολέμια ἄλκιμος, 3.4.1), who finds some fault with Amasis and wants to escape Egypt in order to help Cambyses. We learn from the narrative that he accomplishes his escape because he outwits the trickster Amasis (σοφίη γὰρ μιν περιῆλθε ὁ Φάνης, 3.4.2). Cf. the *sophie* of Phanes' fellow Halicarnassian Artemisia, who ensures her escape by her ramming trick at the battle of Salamis (8.87-88), and the thief in the story of Rhampsinitus' treasury, who gets the guards of his brother's corpse drunk and thereby escapes with the corpse (2.121).

finally burn Amasis' corpse (3.16.1-4).³⁰ According to the Egyptians, however, Amasis had learned his fate from an oracle and had had his son consequently hide his corpse. In this way, Amasis posthumously dupes the mad king (3.16.4-7) and thereby shows humor to be a way of gaining comeuppance on imperialists, not unlike the Babylonian Nitocris (1.187).

In the stories of 2.172-174, Alan Lloyd says that Amasis "is presented as a mixture of the *sophos*, the *polymētis*, a reformed thief and playboy" (1988, 211). He argues that the footbath episode is likely of Greek origin and the other two stories are likely Hellenized versions of Egyptian tales (*ibid.*).³¹ Thus in the figure of Amasis, we meet a complicated and humorous trickster who sometimes exemplifies an Egyptian *sophie* and who at other times seems to lack it, and who occasionally exhibits a Greek-like 'wise-man' persona, as we find in his bow metaphor and in his Solonian advice to Polycrates.

B. Democedes and Atossa (3.129-138)

We meet Democedes in the course of the tale of the Persian Oroetes and Samian tyrant Polycrates. He is part of Polycrates' large entourage as he sails to pick up eight chests of rocks that he thinks, based upon his fellow Samian Maeandrius' report (3.123),

³⁰ Cf. the episodes about the Babylonian queen Nitocris (1.187) and the builder in the story of Rhampsinitus' treasury (2.121), both of which we will discuss in our final chapter on memorializing humor.

³¹ Lloyd also notes Herodotus' skillful variation in his presentation of these stories: "in the first the lesson is given in indirect speech; in the second a dialogue in direct speech is used; in the third a narrative technique is employed" (*ibid.*). Moreover, Amasis' fame for his "wisdom, cunning and moral perception" is seen in later texts, such as D.S., I, 95; Plu., *De Virtutibus Mulierum* 25 (*Mor* 261C ff.); Polyaeus, *Strat* VII, 4 (*ibid.*).

are full of gold.³² What is striking from Democedes' initial introduction is that it is not necessary, save for the fact that Herodotus seems to invite comparison between the persons and events involved. For of the large company with Polycrates, Democedes is the only individual identified, and in this way Herodotus signals the skillful Greek doctor's importance. Thus, when Darius calls a meeting of the Persians in order to find someone who has the *sophie*, instead of *bie*, to overcome Oroetes (3.127.2),³³ he suggests the strategy that we will see soon thereafter in the story of Democedes. The series of letters of the Persian volunteer Bagaesus shows (3.128), indeed, how *sophie* is more powerful than *bie*, a leitmotif we will also see in the case of Democedes.

Throughout his account, Democedes consistently demonstrates a *sophie* that increases his fame and fortune as a doctor. His rise is rapid, too, as the narrative emphasizes by the quick succession of accomplishments it outlines before presenting his greatest accomplishment—his return to Greece, which, as we will see at the end of the anecdote, is capped by Democedes' Odyssean reveling in the success of his deceptive plan.

After leaving Croton in South Italy because his father had a bad temper (πατρι...ὄργην χαλεπῶ, 3.131.1), Democedes surpassed the skills of all the Aeginetan doctors, even without medical equipment, in his first year (πρώτῳ ἔτει ὑπερέβαλετο τοὺς ἄλλους ἰητρούς). In his second year (δευτέρῳ ἔτει) the islanders named him their state doctor at a rate of one talent per year, and the Athenians hired him in his third year (τρίτῳ...ἔτει) for 100 minas a year. Polycrates, tyrant of Samos, hired him in his

³² Oroetes only spreads a thin layer of gold on top of the rocks to create the appearance that all the chests are full of gold (3.123).

³³ For further discussion of this episode, see Hollmann 2005, 294-295.

fourth year (τετάρτω...ἕτει) for two talents a year and it was “especially because of him that Crotoniate doctors have a good reputation” (ἀπὸ τούτου τοῦ ἀνδρὸς οὐκ ἦκιστα Κροτωνιῆται ἰητροὶ εὐδοκίμησαν, 3.131.2).³⁴ Democedes’ greatest fame and wealth, however, come as a result of his dealings with the Persian king. Because of the riches he earned from Darius, Democedes “had the grandest house” (οἶκόν τε μέγιστον εἶχε), became a close confidant of the king (ὁμοτράπεζος βασιλείῃ ἐγεγόνεε) and had “everything except for a passage back to Greece” (πλήν τε ἐνὸς τοῦ ἐς Ἑλλήνας ἀπιέναι πάντα τᾶλλά οἱ παρῆν, 3.132.1). In this way, we find that Democedes embodies the Greek love of freedom and homeland, so that while he seems to have everything, in his own mind he has nothing and is eager to give it up as soon as the opportunity with Atossa presents itself.

The Democedes episode includes several instances of humorous deception that operate both to characterize the ethnic identities of individuals and to highlight the contest between ethnic groups. The first comes when Democedes, in chains and mixed in amongst the slaves of Oroetes, adamantly denies he is a doctor, because “he feared he would be deprived entirely of Hellas” (ἀρρωδέων μὴ ἐωυτὸν ἐκφήνας τὸ παράπαν τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἧ ἀπεστερημένος, 3.130.1). While it is obvious to Darius that Democedes is a doctor, there is a certain humor that results when the king orders the whips and spikes to be brought out (ἐκέλευσε μάστιγὰς τε καὶ κέντρα παραφέρειν ἐς τὸ μέσον), and

³⁴ How and Wells (1912/1928) observe here that “[a]part from the humour of the rapid increase in a fashionable physician’s fees, the story is interesting as one of the earliest accounts of state endowments for medical science,” and what is more, “‘Healthier than Croton’ was a Greek proverb, P. G. ii. 778.”

suddenly Democedes “reveals” (ἐκφαίνει, 3.130.2) that, yes, he knows about medicine, but he is not quite a doctor!³⁵

After Democedes has cured Darius’ sickness by gentle Greek techniques (Ἑλληνικοῖσι ἰήμασι χρεώμενος, 3.130.3),³⁶ he seems to cement his favorable relationship with the king through his wit (3.130.4):

δωρέεται δὴ μιν μετὰ ταῦτα ὁ Δαρεῖος πεδέων χρυσέων δύο ζεύγεσι· ὁ δὲ μιν ἐπείρετο εἶ οἱ διπλήσιον τὸ κακὸν ἐπίτηδες νέμει, ὅτι μιν ὑγίεια ἐποίησε. ἤσθεις δὲ τῷ ἔπει ὁ Δαρεῖος ἀποπέμπει μιν παρὰ τὰς ἑωυτοῦ γυναῖκας.

After this, Darius gave him two pairs of golden shackles as a gift. Democedes asked him if he purposefully bestows a double evil because he made him healthy! Darius was pleased with this saying and sent him to the royal wives.

Not only does Democedes single-handedly trump the established superiority of the Egyptian doctors over all others through his gentle healing treatment of Darius’ sprained ankle, but he also solidifies Greek *sophie* by his witty remark about the golden shackles.³⁷ We find a direct link between Democedes’ *sophie* in making an incongruous and effective joke, and his acquisition of riches that are so great, as Herodotus tells us, that a house slave named Sciton grew wealthy from the staters that fell from the cups the royal wives had dipped into chests full of gold (3.130.5). The narrative presentation of humor, best explained by incongruity theory and the rhetorical use of this telling

³⁵ Thomas 2000, 41, notes a pun on *techne* in this passage: “The Persian king Darius calls Democedes to his presence, in the hope that he can cure Darius’ foot, and the question he asks Democedes is ‘Do you know the art?’ – τὴν τέχνην εἰ ἐπίσταίτο (III 130.1). Democedes at first evades the matter, but he seems to Darius to be ‘behaving artfully’ – τεχνάζειν, a wonderful pun on *techne* – and Darius produces the torturing equipment (130.2).”

³⁶ Not like those Egyptian doctors, whom Darius had kept in tow previously since they had the best reputations (Αἰγυπτίων τοὺς δοκέοντας εἶναι πρώτους τὴν ἰητρικήν, 3.129.2), but who, when they used wrenching force (στρεβλοῦντες καὶ βιώμενοι, 3.129.2), only made the king’s foot worse.

³⁷ Herodotus reminds us again of the superiority of Greek doctors over Egyptian doctors when he recalls how Democedes saved some Egyptian doctors, who had been bested by a Greek doctor, from being impaled (3.132.2). Cf. also 3.22.2, which I discuss further in the context of the Persian gifts to the Ethiopian king on pp. 106-108.

detail, helps to memorialize the episode and particularly highlights Democedes' quick wit.

Herodotus introduces the next *apodexis* of Democedes' *sophie* in his scheme to win return to Greece. Since Herodotus in his authorial voice has told us that Democedes wants to return to Greece (3.130.1; see above) and since he has already provided us with a glimpse of the doctor's *sophie* through his winning wit (3.130.3; see above), the narrative establishes our expectation for a clever trick from Democedes. The turning point for Democedes in this anecdote comes when he cures a growth on Atossa's breast in exchange for a favor that, as he tells her, will not cause her any shame (αἰσχύνην, 3.133.2). Instead of spelling out the contents of the favor, however, the narrative immediately shifts to the bedroom scene of Darius and Atossa, and we witness the enactment of the scheme that Democedes has apparently planned.³⁸

The combination of the bedroom setting and Atossa's remarks to Darius suggest a sort of sexual humor in which the queen manipulates the ideas of sexual and imperial conquest, for Darius is young and vigorous and needs to prove himself.³⁹ When Darius answers briefly in agreement, but says he is going to attack Scythia first, we see Atossa play the role of the clever queen, who offers Herodotus' audience a humorous explanation as to why Darius should invade Greece first (3.134.5):

“Ὅρα νυν, ἐπὶ Σκύθας μὲν τὴν πρώτην ἰέναί ἔασον· οὗτοι γάρ, ἐπεὰν σὺ βούλῃ, ἔσονταί τοι· σὺ δέ μοι ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα στρατεύεσθαι. ἐπιθυμέω γὰρ λόγῳ πυνθανομένη Λακαίνας τέ μοι γενέσθαι θεραπαίνας καὶ Ἀργείας καὶ Ἀττικὰς καὶ Κορινθίας. ἔχεις δὲ

³⁸ While the narrative tells us that Atossa gave a speech that she had been “taught by Democedes” (διδασθεῖσα ὑπὸ τοῦ Δημοκίδεος, 3.134.1), we get the strong impression that Darius does not react according to plan so that Atossa must then improvise.

³⁹ For more on the connection between sexual and imperial desire, see Benardete 1969, 137-138, Hartog 1988, 330, and Munson 2001, 65 n. 67.

ἄνδρα ἐπιτηδεότατον ἀνδρῶν πάντων δέξαι τε ἕκαστα τῆς Ἑλλάδος καὶ κατηγήσασθαι, τοῦτον ὅς σευ τὸν πόδα ἐξήσατο.

Look now, forget about going to Scythia first. For these people will be there for you whenever you wish. I think you should march against Greece, for I've heard stories and I have my heart set on getting Laconian and Argive and Attic and Corinthian handmaids. You have the most suitable man of all to teach all the details about Greece and to act as your guide, this man who made your foot all better.

Atossa here demonstrates her *sophie* by rescuing Democedes' plan, which, though we do not know for sure, seems connected to Atossa's initial reasons that Darius should attack Greece. We sense that Darius' announcement of attacking Scythia first is unexpected. Atossa's outburst about her desire to acquire Greek handmaids is equally unexpected and humorous especially because of its spontaneity and incongruity.⁴⁰ Binyamin Shimron brings out the significance of Atossa's seemingly insignificant desire here and at the same time suggests some reasons for the humorous tone of the scene:

One may smile at the story of this curtain lecture, but if anybody is derided it is Darius, who in Herodotus' opinion was certainly a great man. It is certainly a legitimate desire of a Persian queen—in a story as in reality—to get Spartan chambermaids, and the bedroom—in the story—is the appropriate place to ask for them; it is less certain that this is an αἰτία or a πρόφασις for the greatest king on earth to initiate what he himself must have considered a major undertaking and what the readers knew to have been the climax of an age-long conflict and the greatest peril of Greece. It can be read either as a more or less innocent scoff at Darius or as a reminder, in a witty manner, that great and decisive events may—at least partly—originate from small and even frivolous beginnings; perhaps it hints that even as the greatest war of antiquity was fought because of a woman so the greatest war of the times had partly similar reasons. The difference between the rape of Helen and Atossa's wishes is that between a heroine and a contemporary queen, but the heroine too was frivolous in Herodotus' eyes, as the quip on "raped" women shows. However, Atossa is not ridiculed and the Persian νόμος of expansion as well as Darius' political needs (repeated later by Xerxes) are put into her mouth as if he would not know them himself. (1989, 65)

⁴⁰ Immerwahr, 1956, 252-253, notes the humor here and compares it to that which we have already noted in 3.1 as well as in the proem, which I will discuss in the final chapter on memorialization: "The importance of personal motivation accounts for the mention of women causing wars, as in the proem, for Cambyses' Egyptian campaign (3.1 ff.), and in the Darius-Atossa scene (3.134 ff.). In each case the motivation is absurd, and the cause a ludicrous one."

Shimron focuses on the ridiculous nature of Atossa's *aitie*—she desires to have Greek handmaidens—and also reminds us of the importance of narrative details.⁴¹ Because Atossa plays out Democedes' trick, she represents Democedes' *sophie* in this scene so that we see a contrast between the *sophie* of the Greek Democedes and the *euethie* of Persian Darius.⁴² At the same time, Atossa complicates the dichotomy because she embodies both Greek and Persian *sophie* by her effective use of Democedes' trick and by her own clever argument that ultimately results in Darius' decision to send a reconnaissance group to Greece.⁴³ Alongside this humorous deception, however, we find one of the most pivotal and serious moments in the whole *Histories*. As Immerwahr eloquently says, “The Democedes story is of fundamental importance in connection with the Persian Wars, for without it the idea of total conquest of Greece (as opposed to a punitive expedition against Athens and Eretria only) hangs in the air and has no ἀρχή.”⁴⁴

After the many turns of the long anecdote, we come to the final scene in which the trickster Democedes revels in his trick openly in a way that recalls Odysseus (*Od.* 9.502-505) and Cleomenes in his farewell quip to Crius (6.50, discussed above in Ch. 2, pp. 58-61). Here, however, it is Democedes who is on land back at Croton and the Persians who are setting out to sea as he shouts out to them, now bereft of their guide

⁴¹ Thomas 2000, 108, n. 10, suggests that the handmaidens offer further evidence of Persian poverty at the time before their invasion of Greece.

⁴² Though we might recall a clever trick that Darius used to win the kingship, we remember that it was not Darius who planned the actual trick, but his groom Oebares (3.85-87), whom he commemorates by name (along with that of his horse) in an inscription that accompanies a statue of a man on a horse (3.88.3).

⁴³ Cf. Immerwahr 1956, 261, Waters 1966, 162-163, and Shimron 1989, 65.

⁴⁴ 1956, 271 n. 60.

and their merchant ship, since the Crotonians were unwilling to give either up to the Persians (3.137.5):

τοσόνδε μέντοι ἐνετείλατό σφι Δημοκίδης ἀναγομένοισι, κελύων εἰπεῖν σφεας Δαρείῳ ὅτι ἄρμονται τὴν Μίλωνος θυγατέρα Δημοκίδης γυναῖκα. τοῦ γὰρ δὴ παλαιστέω Μίλωνος ἦν οὖνομα πολλὸν παρὰ βασιλείῃ. κατὰ δὲ τοῦτό μοι δοκέει σπεῦσαι τὸν γάμον τοῦτον τελέσας χρήματα μεγάλα Δημοκίδης, ἵνα φανῆ πρὸς Δαρείου ἔων καὶ ἐν τῇ ἑωυτοῦ δόκιμος.

Democedes, however, commanded such great things to them as they were putting out to sea, bidding them to tell Darius that Democedes had married the daughter of Milo. For indeed the name of Milo the wrestler was well known to the Persian king. I think the reason Democedes was eager for this marriage and paid a lot of money for it was in order to show to Darius that he was also in his own country an esteemed person.

While Herodotus reports indirectly the contents of Democedes' final line, we rely on his explanation to comprehend the full importance of Democedes' mention of Milo's daughter. Not only do we learn that Milo's name was well known to the Persian king, but also that Democedes paid a lot of money to secure this marriage to the Crotonian woman. Democedes' final revelation, then, helps to bring out an underlying serious message of the entire episode. While Democedes had all the material wealth thanks directly to the Persian king, he both shunned and begrudged his enslavement, which included the Persian king's appropriation of his person and reputation for his own court. Thus, we understand better Herodotus' own comments that Democedes uttered his remark to show the king that he was important in his own country as well (ἵνα φανῆ πρὸς Δαρείου ἔων καὶ ἐν τῇ ἑωυτοῦ δόκιμος). At the same time, Democedes revels in his elaborate deception with his exclamation and declares his freedom from and moral victory over Persia.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ We see the idea of freedom versus slavery emphasized again in the immediate aftermath of this scene. As we learn from the narrative, the Persian crew, on their journey home, is enslaved at Iapygia after they shipwreck there. They are then saved by Gillus, a man from Tarentum, who, like Democedes, seeks a return home to South Italy (3.138.1-4).

II. Tricks Uncovered

While in the last section we met with tricksters who reveled in the humor of their acts of deception, in this section we will find that the deceptions of tricksters are uncovered by individuals who display a greater degree of *sophie* than those who plot the tricks. Here the narrative invites the audience to enjoy the failed attempts at deception through the *sophie* of individuals who are more clever than those who plan deception. In this way, the characters who uncover tricks exhibit a kind of one-upmanship over the trickster that reinforces an image of the trickster's *euethie*. The most prominent example of this type of anecdote, and one of the richest in all the *Histories*, is the episode involving the Fish Eaters and the Ethiopian king.

The Fish Eaters and the Ethiopian king (3.17-25)

The Fish Eaters, a tribe of Egyptians from Elephantine, make their sole appearance in the *Histories* as representatives of Cambyses and the Persians at the court of the Ethiopian king. Herodotus offers little information about the customs or identity of the Fish Eaters,⁴⁶ whom Cambyses sends to spy on the Ethiopians, their so-called Table of the Sun, and the current state of Ethiopian affairs. Cambyses decides to use the Fish Eaters instead of his own men, as Herodotus tells us, because they know the Ethiopian language (τῶν ἰχθυοφάγων ἀνδρῶν τοὺς ἐπισταμένους τὴν Αἰθιοπίδα γλῶσσαν, 3.19.1).⁴⁷ The implication, then, is that these Fish Eaters will be able to gather

⁴⁶ Except that they are tall, handsome, and have customs that are peculiar (3.20), the only one of which Herodotus mentions being that they choose the tallest among them as their leaders.

⁴⁷ For more on interpreters in the *Histories*, see Harrison 1998.

their reconnaissance information more easily by understanding their language. The Ethiopian king immediately uncovers Cambyses' deception and openly mocks the Persians and their customs, and through his humor, criticizes their desire for empire. The Ethiopian king uses humor as an aggressive and didactic tool that simultaneously mocks Cambyses and the Persians, criticizes the Persian desire for expanding their empire, and dares the Persians to attack, as we will see in the exchange of Persian and Ethiopian gifts.

Since the Fish Eaters represent the Persian king Cambyses, the Ethiopian king's reactions to them represent his reactions to the imperial designs of the Persians and their king. The narrative tells us that Cambyses "ordered them to say what was needed" (ἐντειλάμενός τε τὰ λέγειν χρῆν, 3.20.1) and to present five gifts to the Ethiopian king: a purple cloak, a golden collar worn around the neck, armlets, an alabaster of perfume, and a jar of palm wine (πορφύρεόν τε εἶμα καὶ χρύσειον στρεπτὸν περιουχένιον καὶ ψέλια καὶ μύρου ἀλάβαστρον καὶ φοινικηίου οἴνου κάδον, 3.20.1).⁴⁸ By itemizing these gifts, Herodotus calls special attention to them and suggests their importance in the engagement that will follow. The last of these items, the jar of "palm" wine (φοινικηίου οἴνου κάδον), is emphasized by its placement at the end of the list. What is more, the identifying adjective φοινικηίου suggests "Phoenician" as well as "palm," and gestures to the stereotypically deceptive nature of the Phoenicians that the Ethiopian king finds reflected in the Persians' behavior here.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ See Flory 1987, 97-98, for parallels between this episode with Cambyses and the Ethiopian king and Cyrus and Tomyris.

⁴⁹ Moreover, we learn of the Phoenicians' disobedience in the naval attack on Carthage and Cambyses' relenting posture in relation to them. The Phoenicians, according to Herodotus, were too

The Ethiopian king immediately and inexplicably recognizes the deceptive intent of the Fish Eaters' mission.⁵⁰ While the Fish Eaters proclaim that their purpose is to hold talks with the Ethiopians and present gifts that Cambyses particularly enjoys using (δῶρα ταῦτά τοι δίδοι τοῖσι καὶ αὐτὸς μάλιστα ἤδεται χρεώμενος, 3.21.1), the Ethiopian king realizes that they are spies (μαθὼν ὅτι κατόπται ἤκοιεν, 3.21.2) and therefore concludes that their largesse is false. What is more, instead of accepting the gifts, he immediately offers his own gift, complete with a threatening explanation of its symbolic significance. In this way he rejects the Persian gifts and signals the underlying aggression that we will see in the ridicule he directs at Cambyses, the Persians, and the Fish Eaters who represent the Persians. Just as Cambyses had sent a message to accompany the bestowal of his gifts, the Ethiopian king, too, offers his own message. What makes the Ethiopian king's message different, however, is the frank and threatening message he sends that, significantly, explains the symbolic significance of his gift. In this way, the king suggests Cambyses' stupidity and inability to understand the intended message of his present, a bow (3.21.2-3):⁵¹

νῦν δὲ αὐτῷ τόξον τόδε διδόντες τάδε ἔπεα λέγετε· βασιλεὺς ὁ Αἰθιοπίων συμβουλεύει τῷ Περσέων βασιλεί, ἔπεὰν οὕτως εὐπετέως ἔλκωσι [τὰ] τόξα Πέρσαι ἔοντα μεγάθει τοσαῦτα, τότε ἐπ' Αἰθίοπας τοὺς μακροβίους πλήθει ὑπερβαλλόμενον στρατεύεσθαι, μέχρι δὲ τούτου θεοῖσι εἰδέναι χάριν, οἳ οὐκ ἐπὶ νόον τρέπουσι Αἰθιοπίων παισὶ γῆν ἄλλην προσκτᾶσθαι τῇ ἑωυτῶν.

And now when you give this bow to <Cambyses>, say these words, "The king of the Ethiopians gives advice to the king of the Persians. Whenever the Persians so readily draw this bow, so great in size, at that time he should march against the long-lived Ethiopians with an army exceeding theirs in size. But until this time, he should thank

important to Cambyses for him to chastise them, and he also feared that they might abandon the Persian side if he were to protest their failure to contribute to the Persian naval campaign.

⁵⁰ Cf. Romm 1992, 56, who notes how the Ethiopian king here has an "unexplained omniscience."

⁵¹ Cf. p. 92, n. 27 above concerning Phaedrus' fable about Aesop and the "wise" Athenian.

the gods, who do not put it into the minds of the sons of the Ethiopians to add another land to their own!⁵²

The Ethiopian king demonstrates his strong position to Cambyses by using the “messengers” he had sent as if they were his own messengers. We even see a reenactment of the narrative immediately preceding the Fish Eater’s arrival at the Ethiopian king’s court, where Cambyses carefully instructed the Fish Eaters to deliver his message. The Fish Eaters themselves are protected from mockery and punishment, however, by their status as intermediaries. Not unlike Atossa in Democedes’ ruse, they play a complicated and active role in the scene, but unlike Atossa, they show no signs of their own innovative wit. Instead, they appear as mute pawns of both the Persian king who sent them and the Ethiopian king who sends them back.

The Ethiopian king mocks Cambyses, the sender of the Persian gifts, by replacing his message with the demonstration of a single object.⁵³ The bow suggests that the Persians are weak, and in this way taunts Cambyses, who, perhaps in

⁵² Cf. similar outbursts at 1.27.3 and 1.71.4, episodes that I will discuss in the next chapter on didactic humor. Flory 1987, 99, notes the parallel to Sandanis: “Here the Ethiopian king acts the part of the wise adviser by warning a prosperous aggressor (Cambyses) not to attack a noble savage. His words recall those with which Sandanis warned Croesus (‘give thanks to the gods’) against attacking the Persians.”

⁵³ Lateiner 1989, 29, observes how the Ethiopian king’s bow fits into a larger pattern of communicative objects and demonstrations in the *Histories*: “Dumb-shows replace words when talk is dangerous or when symbolic actions are used as a standard language of diplomacy. Thrasylbulus says nothing to Periander’s messenger; he simply cuts down the highest ears of grain in a field and ‘appends not a single word.’ To the messenger he seemed a fool, but ‘Periander comprehended what had been done’ (5.92.ζ2-η1). The Persians asked for proof of submission from the European Greeks by demanding earth and water, symbolic surrender (4.126; 6.48.2; 7.32, 133.1). The king of Ethiopia rejected Cambyses’ gifts and returned to him a meaningful object, a stiff bow; only when the Persians could easily bend and string it, should they try to subdue independent Ethiopia (3.21.3, an obvious echo of the *Odyssey* and certain other testing folktales, but not therefore un-factual).” The Ethiopian king’s additional explanation of the bow’s message in my opinion adds to a victimizing humor that targets the *euethie* of the Persians, since it suggests that they would not be able to decipher the meaning of the bow on their own.

accordance with the Ethiopian king's expectation, immediately sets out for Ethiopia.⁵⁴

As Lateiner says here, “Cambyses foolishly sets out with his army but few supplies ‘for the ends of the earth’ (ἔσχατα γῆς, 3.25.1). He cannot conceive of a limit to his power, megalomaniac that he is.”⁵⁵

While the intent of the Fish Eaters' mission was to find out more about the Ethiopians and their customs, the Ethiopian king inverts the situation so that he is the one who gathers his own reconnaissance information.⁵⁶ At the same time, the Ethiopian king uses the Fish Eaters' explanations of the Persian items as an opportunity to mock Persian customs and the ways in which the “gifts” embody the same deceptive intent as the Fish Eaters' mission (3.22):

ταῦτα δὲ εἶπας καὶ ἀνείς τὸ τόξον παρέδωκε τοῖσι ἤκουσι. λαβὼν δὲ τὸ εἶμα τὸ πορφύρεον εἰρώτα ὅ τι εἶη καὶ ὅπως πεποιημένον. εἰπόντων δὲ τῶν ἰχθυοφάγων τὴν ἀληθείην περὶ τῆς πορφύρης καὶ τῆς βαφῆς, δολεροῦς μὲν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἔφη εἶναι, δολερά δὲ αὐτῶν τὰ εἶματα. δεύτερα δὲ τὸν χρυσὸν εἰρώτα, τὸν στρεπτὸν τὸν περιαιχένιον καὶ τὰ ψέλια. ἐξηγεομένων δὲ τῶν ἰχθυοφάγων τὸν κόσμον αὐτοῦ γέλασας ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ νομίσας εἶναί σφρα πέδας εἶπε ὡς παρ' ἑωυτοῖσί εἰσι ῥωμαλεώτεραι τουτέων πέδαί. τρίτον δὲ εἰρώτα τὸ μύρον· εἰπόντων δὲ τῆς ποιήσιος πέρι καὶ ἀλείψιος, τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον τὸν καὶ περὶ τοῦ εἵματος εἶπε. ὡς δὲ ἐς τὸν οἶνον ἀπικετο καὶ ἐπύθετο αὐτοῦ τὴν ποιήσιν, ὑπερησθεὶς τῷ πόματι ἐπέειρετο ὅ τι τε σιτέεται ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ χρόνον ὀκόσον μακρότατον ἀνὴρ Πέρσης ζῶει. οἱ δὲ σιτέεσθαι μὲν τὸν ἄρτον εἶπον, ἐξηγησάμενοι τῶν πυρῶν τὴν φύσιν, ὀγδώκοντα δὲ ἔτεα ζῆς πλήρωμα ἀνδρὶ μακρότατον προκεῖσθαι. πρὸς ταῦτα ὁ Αἰθίοψ ἔφη οὐδὲν θωμάζειν εἰ σιτέομενοι κόπρον ἔτεα ὀλίγα ζῶουσι· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἂν τοσαῦτα δύνασθαι ζῶειν σφέας, εἰ μὴ τῷ πόματι ἀνέφερον, φράζων τοῖσι ἰχθυοφάγοισι τὸν οἶνον· τοῦτο γὰρ ἑωυτοῦς ὑπὸ Περσέων ἔσσοῦσθαι.

After he said these things and unstrung the bow, he handed it to those men who had come. Taking the purple cloak he asked what it was and how it had been made. When the Fish Eaters said the truth about the purple dye and the (process of dyeing), he said that the men were deceitful and their cloaks were deceitful. Second, he asked about

⁵⁴ At the same time, as Flory argues, the bow “symbolizes the Ethiopians' warlike strength” (1987, 98).

⁵⁵ 1989, 130.

⁵⁶ For more on inquisitive kings, see Christ 1994, 167-202, and for this episode specifically, see 180-182, which Christ calls “[p]erhaps the most unusual Herodotean treatment of kingly inquiry” (1994, 180).

the gold, the collar for around the neck and the armlets. *When the Fish Eaters explained the decoration of it, the king laughed and, having thought they were shackles, said that they had stronger shackles than these among his own people.* Third he asked about the perfume. When they spoke about its production and the custom of anointing, he said the same thing as he had about the cloak. But when he came to the wine and asked how it was made, he was delighted by the drink and asked what the king ate and what was the longest time a Persian man lived. They said he ate wheat bread, explaining the growing of wheat, and that the longest span of life a man could expect was eighty years. In response to these things, the Ethiopian said that he was not at all amazed they lived few years since they ate manure! For they would not have been able to live so many years if they had not recovered themselves with the drink, indicating the wine to the Fish Eaters. For in this respect, they themselves were beaten by the Persians.

The Ethiopian king methodically examines, asks about, and then comments on each gift in the order Herodotus presented earlier in his narrative: the purple cloak, the gold neckband and armlets, the perfume, and the wine. He reveals what Romm calls his “bemused frame of mind” (1992, 56) as he uses the respondents’ own answers as the bases of his derision. That is, the Ethiopian king does not just pick up the object, laugh at it, and toss it to the side, but rather he incorporates the Fish Eaters’ *explanations* of the gifts in his mocking responses.⁵⁷ Had Herodotus not revealed the deceptive nature of the trip, the scene could play out quite differently, but instead, all sympathy for Cambyses and the Persians is removed and the Ethiopian king has free rein to ridicule. The Persian gifts that Cambyses sends as a way of concealing his imperialistic intent, then, prompt the Ethiopian king’s mockery of Persian customs more generally.⁵⁸ In this way, we see how politics and ethnography are interconnected, for the Ethiopian king

⁵⁷ Lateiner comments very briefly on the passage in his article on laughter in the *Histories*: “The king of the Ethiopians has a legitimate laugh at Cambyses and civilization (3.22.2)” (1977, 177). Griffiths 1994, 41 n. 28, comments on how the Ethiopian king’s laughter in 3.22 does not fit into the laughter scheme that Lateiner proposes in his 1977 article by referencing Lateiner’s later remarks in his 1989 book that “[i]ndividuals who are destined to die in peace do not laugh in this text” (1989, 28). In his endnote to this remark, Lateiner identifies 5.92γ3, 3.22.2, 5.68.1, and 4.36.2 as exceptions (1989, 237 n. 49). Griffiths (ibid.) also adds his doubt about how Pausanias’s laughter in 9.82.2 fits into Lateiner’s scheme.

⁵⁸ Dewald 1993, 58, calls this episode with the Ethiopian king a rare example of when “people read such object-tokens correctly, and even more astutely than the donor intends.”

simultaneously directs his humor at the deceptive gifts of the Persians and the imperial desire that the gifts ultimately represent.⁵⁹

In the Ethiopian king's humorous comments on the first four Persian gifts, we see how obvious the Persian trick is. In this way, the Ethiopian king's speech helps to uncover the trick for the audience as well, and makes it more memorable by the focus on the concrete objects that the Fish Eaters present to him. Every gift that is Persian in origin has a deceptive nature that reinforces the deceptive nature of the Persian mission via the Fish Eaters. The purple dye disguises the true color of the fabric, the golden armlets and fetters feebly hide the connection between acceptance of Persian wealth and slavery (we have only to think of Democedes to see this connection),⁶⁰ and the perfume disguises a person's natural scent.⁶¹

The fifth and last item, the wine, shows most clearly the humorous delight the Ethiopian king feels in the *apodexis* of his own *sophie* as he has discovered the Persian deception and found a way to prove it symbolically through the very gifts that were meant to flatter and deceive him. Only the wine delights the king and, in turn,

⁵⁹ Cf. the gifts that the Scythian king Idanthyrus sends to Darius—a bird, a mouse, a frog, and five arrows. Darius thinks these gifts represent earth and water to indicate subjection to Persian rule (4.132). Darius' advisor Gobyras, however, interprets the gifts as follows: "Unless you Persians turn into birds and fly up into the air, or into mice and burrow under ground, or into frogs and jump into lakes, you will never get home again but stay here in this country, only to be shot at by the Scythian arrows" (4.132, tr. Murnaghan 2001, 67). As Murnaghan argues, "In their elusiveness, Idanthyrus' gifts replicate the key attribute of the Scythians, their ability never to be captured, which Herodotus identifies as the most valuable of human achievements (4.46)" (2001, 67). From this anecdote, we prize the humor that comes from the admiration for Scythian *sophie* in such clever gifts in a similar way that we prize the Ethiopian king's *sophie* in uncovering the deception of the Persian gifts.

⁶⁰ Flory 1987, 98, remarks that "[w]ith a mixture of naiveté, disdain, and shrewdness, the savage king calls the Persian jewelry 'fetters' πέδαι (3.22.2), a doubly clever perception since the Persians are enslaved by luxury and the gifts are intended to lure the Ethiopians into slavery to Persia."

⁶¹ Dewald 1993, 58, suggests even further that all the objects suggest to the Ethiopian king enslavement to Persia: he "correctly interprets these tokens as marks of a Persian intent to enslave the Ethiopians."

encourages him to inquire further about Cambyses' diet and Persian life expectancy.⁶² The explanation of the Ethiopian king's question about Persian food seems to be logical: if Cambyses' drink is so good, perhaps his food is also desirable.

The Ethiopian king's inquiry into Persian life expectancies mirrors the ethnographer's tendency to work through different categories, yet at the same time informs us about the disparaging tone of his questioning. Because the Ethiopians were famed for their long lives, the king's question about Persian life expectancies implies his belief that the Ethiopians were superior to the Persians in this regard.⁶³

Furthermore, Herodotus reveals at the end of this passage that the Ethiopian king's question is actually the first part of a joke. According to the king, it is obvious why the Persians do not live long—they eat manure! And what is more, the only thing the Persians have going for them is their drink, the wine. Herodotus suggests a final jab about the wine by his earlier description of it in 3.20 as φοινικηίου. That is, even though φοινικηίου is usually translated as “palm,” the adjective also strongly suggests “Phoenician.” So, the Ethiopian king finishes his joke by complimenting the Persians on the one gift that is not even Persian in origin!

James Romm calls the Ethiopian king's diatribe an “ethnologic satire” and discusses how the Persian gifts reveal the Persians' ethnocentrism, which to the Ethiopians “appears laughably presumptuous; the conquerers of the known world are

⁶² Romm 1992, 57-58, notes that “Herodotus here follows a long-standing tradition (dating back at least to the Cyclops episode of the *Odyssey*) according to which ‘primitive’ peoples are unable to resist the effects of wine, that most sublime of advancements wrought by higher civilizations. Even here, however, we can see an implicit critique of Persian sophistication at work: The Ethiopian king praises wine as a salutary beverage, capable of extending the lifespan of those who drink it; whereas in fact it has the opposite effect on Cambyses, who (as we learn at 3.34) lapses into madness and violence partly as a result of his over-indulgence in wine.”

⁶³ Cf. the language the Ethiopian king uses at 3.22.4 about the Persians' superiority over the Ethiopians in terms of their wine: τοῦτο γὰρ ἑωυτοῦς ὑπὸ Περσέων ἔσσοῦσθαι.

here reduced to liars, cheats, fools, and eaters of dung (i.e., cereals raised from the manured earth)” (1992, 57). This Persian ethnocentrism, like that of the Athenians in 1.60 that draws the narrator’s own ridicule, helps explain the basis of the Ethiopian king’s humor. Following Flory,⁶⁴ Romm also brings out the important aspect of “nature-culture opposition” that we find represented in the Persian gifts to the noble savage Ethiopians:

Neither these gifts, nor the Ethiopian king’s rebukes of them, are idly chosen; in fact what is under attack are the most basic underpinnings of Mediterranean technology and material culture. It is the artifice behind such products as dyed cloth and refined myrrh, echoing as it does the artifice of Cambyses in sending out spies, that the Ethiopian king finds so distasteful; likewise it is the use of gold for cosmetic rather than practical purposes that he sees as ridiculous. The most esteemed products of a sophisticated, manufacturing-based society suddenly lose their value when viewed through the eyes of *Naturvölker*, for whom the raw materials supplied by nature are sufficient to meet every need. Herodotus carries this contrast further in the next scene, by having the king conduct the Fish-eaters on a tour of Ethiopian life: He exhibits their food and drink (boiled meat and milk); the spring of rarefied water which gives a glossy sheen, ‘like that of olive oil,’ to those who bathe in it; the prison, where wrongdoers are bound in golden fetters; and lastly the famous meat-producing Table of the Sun. In each case the Ethiopians are seen to obtain from the environment around them the substances which the Persians can only get, ignobly, by manufacture or cultivation. (1992, 57)

In his comments on this passage in Herodotus, Matthew Christ notes the humorous tone of the Ethiopian king’s inquiries and a blurring of the *histor* and the Ethiopian king in their ethnological curiosity. At the same time, moreover, he suggests that a serious message emerges from the Ethiopian king’s comments that reveals the way in which his humor criticizes Persian imperialistic tendencies, an attitude that Herodotus’ Ethiopian king shares with the *histor* himself:

This kingly inquirer shares a number of features in common with the historian. For example, when the Ethiopian king condemns Persian imperialism (3.21.2-3), he voices an opinion that is consistent with the historian’s own critical representation of the Persian lust for expansion. Of particular interest, however, is the ethnological slant of

⁶⁴ 1987, 98-99.

the king's interrogation of the Fish-Eaters. The Ethiopian king recognizes that the gifts they bring are a cover for their spying expedition (3.21.2) and analyzes the objects, one by one, as if they were cultural artifacts that contain revealing information about the Persians and their perfidy (3.22.1, 3.22.3). In his cross-examination of the Fish-Eaters concerning the objects, the Ethiopian king mirrors in his own humorous way the historian's ethnological interest in peoples' longevity, diet and *nomoi* (3.22.3-4). When he generalizes that in the custom of wine-drinking alone are the Persians superior to the Ethiopians (τοῦτο γὰρ ἔωυτούς ὑπὸ Περσέων ἔσσοῦσθαι, 3.22.4), we are reminded of the historian's own treatment of Persian *nomoi* earlier in the *Histories*. Herodotus, like the Ethiopian king, concedes the superiority of certain Persian *nomoi* (1.136-137) and is also intrigued by the Persian use of wine (1.133). The overlapping interests of historian and king are accentuated within the episode by the fact that the historian intrudes frequently in the narrative to voice his own views of ethnological matters (3.20.1-2, 3.23.3-4, 3.24). (1994, 181-182)

Herodotus suggests that the Fish Eaters' report spurs Cambyses' rash and immediate march against the Ethiopians. By not restating how the Fish Eaters' report resulted in Cambyses' outrage, however, Herodotus encourages us to reexamine the episode to uncover the basis of the Persian king's outrage—the mocking gift and message of the unstrung bow—and in this way emphasizes further the Ethiopian king's mockery of Cambyses. He leaves without gathering a proper food supply and his Ethiopian expedition ends with the horror of his own men practicing cannibalism (3.25.6). Along with the disappearance of the troops he had sent to Ammonia, the failure of Cambyses' Ethiopian expedition adds to his sensitivity about the Egyptians' celebrations of the appearance of the sacred Apis bull (3.27). This, in turn, leads to his mad killing of the bull and to his laughter at Egyptian religious *nomoi* (3.29, which we will examine more closely in the next chapter). We also learn that the Ethiopian king's gift of the bow causes Cambyses to be jealous of his brother Smerdis, who was the only Persian who could draw the Ethiopian bow, even if only to two finger-breadths (δύο δακτύλους, 3.30.1). While Cambyses' misinterpretation of his dream about Smerdis leads directly to his killing of his brother, his jealousy and implied paranoia about

Smerdis' superior standing because of his ability to string the Ethiopian bow show the lasting importance of the seemingly insignificant and mockingly hostile Ethiopian "gift."⁶⁵

What is more, if we understand that the Ethiopian bow plays some role in Smerdis' death, we can also link at least one version of Cambyses' killing of his sister/wife ultimately to the bow as well. For it is because of her weeping mention of Smerdis' death, while watching a contest between two puppies and a lion cub, that Cambyses decides to kill her (3.32). The wine, of which the Ethiopian king was so fond, also leads to Cambyses' killing of Prexaspes' son (3.34-35). For it is Prexaspes' honest report from the Persians that they thought Cambyses was too fond of wine which leads to his mad outburst and rash bow-and-arrow "experiment" with Prexaspes' son, and almost results in the death of Croesus, who rebukes him (3.36). Add Cambyses' desecration of tombs in Memphis, laughter at the cult statue of Hephaestus, and laughter at and burning of the statues of the Cabiri (3.37), and we can understand Herodotus' conclusion that Cambyses was mad (3.38):⁶⁶

πανταχῆ ὧν μοι δῆλά ἐστι ὅτι ἐμάνη μεγάλως ὁ Καμβύσης· οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἱροῖσί τε καὶ νομαίοισι ἐπεχείρησε καταγελάειν. εἰ γὰρ τις προθείη πᾶσι ἀνθρώποισι ἐκλέξασθαι κελεύων νόμους τοὺς καλλίστους ἐκ τῶν πάντων νόμων, διασκεψάμενοι ἂν ἐλοίατο ἕκαστοι τοὺς ἐωυτῶν· οὕτω νομίζουσι πολλόν τι καλλίστους τοὺς ἐωυτῶν νόμους ἕκαστοι εἶναι. οὐκ ὧν οἶκός ἐστι ἄλλον γε ἢ μαινόμενον ἄνδρα γέλωτα τὰ τοιαῦτα τίθεσθαι. ὥς δὲ οὕτω νενομίκασι τὰ περὶ τοὺς νόμους οἱ πάντες ἄνθρωποι, πολλοῖσί τε καὶ ἄλλοισι τεκμηρίοισι πάρεστι σταθμώσασθαι, ἐν δὲ δὴ καὶ τῷδε·

⁶⁵ On the pattern of how the insignificant in Herodotus so often turns out to be significant, see J. E. van der Veen (1996).

⁶⁶ Cf. Rood, who argues that a more obvious sign of Cambyses' madness is found when he burns Amasis' corpse, since at 3.16 Herodotus tells us that burning a corpse was impious both for Persians and Egyptians (2006, 299). We should not discount the role of humor in the text of Herodotus' account that, while certainly not aimed at his readers, nevertheless focuses explicitly on Cambyses' *laughter* at religious *nomoi* as an undeniable sign of his madness here at 3.38. In this way, Herodotus instructs us about how important he considers the impiety of laughter at religious *nomoi*. See note 70 below for further discussion.

Therefore it is entirely clear to me that Cambyses was greatly mad, for he would not otherwise have attempted to laugh at (καταγελάειν) both sacred rites and customs. For if someone were to command all men to choose the finest customs of all, each one would choose his own customs once he had thoroughly considered other people's. Thus each group of men believes its own customs are far the best. Therefore it is not likely that anyone other than a mad man would laugh at such things (γέλωτα τὰ τοιαῦτα τίθεσθαι). And that it is thus that all men think about their customs, it is possible to judge by many other evidences, and particularly by the following...

Immediately following this passage, of course, is Herodotus' proof of the universal appeal of one's own customs. In Darius' experiment of cultural relativity involving the funerary customs of Greeks and the Indian Callatiae, Herodotus tells us that while the Greeks merely state they would not eat their parents like the Indians do for any amount of money, the Indians shout in horror at the practice of Greek cremation (3.38.4).⁶⁷

Herodotus' global criticism of laughter at other peoples' *nomoi* in 3.38.1, so soon after the Fish Eaters' episode, encourages us to think again about the Ethiopian king's laughter at the Persian customs in 3.22. What is the difference between the Ethiopian king's laughter there and Cambyses' subsequent laughter at the Egyptian priests and *nomoi*? Cambyses laughs at the Egyptian customs only because they are different from

⁶⁷ Rood 2006, 300, emphasizes the contrast between the emotive response of the Indians and the subdued response of the Greeks in Darius' experiment. "By contrasting the restrained Greek response with the emotional Indian shout, is Herodotus inviting his Greek audience to admire their own stiff upper lip and look down on the primitive Indians? Not necessarily. Greek readers and listeners did not need the narrator to prod their emotions at the thought of eating their parents. They did need to be made to re-think their own habits. Far from pandering to Greek assumptions, the Indians' profound disgust at what seems natural to Greeks in fact reinforces Herodotus' message of tolerance." Rood (ibid.) also argues for connections between ethnographic inquiry and imperial domination by Darius, and suggests that Herodotus' comment at 1.134.2 on Persians respecting those closest to them and least those who are far away (i.e., the Greeks and Indians) offers "another hit at the Greeks' own ethnocentric assumptions."

his own, whereas the Ethiopian king laughs at customs in order to instruct the Persians: that is, to discourage their blind imperialism, which serves no morally sound purpose.⁶⁸

In fact, the Ethiopian king views the Persians' deceptive gifts, which all reinforce the deceptive reconnaissance mission of the Persians via the Fish Eaters, as a mockery of Ethiopian customs because they embody the idea of empire, with its characteristic ignoring of *nomoi*. Laughter at other customs, only because they are different from one's own, marks an individual, like Cambyses, as mad.⁶⁹ At the same time, however, Herodotus recognizes the universal attraction of one's own *nomoi* and asserts that each naturally chooses his own. Therefore, while the impulse to laugh may be normal, the act of laughing at other customs is hubristic.⁷⁰ Herodotus presents a somewhat complex picture on this issue, then, by presenting a spectrum of responses ranging from less to more offensive.

If we wonder how the encounter between the Fish Eaters and the Ethiopian king resonated in antiquity, we have to look no further than Plutarch, who in his essay on Herodotus' malice uses the episode as a means by which to attack Herodotus more generally:

Why not adopt what Herodotus himself says (3.22) that the Egyptian said about Persian perfume and purple clothes, that the myrrh was a pretence and the garments a

⁶⁸ An idea I will explore further in the next chapter.

⁶⁹ Among other reasons, we can also say that Cambyses is mad because he *flaunts* his own Persian customs.

⁷⁰ Cf. 7.152, Herodotus' famous marketplace metaphor that each person would choose their own problems upon seeing those of their neighbors at the marketplace. Apte 1985, 257, observes that laughter is often not tolerated in contexts where smiling is, an idea that might aid us further in comprehending Herodotus' explicit condemnation of laughter here. That is, it seems that should Cambyses have only *smiled* at the Egyptian customs, he would not have violated Herodotus' formulation for the respect due to others' *nomoi*. Rather, it is Cambyses' open *laughter* at the Egyptians' *nomoi* that proves his madness. In this regard, compare Deioces' condemnation of laughter (cf. Ch. 1, p. 27, n. 16).

pretence, and so say to him that his words are a pretence and his history a pretence, 'all twisted, nothing sound, all back to front'? --Plutarch *de Malig.* 863D, tr. Bowen 1992, 57

Plutarch here proves the success with which Herodotus has memorialized this particular episode, for the second-century writer uses it as a tool with which to criticize. Indeed, it may even be that the humor of the episode is largely the reason why Plutarch hates the passage so much and that he responds to Herodotus' humor with his own humorous touch.

III. Deadly Tricks

The final example of humorous deception we will discuss, the account of Alexander and the Persian guests (5.18-22), demonstrates the ultimate danger of humor in the *Histories*. For here, we see an example of humor connected to a trick that results in death. While this episode demonstrates the recurring theme of vengeance in the *Histories*,⁷¹ it also demonstrates the role a bitter type of humorous deception can play in characters' exaction of vengeance.

Alexander and the Persian Ambassadors (5.18-22)

We can better understand the significance of the episode about Alexander and his Persian guests by first considering the seemingly insignificant example of humorous deception that precedes it. Two Paeonian brothers, who wanted to be tyrants of Paeonia, set up a scheme to attract Darius' attention (5.12).⁷² They dressed up

⁷¹ See also, e.g., Gyges and Candaules' wife (1.8-12) and Hermotimus and Panionius (8.105-106). For discussion of possible humor in these episodes, see Casevitz 1995, 15-16, and Dewald 2006, 154-155, respectively.

their tall, beautiful sister (ἀδελφεὴν μεγάλην τε καὶ εὐειδέα) in fine clothes, and had her carry a jar on her head, lead a horse, and spin flax, all at the same time! (5.12.1-2). Herodotus tells us that she did indeed attract Darius' attention because she acted not like a Persian, Lydian, or indeed any Asian woman (οὔτε γὰρ Περσικὰ ἦν οὔτε Λύδια τὰ ποιούμενα ἐκ τῆς γυναικός, οὔτε πρὸς τῶν ἐκ τῆς Ἀσίας οὐδαμῶν, 5.12.3). What colors this anecdote as humorous on one level is the *ridiculous* nature of the sister's display—the brothers dress up her as a one-person circus of sorts. Thus, the brothers achieve their goal through their humorous ruse, for their conspicuous (ἐπιμελὲς, 5.12.3) sister attracts Darius' attention.

Yet, the consequences of the trick differ from the brothers' wishes to be appointed local satraps, and herein lies another level of humor that points our attention specifically to Darius' perception of Paeonian *nomoi* that the brothers help create.⁷³ Dewald argues that there is a subtle humor here as “the manipulation of the object backfires because the would-be trickster does not correctly anticipate the mindset or worldview of the intended audience.”⁷⁴ After they tell Darius that *all* women in Paeonia are just as industrious (ἐργάτιδες, 5.13.3) as their sister, the Persian king decides to uproot all the people of Paeonia and bring them to Asia (5.15.3). Thus, when

⁷² Dewald 1998, 667, observes the humor in the tale: “There is an odd mixture of humour and horror in this story. The two brothers are almost a parody of a theme noticed before in the *Histories*, of ambitious underlings seeking personal advancement with the king (cf. n. 3.129-38). Here most in play is the incommensurability between the scope of Darius' plans and anything these two rustics from the Thraceward region can imagine.”

⁷³ In her recent article on humor in the *Histories*, Dewald 2006, 158, cites this episode as an example of “humor...[that] is so subtle and pervasive that, as in the trickster stories, it shades at the end into a kind of bitter irony.” As she further remarks, the brothers’ “hope is to trap Darius into making them satraps of a tyranny centered on the Strymon river,” but their “grandiose dreams of tyranny” are dashed, so that “[i]n a comic version, they foreshadow the much darker replay of this theme in the account of the Ionian revolt that follows.” Christ 1994, 171, observes the “ironic frame” of this tale of kingly inquiry.

⁷⁴ 1993, 64.

the Persian general Megabazus soon thereafter sends Persian ambassadors to demand earth and water from the Macedonians, we are aware of the potentially serious consequences of humorous deception (5.18.2-5):

ὥς δὲ ἀπὸ δεῖπνου ἐγίνοντο, διαπίνοντες εἶπαν οἱ Πέρσαι τάδε· Ξεῖνε Μακεδῶν, ἡμῖν νόμος ἐστὶ τοῖσι Πέρσησι, ἐπεὰν δεῖπνον προτιθώμεθα μέγα, τότε καὶ τὰς παλλακὰς καὶ τὰς κουριδίας γυναῖκας ἐσάγεσθαι παρέδρους· σύ νυν, ἐπεὶ περ προθύμως μὲν ἐδέξαιο, μέγालος δὲ ξεινίζεις, διδοῖς τε βασιλεῖ Δαρεῖω γῆν τε καὶ ὕδωρ, ἔπει νόμῳ τῷ ἡμετέρῳ. εἶπε πρὸς ταῦτα Ἀμύντης· ὦ Πέρσαι, νόμος μὲν ἡμῖν γέ ἐστι οὐκ οὗτος, ἀλλὰ κεχωρίσθαι ἄνδρας γυναικῶν· ἐπεῖτε δὲ ὑμεῖς ἐόντες δεσπότες προσχρηρίζετε τούτων, παρέσται ὑμῖν καὶ ταῦτα. εἶπας τοσαῦτα ὁ Ἀμύντης μετεπέμπετο τὰς γυναῖκας. αἱ δ' ἐπεῖτε καλεόμεναι ἦλθον, ἐπεξῆς ἀντίαι ἴζοντο τοῖσι Πέρσησι. ἐνθαῦτα οἱ Πέρσαι ἰδόμενοι γυναῖκας εὐμόρφους ἔλεγον πρὸς Ἀμύντην φάμενοι τὸ ποιηθὲν τοῦτο οὐδὲν εἶναι σοφόν· κρέσσον γὰρ εἶναι ἀρχῆθεν μὴ ἐλθεῖν τὰς γυναῖκας ἢ ἐλθούσας καὶ μὴ παριζομένας ἀντίας ἴζεσθαι ἀλγηδόνας σφίσι ὀφθαλμῶν. ἀναγκαζόμενος δὲ ὁ Ἀμύντης ἐκέλευε παρίζειν· πειθομένων δὲ τῶν γυναικῶν αὐτίκα οἱ Πέρσαι μαστῶν τε ἄπτοντο οἷα πλεόνως οἰνωμένοι καὶ κού τις καὶ φιλέειν ἐπειράτο.

After dinner was over, the Persians said these things as they were drinking, “Macedonian host, it is the custom for us Persians to have both our concubines and wedded wives sit beside us whenever we serve a great feast. Therefore, since you have received us kindly, since you are greatly entertaining us as guests, since you are giving King Darius earth and water, follow our custom.” Amyntas said in response, “Men from Persia, this is not our custom here—we separate our men and women. But since you are our masters and make this request, we will do this for you.” After Amyntas said this, he sent for the women. The women came at his call and sat in a row opposite the Persians. After the Persians had seen the shapely women, however, they told Amyntas that he had done a stupid thing. It would have been better had the women not even come than that they come and not sit beside them, but opposite them to torment their eyes. Amyntas, compelled, bid the women sit beside the Persian men. The women obeyed and the Persians, as they were completely drunk with wine, immediately started to fondle their breasts and occasionally tried to kiss them.

The first part of this anecdote sets up the dark humor we will find later in this episode because it pits Persian customs against Macedonian customs, and we suspect that the Persians, with an aggressive sort of humor, are actually using the name of *nomos* as a cover for their own wish to violate Macedonian custom and women.⁷⁵ The Persians assert their power as they mention the Macedonians’ submission to the Persians through the symbolic offerings of earth and water (γῆν τε καὶ ὕδωρ, 5.18.2), and

⁷⁵ On women as representatives of culture and *nomos* in Herodotus, see Dewald 1981, 91-119.

thereby declare that the Macedonians also submit their customs to those of Persia.

Throughout this entire exchange, we find the interplay of power, *ethnos* and *nomos* that precipitates the deadly trick of Amyntas' son, Alexander. After encouraging his reluctant father to go to sleep and insisting that *he* will take care of the guests, Alexander makes a simple announcement to the Persians (5.20.1-2):

Γυναικῶν τουτέων, ὧ̃ ξεῖνοι, ἔστι ὑμῖν πολλή εὐπετεῖη, καὶ εἰ πάσῃσι βούλεσθε μίσησθαι καὶ ὀκόσησι ὧ̃ν αὐτέων. τούτου μὲν πέρι αὐτοὶ ἀποσημανέετε· νῦν δέ, σχεδὸν γὰρ ἤδη τῆς κοίτης ὥρη προσέρχεται ὑμῖν καὶ καλῶς ἔχοντας ὑμέας ὀρῶ μέθης, γυναῖκας ταύτας, εἰ ὑμῖν φίλον ἐστί, ἄφετε λούσασθαι, λουσαμένας δὲ ὀπίσω προσδέκεσθε.

Guests, it is very easy for you to have sex with any one of these women you like. You will just need to give the signal. But now since bedtime is already approaching for you and I see that you are pretty well drunk, if it's okay with you, let these women go bathe and then welcome them back after they've finished.

Herodotus leads us to expect that Alexander is thinking of vengeance through his presentation of 1) the conflicts of power and *nomos* between Amyntas and the Persians in the first part of this anecdote, 2) Alexander's inability to endure what the Persians are doing (οὐδαμῶς ἔτι κατέχειν οἶός τε ἦν, 5.19.1), and 3) Amyntas' suspicion of Alexander's anger (Ὡ παῖ, σχεδὸν γὰρ σευ ἀνακαιομένου συνήμι τοὺς λόγους, 5.19.2). Instead of immediately slaughtering the Persians, however, Alexander first sets up a deadly act of humorous deception by sending in Macedonian men disguised in the dress of Macedonian women to "entertain" the Persians. As the Persian men are eager to grab the women, they instead meet with the daggers of the Macedonian men. Thus, Alexander counterattacks the Persians' obvious lust, which they had veiled as "*nomos*," with his own deadly and skillful manipulation of the situation.

As we know, however, Alexander's slaughter of the Persian ambassadors is not the end of the tale. While Carolyn Dewald in her chapter on humor and danger in the

Histories alludes to the thematic cycle of vengeance by saying that “the bitter trick is turned against Alexander,”⁷⁶ Alan Griffiths finds Alexander’s later behavior ironic:

When the party fails to return to base, the Persians dispatch a military expedition to find their diplomats. And how does Alexander deflect the threat? By bribing the commander, Boubares. He gives him a great deal of money and, in addition...his own sister, Gugaia. So the whole brave coup in defence of the virtue of the chaste Macedonian womenfolk is cynically negated, wiped away at a stroke. Alexandros gives his sister to a Persian. There are no verbal hints in the text that the story is ironic; it is simply inherent in the logic of the story. (1994, 37)

I should add, however, that Herodotus describes Alexander’s plan to rid all evidence of his massacre of the Persians by saying that he did so through his *sophie* (σοφείας Ἀλέξανδρος κατέλαβε σοφίη, 5.21.2), which he immediately clarifies as Alexander’s bribery of and gift of his sister to Bubares. Thus, I might describe Alexander’s gift of his sister—to his own mind, at least—as practical and in keeping with the same *sophie* he demonstrated in his deception of the Persian ambassadors. Alexander seems to recognize that in order to ward off the serious consequences that would result from the Persians’ discovery of his crime, he must offer a compelling bribe. Perhaps he thought of his sister because the Persians revealed, in their behavior at his father’s palace, that they were attracted to Macedonian women. It is significant that the woman he offers is his sister, though, for it both demonstrates the seriousness of the action on account of which he is trying to escape retribution, and it also offers a glimpse into his character.

Therefore, while Griffiths offers us one perspective on Alexander’s inconsistent behavior, we find that from another perspective Alexander’s behavior is quite consistent with his duplicitous nature.⁷⁷ Indeed, as we later discover, Alexander in the *Histories* appears at times a friend to Persia and at other times a friend to the Athenians

⁷⁶ 2006, 154.

⁷⁷ Cf. Badian 1994, 117-121.

in a way that is destabilizing (cf. 7.173, 8.34, 8.136-143, and 9.44).⁷⁸ Also destabilizing is Alexander's own identity, for Herodotus tells how Alexander finds himself in the middle of a dispute during the Olympic Games about whether he is a Greek or a barbarian (5.22.1-2).⁷⁹

IV. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how characters in the *Histories* use humorous deception in a way that highlights the conflict between cultures and *nomoi*, or helps to characterize particular peoples and their *nomoi*. Ethnocentric behavior and attitudes invite humor that focuses on attacking cultural arrogance, such as the Athenians in 1.60 or the Persians in 3.22 and 5.13. In this way, humorous deception calls attention to the *sophie* of characters who concoct deceptive plans, and at the same time exposes the *euethie* of the victimized parties, or sometimes of the tricksters themselves.

I examined three main ways in which humor and deception interact prominently in the *Histories*: 1) When characters revel in a type of deception that

⁷⁸ As a friend to Persia: cf. 8.136 when Mardonius chooses Alexander as ambassador to Athens, in part, because of his connection to Persia by the marriage of his sister Gygaea. This bond, then, appears to ensure to Mardonius that Alexander would be loyal to Persia's interests. To Athens: Alexander arrives to help the Athenians at Tempe (7.173) and at Plataea (9.44). Badian 1994, 122, in reference to Alexander's speech to the Athenian Assembly in 8.140, notes Herodotus' silence on the reasons for Alexander's friendly status with Athens, and suggests that "he supplied Athens with timber and pitch (as we know some of his successors did) when she built her great fleet just before the Persian War." For more on Herodotus' portrait of Alexander, see Scaife 1989 and Badian 1994.

⁷⁹ Alexander is first prohibited from participating in the games at Olympia because the Greeks assert that the games are for Greeks and not barbarians (φάμενοι οὐ βαρβάρων ἀγωνιστέων εἶναι τὸν ἀγῶνα ἀλλὰ Ἑλλήνων, 5.22.2). Alexander is later permitted to take part in the games after he proves that he is an Argive. See Hall 2002, 154-157, for further discussion. Cf. also 9.45.1-3. We might also compare Alexander to the complicated figure of Croesus: "In terms of any East/West division, [Herodotus] begins on the cusp, the margins of both parts of the world; and begins by dealing with a figure who is hard to place and who resists description in the easy formulations of Greek/barbarian discourse. Herodotus *begins* by pressing on the boundaries and blurring them, not by establishing them clearly. That does not mean that the categories do not exist, or that they are not important; but they are problematic from the start. (It is interesting that Hartog barely mentions Croesus)" (Pelling 1997, 5).

resembles a practical joke, where the clever trickster makes his plot known to the deceived victim(s); 2) Tricks that are uncovered by a more clever individual, who makes humorous (though not frivolous) fun of the simplicity of the trick or trickster and thereby displays a competitive one-upmanship in a contest of *sophie*; and 3) Tricks that turn deadly and remind the audience of the most extreme consequences of certain acts of humorous deception.

As I have demonstrated in several of the examples in this chapter, humor can sometimes serve a useful and serious role in conveying truths. In the next chapter, I will discuss this interplay of humor and didacticism more explicitly.

CHAPTER FOUR: DIDACTIC HUMOR

Herodotus' audiences would probably expect from a lecturer both instruction and entertainment and appreciate entertaining instruction. -B. Shimron 1989, 60

Humor can serve a critical didactic function when it instructs the audience by inviting them to consider serious issues of *nomoi* and politics. Not surprisingly, we have seen that Herodotus the cultural relativist rarely uses humor in his authorial voice to instruct the audience. Rather we find his characters using humor and we are left to consider its importance. Indeed, Herodotus reflects in his portrayals of his characters the same kinds of challenges to cultural boundaries and identities that fifth-century Greeks must have particularly experienced in the wake of the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars.¹

In didactic humor, we witness a mixture of aggressive humor and humor that arises contrary to expectation, two primary types of humor that ancient and modern humor theorists discuss.² In each case, humor in the narrative encourages the audience

¹ See Mitchell 2006 and 2007 for evidence that these challenges to Greek identity predate the Persian Wars; cf. Miller 1997 and Malkin 2001 on how these challenges became more intense in the wake of the Persian Wars. See also Apte 1985, 132, on the importance of war to the prevalence of ethnic humor.

² Aggression theorists include Plato and Aristotle, and most prominently in modern literature, Henri Bergson. Humor that arises contrary to expectation appears prominently in ancient analyses of humor: Demetrius 152, Cicero *De Oratore* 2.255, Quintilian 6.3.84-87, Hermogenes *Peri Methodou deinotatos* 34, and *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 1.10. In modern analyses of humor, moreover, expectation plays an important role in incongruity theories. See discussion above, Ch. 1, pp. 16-21.

to reflect upon boundaries to their identities and the importance of their own and others' *nomoi* in the creation of these boundaries.

Before we turn to the *Histories*, let us first consider an obvious form of humor that offers instruction: the proverbs cited by ancient analysts of humor. While we can detect didactic elements in much of the *Histories*' humor (for example, that surrounding the Egyptian king Amasis discussed above, Ch. 3, pp. 86-94), there are also anecdotes in the text that share some similarities with proverbs that ancient analysts of humor have included in their schemata. In the ancient analyses of humor from Demetrius, Cicero and Quintilian, I find examples of proverbs that valuably inform my analysis. Take, for example, this proverb from Quintilian:

Proverbs which are to the point also make a contribution. A bad character falls down and asks to be helped up; someone says "Let someone help you up who doesn't know you." –Quintilian 6.3.98 (tr. D. Russell 2001, 115)

We see that Quintilian's example of a proverb is linked to an individual (unnamed here), appears to originate in direct discourse, and involves an aggressive type of humor that instructs the audience. The proverbs of Demetrius and Cicero also follow this same pattern, though a named individual appears in their examples.³ What we do not see in the examples from ancient critics of humor, however, is the interplay of humor and ethnography that characterizes Herodotus' narrative.

The progymnastic writer Theon offers an example of a *chreia* that contains "wit" or "jest" (αἰ δὲ κατὰ χαριεντισμὸν) that is also useful for my analysis:⁴

³ See Demetrius 156 and Cicero, *De Oratore*, 2.258, respectively.

⁴ Other species include gnomic sayings, logical demonstrations, syllogism, enthymeme, with examples, prayer, with a sign, as tropes, as a wish, with metalepsis, and any combination thereof (Theon 99; Kennedy 2003, 17-18). The only elaboration on these species Theon provides is an example for each.

As a jest, for example, “When Olympias learned that her son Alexander was proclaiming himself the child of Zeus, she said ‘Will he not stop slandering me to Hera?’” –Theon, 99 (tr. Kennedy 2003, 18)

Though Theon does not analyze the “jest” in this chreia, the humor is best explained by ancient and modern theories which describe humor that arises contrary to expectation and humor that is connected with aggression. We expect that Alexander’s mother will chastise her son when she learns that Alexander has claimed his father is Zeus. Instead of directly criticizing Alexander, however, she manipulates his claim so that it concerns *her* most of all. She facetiously plays along and claims she is not another one of Zeus’ many women through a rhetorical question that helps her to correct her son cleverly and aggressively. This sort of rhetorical question, identified by a *reductio ad absurdum* logic, sometimes marks didactic humor in the *Histories* as well.⁵

The progymnastic writer Nicolaus the Sophist expands on the idea of jest in chreias and offers further clarification of the ways in which certain proverbs incorporate humor and at the same time serve didactic purposes:

They say, also, that some chreias are transmitted because of some utility and some only because of their charm. An example of a useful one is, “Isocrates said that the root of education is bitter but the fruit is sweet.” It refers to the need to endure difficulties for the pleasure that follows them. An example of a charming one is, “When Olympias, the mother of Alexander, heard that her child was claiming to be the son of Zeus, she said,

⁵ Aristotle discusses these in *Rhetoric* 3.18. The first example of a *reductio ad absurdum* question that he provides shows the close connection to aggressive humor: “In regard to interrogation, its employment is especially opportune, when the opponent has already stated the opposite, so that the addition of a question makes the result an absurdity (ὥστε ἐνὸς προσερωτηθέντος συμβαίνει τὸ ἄτοπον); as, for instance, when Pericles interrogated Lampon about initiation into the sacred rites of the savior goddess. On Lampon replying that it was not possible for one who was not initiated to be told about them, Pericles asked him if he himself was acquainted with the rites, and when he said yes, Pericles further asked, ‘How can that be, seeing that you are uninitiated?’” (Aristotle *Rhetoric* 3.18.1; translation by J. H. Freese, 1926). In his recent chapter on “global or absolute absurdity” (2008, 332-287), Halliwell briefly distinguishes this type of absurdity as “contextual absurdity,” which “can be perceived in most areas of human behaviour, but...is always construed as a failing or incongruity in relation to particular standards of sense and value and is judged from a position that takes *itself* to be non-absurd” (2008, 341; Halliwell’s italics). Apte 1985, 14, citing McGhee 1979, 6-8, notes that “absurdity” is found in a group of terms that “share at least some semantic properties with the term ‘humor’ and are commonly used in scholarly discussions on the topic.” Other terms he mentions are: wit, comic, incongruity, amusement, ludicrousness, ridicule, mirth, funniness and playfulness (ibid.).

‘When will the boy stop slandering me to Hera?’” It seems to be a pleasantry. And again, “Damon the trainer, they say, had twisted feet and when he lost his shoes at the baths he expressed the hope that they would fit the feet of the thief.” This seems to be only a pleasantry. Yet to me, together with the pleasantry they seem to contain good advice: one dissuades a child from calling himself the son of Zeus, and the other teaches us to avoid theft as a most unacceptable thing.⁶

In Nicolaus’ examples, we find characters using an aggressive variety of humor to attack other characters, who become targets of humor for the audience. I also find here an ancient argument that mirrors my own and lends further credibility to my interpretation of the didactic nature of some humor.⁷ As I will show in Herodotus, certain anecdotes resemble these types of proverbs, and also, in a similar way, simultaneously create a mirthful smile in and memorably instruct the audience.

I. Didactic Humor in the *Histories*

The analysis that follows will show the various ways Herodotus blends humor, usually that which is contrary to expectation, and didacticism in his narrative. Through his characters’ use of humor, Herodotus constantly manipulates the portraits of different peoples and therefore invites us to appreciate striking differences.⁸ In each of the examples I present, Herodotus’ characters offer questions which encourage us to make evaluations and to notice when our evaluations are upset by the narrative.⁹ As I will demonstrate, Herodotus often allows his characters to provide instruction through

⁶ Preliminary Exercises of Nicolaus the Sophist, sec. 21 (Kennedy 2003, 141).

⁷ Cf. also the quotation from Shimron 1989, 60, on p. 122 that opens this chapter.

⁸ Cf. Introduction, pp. 6-12.

⁹ I mark all questions in my text with a bold font. Other key items within these passages are underlined.

the very questions that they pose.¹⁰ This technique should not surprise us, however, since Herodotus himself seems more interested in asking questions than in offering rigid answers. These questions encourage us to think particularly about the significance of customs and cultural identities in the situations Herodotus presents to us.

A. The Lydians

i. Bias/Pittacus to Croesus (1.27.1-5)

Pittacus [Herodotus] mentioned (27.2) for trifles not worth mentioning, and omitted the man's best and biggest deed in spite of having the opportunity (5.94/5) to put it in.¹¹ –Plutarch, *de Malig.* 858A; tr. Bowen 1992, 33

[This anecdote] has no historical value, as can be inferred from Herodotus not even being certain of the name of the wise man who spoke with Croesus. The anecdote simply serves to report a witty answer and, at the same time, explain why Croesus did not conquer the islands. –Asheri 2007, 96

As Plutarch helps reveal by his frustration about Herodotus' inclusion of Pittacus' "trifles" (μικρά) but not his "best and biggest deed" (μέγιστόν...τῶν πεπραγμένων τῷ ἀνδρὶ καὶ κάλλιστον),¹² Herodotus' anecdote about Pittacus has an important humorous dimension. In David Asheri's dismissive reference about this passage, moreover, we sense the same sort of interpretation that Plutarch offers almost

¹⁰ Even in the famous Solon-Croesus episode (1.30-33), where Solon offers answers to Croesus' questions, we find that Croesus' self-absorbed questions offer instruction that is just as important as Solon's elaborate and carefully construed answers.

¹¹ Πιττακῶ τοῖνον εἰς μικρὰ καὶ οὐκ ἄξια λόγου χρησάμενος, ὃ μέγιστόν ἐστι τῶν πεπραγμένων τῷ ἀνδρὶ καὶ κάλλιστον, ἐν ταῖς πράξεσι γενόμενος παρήκε.

¹² Plutarch explains this deed further in *de Malig.* 858A-B. During the battle between Athens and Mytilene over Sigeum, Pittacus accepted the challenge to duel with the Athenian general Phrynon, whom he threw a net over and killed. He only asked for the land as far as his spear could fly, which was later named Pittaceum (Πιττάκειον). Plutarch says that because Herodotus omits this deed but includes the detail about Alcaeus throwing away his armor, Herodotus shows the truth of the maxim that "joy at others' misfortunes is born of one and the same vice as jealousy" (ἀπὸ μιᾶς κακίας καὶ τὸν φθόνον φύεσθαι καὶ τὴν ἐπιχαιρεκακίαν; tr. Bowen 1992, 35).

two millenia earlier.¹³ As I argue, however, the witty humor we find here offers instruction and succinctly memorializes the reason Croesus does not attack the islanders, which results directly from Bias’/Pittacus’ effective use of didactic humor.

The Greek wise man Bias/Pittacus obliquely instructs the Lydian Croesus in their discussion about the Aegean islanders, whose lands Croesus desires to acquire now that he has subdued the cities of the mainland (1.27.1-5):

έόντων δέ οί πάντων έτοιμών ές τήν ναυπηγίην, οί μόν Βίαντα λέγουσι τόν Πριηνέα άπικόμενον ές Σάρδις, οί δέ Πιττακόν τόν Μυτιληναίον, είρομένου Κροΐσου εί τι είη νεώτερον περι τήν Έλλάδα, είπόντα τάδε καταπαύσαι τήν ναυπηγίην· Ή βασιλεϋ, νησιώται ίππον συνωνέονται μυρίην, ές Σάρδις τε καί έπί σέ έν νόω έχοντες στρατεύεσθαι. Κροΐσον δέ έλπίσαντα λέγειν εκείνον άληθέα είπεΐν· Αΐ γάρ τοϋτο θεοί ποιήσειαν έπί νόον νησιώτησι, έλθεΐν έπί Λυδών παιδας σϋν ίπποισι. τόν δέ ύπολαβόντα φάναι· Ή βασιλεϋ, προθύμως μοι φαΐναι ευΐασθαι νησιώτας ίππευομένους λαβεΐν έν ήπειρω, οικότα έλπίζων· νησιώτας δέ τί δοκέεις ευΐεσθαι άλλο ή, έπειτε τάχιστα έπύθοντό σε μέλλοντα έπί σφίσι ναυπηγέεσθαι νέας, λαβεΐν άρώμενοι Λυδούς έν θαλάσση, ίνα ύπέρ τών έν τή ήπειρω οίκημένων Έλλήνων τείσωνταί σε, τούς σϋ δουλώσας έχεις; κάρτα τε ήσθηναι Κροΐσον τω έπιλόγω καί οί, προσφυέως γάρ δόξαί λέγειν, πειθόμενον παύσασθαι τής ναυπηγίης. καί οϋτω τοΐσι τας νήσους οίκημένοισι Ήϊωσι ξεινίην συνεθήκατο.

When all matters were ready for the shipbuilding, some say that Bias of Priene (others say it was Pittacus of Mytilene) came to Sardis and when Croesus asked if there was any news about Greece, he said the following things and put an end to the shipbuilding: “O King, the islanders are buying 10,000 horses and they have it in mind to lead an army against Sardis and you.” Croesus, *expecting that that man spoke the truth*, said, “Would that the gods might put this in the islanders’ mind(s) to come against the children of the Lydians with horses!” But Bias/Pittacus said in response, “O King, you seem eager in your prayer to seize the islanders coming on horseback to the mainland, and you reasonably *hope for this*. **But what else do you think the islanders prayed for, as soon as they heard that you were intending to build ships to use against them, other than to catch the Lydians on the sea, in order to avenge themselves for those Greeks living on the mainland, whom you enslaved?**” (They say that) Croesus was quite taken by the conclusion and, because Bias/Pittacus seemed to have spoken suitably, he heeded him and stopped the shipbuilding. And in this way he established a bond of friendship with the Ionians living on the islands.

¹³ I have problems with Asheri’s conclusion that the anecdote has no historical value because Herodotus is “not even...certain of the name of the wise man who spoke with Croesus” (2007, 96). Rather, Herodotus says that there are two different traditions, and he simply includes the name of the wise man that each tradition offers.

Bias/Pittacus orchestrates the entire exchange: he intentionally deceives Croesus in order to instruct him with a *reductio ad absurdum* rhetorical question.¹⁴ In addition to the words of his characters, moreover, Herodotus adds narrative clues about how to interpret this scene. When Croesus asks the Greek sage if there is any news from Greece, the narrator reveals that Bias’/Pittacus’ news that the Aegean islanders were buying 10,000 horses is not actually true by his use of ἐλπίσαντα: “Croesus expected that [Bias/Pittacus] was speaking the truth” (Κροῖσον δὲ ἐλπίσαντα λέγειν ἐκείνον ἀληθέα εἶπεῖν, 1.27.3).¹⁵ By introducing the “news” that the islanders were planning to buy a myriad of horses, the sage introduces an identifying *nomos* of the Lydians and the Aegean islanders: the former fight on land, and the latter on sea.

Bias/Pittacus focuses on this single *nomos* of each group, their characteristic fighting style, and then mixes them up in a sort of incongruity in order to elicit Croesus’ astounded response. We know that Croesus makes his outburst because he is shocked by how suicidal the islanders are to challenge his superior land forces. Yet we also know, by Herodotus’ use of ἐλπίσαντα, that Croesus is misguided in his exclamation and has just been duped by the Greek sage.¹⁶ Bias/Pittacus first recognizes Croesus’ logical wish that the Aegean islanders buy horses to use in a land battle for which they would be at a severe disadvantage, but then presents the perspective of the Aegean islanders and uses the same *reductio ad absurdum* logic to teach Croesus that his

¹⁴ Bias’/Pittacus’ “news” reflects the notion of lying *kata kosmon*. For more, see Pratt 1993, 55-94.

¹⁵ For more on ἐλπίζειν and related terms, see Myres 1949, 46. Professor Baragwanath calls my attention to Paris in the poem, who “expects” that his theft of Helen will not cause problems.

¹⁶ Αἰ γὰρ τοῦτο θεοὶ ποιήσειαν ἐπὶ νόον νησιώτησι, ἐλθεῖν ἐπὶ Λυδῶν παῖδας σὺν ἵπποισι (1.27.3). Cf. Croesus’ outburst in 1.71.4, discussed below.

wishes have been foolish and short-sighted. Bias/Pittacus is able to show Croesus that the Aegean islanders would find his appropriation of their *nomos* ridiculous.

ii. Sandanis to Croesus (1.71.2-4)

Sandanis offers a classic ethnographic identification of the Persians by presenting information about their clothing, food and drink. Herodotus uses this ethnographic portrait to ready the audience for a *reductio ad absurdum* rhetorical question, as well as two different “punchline” phrases (1.71.2-4):

παρασκευαζομένου δὲ Κροίσου στρατεύεσθαι ἐπὶ Πέρσας, τῶν τις Λυδῶν νομιζόμενος καὶ πρόσθε εἶναι σοφός, ἀπὸ δὲ ταύτης τῆς γνώμης καὶ τὸ κάρτα οὔνομα ἐν Λυδοῖσι ἔχων, συνεβούλευσε Κροίσῳ τάδε· οὔνομά οἱ ἦν Σάνδανις· ὦ βασιλεῦ, ἐπ’ ἄνδρας τοιούτους στρατεύεσθαι παρασκευάζει, οἱ σκυτίνας μὲν ἀναξυρίδας, σκυτίνην δὲ τὴν ἄλλην ἐσθῆτα φορέουσι, σιτέονται δὲ οὐκ ὅσα ἐθέλουσι, ἀλλ’ ὅσα ἔχουσι, χώρην ἔχοντες τριχέαν. πρὸς δὲ οὐκ οἴνω διαχρέωνται, ἀλλὰ ὑδροποτέουσι, οὐ σῦκα δὲ ἔχουσι τρώγειν, οὐκ ἄλλο ἀγαθὸν οὐδέν. **τοῦτο μὲν δὴ, εἰ νικήσεις, τί σφεας ἀπαιρήσεις, τοῖσι γε μὴ ἔστι μηδέν;** τοῦτο δὲ, ἦν νικηθῆς, μάθε ὅσα ἀγαθὰ ἀποβαλέεις. γευσάμενοι γὰρ τῶν ἡμετέρων ἀγαθῶν περιέξονται οὐδὲ ἀπωστοὶ ἔσονται. ἐγὼ μὲν νυν θεοῖσι ἔχω χάριν, οἱ οὐκ ἐπὶ νόον ποιέουσι Πέρσησι στρατεύεσθαι ἐπὶ Λυδούς. ταῦτα λέγων οὐκ ἔπειθε τὸν Κροῖσον. Πέρσησι γάρ, πρὶν Λυδοὺς καταστρέψασθαι, ἦν οὔτε ἀβρόν οὔτε ἀγαθὸν οὐδέν.

When Croesus was preparing to lead an army against the Persians, a certain Lydian named Sandanis gave Croesus the following advice. Although he was thought wise even before, after this saying his name circulated even more among the Lydians. “O King, you are preparing to lead an army against such sort of men who wear leather trousers and whose other clothing is leather. They eat not so much as they wish, but so much as they have since they have a rugged land. In addition, they do not use wine but drink water, and they don’t even have figs to nibble upon—they don’t have any good thing! **If you win, what will you carry away from those men who have nothing at all?** But if you are defeated, understand how many good things you will lose. For once they taste of our good things, they will cling to them and will not be driven away. Truly thank the gods that they do not put it into the minds of the Persians to lead an army against the Lydians!” Saying these things, he did not persuade Croesus. For the Persians had nothing splendid or good before they subdued the Lydians.

The narrative identifies Sandanis as a certain Lydian who, while the Lydians considered him “clever” (σοφός) before, gained particular fame for his *sophie*

afterwards because of this advice. Herodotus' authorial note about Sandanis' later fame here alerts the audience to pay close attention to this exchange between Sandanis and Croesus. The preceding lines helped to establish Croesus' lack of self-awareness by reminding the audience that he *expected* to defeat the Persians, and this helps to provide reason for Sandanis' instructive technique in this passage: Κροῖσος δὲ ἀμαρτῶν τοῦ χρησμοῦ ἐποιέετο στρατηίην ἐς Καππαδοκίην, ἐλπίσας καταιρήσειν Κῦρόν τε καὶ τὴν Περσέων δύναμιν. (1.71.1).

At the broadest level, Sandanis urges Croesus to consider the incongruity of the Lydians' and Persians' ways of living in an effort to dissuade the Lydian king from attacking the Persians. According to Sandanis, Croesus has not considered that Lydian luxury might be attractive to the Persians, who wear leather, have little food, and drink water (1.71.2-3). Moreover, as the most vivid witness to the scarcity of Persian resources, Sandanis tells Croesus that the Persians “do not even have figs to nibble upon” (οὐ σῦκα δὲ ἔχουσι τρώγειν), and in this way suggests that Croesus has not considered what Persia lacks: in his estimation, everything!¹⁷ Herodotus marks the significance of the figs by equating the lack of them with the lack of any desirable resources in the punchline phrase that marks the low, colloquial register of his remarks: “—they didn't have anything good!” (οὐκ ἄλλο ἀγαθὸν οὐδέν).

Sandanis draws Croesus into his attempt at oblique persuasion first by introducing easily observable traits of the Persians and thus appeals to Croesus'

¹⁷ Cf. the type of humor Cicero describes as the “telling detail” in *De Oratore* 2.66.

fondness for seeing and calculating objects and men.¹⁸ Sandanis points out what Croesus could observe and therefore would agree with—that the Persians do have markedly different customs—only to show that his own comments about Persian dress and food are mere hooks to gain Croesus’ attention.¹⁹ What is more, Sandanis’ examples of visible Persian cultural artifacts—what clothes they wear, what food they eat and what drink they drink—function as his evidence and add weight to the authority of his argument that the very thought of attacking the Persians is laughable. Sandanis’ question instructs Croesus and the audience that the Persians, in their current state of affairs, do not realize their own poverty and resulting hardiness (1.71.3):

τοῦτο μὲν δὴ, εἰ νικήσεις, τί σφραγῶ ἀπαιρήσειαι, τοῖσί γε μὴ ἔστι μηδέν;

If you win, what will you carry away from those men who have nothing at all?

Sandanis’ rhetorical question here helps to characterize the seriousness of the entire exchange and also the absurdity of Croesus’ desire to conquer a land that knows no luxury. Underpinning Sandanis’ question, moreover, is the serious political warning that Persia may conquer Lydia. More generally, it calls into question the very rationale for the conquest. Even though Sandanis unsuccessfully instructs Croesus through his use of humor that is contrary to expectation, his words resonate with the audience, which is drawn to reflect on Croesus’ desire for empire.

¹⁸ Flory 1978, 148, comments on Croesus’ insistence that Solon *see* all his treasure. On the eastern monarchs’, especially Xerxes’, obsession with seeing, counting and calculating, see Immerwahr 1966, 182; Konstan 1987, 62-67; and Christ 1994, 172-175.

¹⁹ Cf. the use of stereotypes to draw in an audience. See Ch. 1, pp. 35-36 for more.

Sandanis' portrayal of the Persians as living in poverty and lacking luxury encourages the audience to reflect upon how rapidly their own prosperity could be transformed. Like the maxims of 1.5.3-4 and Solon's wisdom about the instability of human fortune at 1.32, Sandanis' words here might also function as a warning to the Athenians about their growing empire and wealth.²⁰ Namely, their prosperity and luxury might signal weakness, rather than the strength that they suppose.

A final exclamatory punchline reinforces the humorous tone Sandanis employs here and informs us further about the "key" of this speech event (1.71.4):²¹

ἐγὼ μὲν νυν θεοῖσι ἔχω χάριν, οἳ οὐκ ἐπὶ νόον ποιέουσι Πέρσησι στρατεύεσθαι ἐπὶ
Λυδούς.

I truly thank the gods that they do not put it into the minds of the Persians to lead an army against the Lydians!

Sandanis' punchline phrase here might also explain why Sandanis does not persuade Croesus (ταῦτα λέγων οὐκ ἔπειθε τὸν Κροῖσον, 1.71.4), for Sandanis' remark might be interpreted as an example of implicit ridicule.²² The summary of Croesus' reaction in this brief phrase reinforces Croesus' own disregard for Sandanis' careful reasoning and reading of the importance of *nomoi*. Not only does Croesus seem to disregard the *nomoi* of the Persians, but he does not even seem to recognize how their *nomoi* should influence his decision about whether or not to conquer them. The narrative here also confirms the veracity of Sandanis' advice in a way that serves to underscore its importance: the Persians had never enjoyed luxury before they

²⁰ Cf. Moles 1996, 2002.

²¹ See Chapter 1, pp. 32-33, with reference to Apte 1985, 203-205.

²² Cf. discussion of 1.30-33 below, where Croesus first rejects sound advice from a wise counselor.

conquered the Lydians (Πέρσησι γάρ, πρὶν Λυδοὺς καταστρέψασθαι, ἦν οὔτε ἄβρὸν οὔτε ἄγαθὸν οὐδέν. 1.71.4).

As I argue, the Sandanis-Croesus episode is important for demonstrating how the wise man Sandanis uses humor directed at the Persians' customs to engage Croesus, only to present his real admonition through his rhetorical question. His advice helps to make the serious point that the Persians are not worth conquering, and what is more, it is absolutely dangerous even to try. The wise Sandanis supports a conservative *modus operandi* that preserves all the luxuries the Lydians have by not waging the expedition, for military defeat means that the Lydians will lose all the good things that they have: their plentiful food, their wine, and their figs. The same conservative ideology is mirrored from the Persian side at the end of the *Histories*. Cyrus argues in favor of rugged land and lack of crops, which ensure strong warriors: "soft lands make soft people" (9.122.3). By implication, Cyrus also suggests that "tough lands make tough people," and therefore warns that the Persians will be all the more formidable.²³ While Cyrus here is talking about the Medes and not the Lydians, the cultural contrasts and stereotyping are similar.

iii. Solon and Croesus (1.30-33)

The Solon-Croesus episode, which is so central to discussions of the *Histories*, demonstrates the way humor and didacticism interact in the clash of cultures and

²³ The connection between poverty and political/military might is seen in several other instances: 7.102, 8.26, and 9.82. For another example of the general thought Herodotus seems to be drawing upon, see the Hippocratic *Airs, Waters, Places* 24.

ideals.²⁴ While this episode has often been read in terms of general statements about the realities of man's happiness, I hope to show that humor adds another dimension to this complex and pivotal episode.

In Plato's *Philebus*, Socrates offers three categories of the ridiculous (τὸ γελοῖον). Socrates' first category consists of those who think that they are richer than they really are,²⁵ and thus we have evidence that the Croesus-Solon episode might fit an ancient model for a specific type of laughable situation. While the episode certainly offers us universal statements on the qualities of a good life,²⁶ humor flavors the exchange both in Croesus' questions, Herodotus' authorial hints, and the quality and details of Solon's answers to Croesus. Just as Croesus makes certain assumptions about his primary place in the ethnographic sphere of Solon's travels, Solon combats Croesus' lack of insight and rigid thinking by directing humor at the Lydian tyrant in an attempt to teach him.

Though the story is well-known, it is important to consider the details of the text. During the course of his stay at the Lydian king Croesus' palace, the Athenian Solon was taken on a tour of Croesus' treasuries and afterwards Croesus has a question for Solon (1.30.2-3):

Ξεῖνε Ἀθηναῖε, παρ' ἡμέας γὰρ περὶ σέο λόγος ἀπῖκται πολλὸς καὶ σοφίης εἵνεκεν τῆς σῆς καὶ πλάνης, ὡς φιλοσοφῶν γῆν πολλὴν θεωρίας εἵνεκεν ἐπελήλυθας· **νῦν ὧν ἡμερος ἐπειρέσθαι μοι ἐπήλθε σε εἴ τινα ἤδη πάντων εἶδες ὀλβιώτατον.** ὁ μὲν ἐλπίζων εἶναι ἀνθρώπων ὀλβιώτατος ταῦτα ἐπειρώτα, Σόλων δὲ οὐδὲν ὑποθωπεύσας, ἀλλὰ τῷ ἐόντι χρησάμενος λέγει· ὦ βασιλεῦ, Τέλλον Ἀθηναῖον. ἀποθωμάσας δὲ Κροῖσος τὸ λεχθὲν εἶρετο ἐπιστρεφένως· Κοίη δὴ κρίνεις Τέλλον εἶναι ὀλβιώτατον;

Athenian Guest, we have heard many things about you because of your wisdom and your wandering, you who, because you love wisdom, have visited many places to see them for yourself. **Now, therefore, the desire came to me to ask you if anyone of all**

²⁴ On the extensive bibliography on this episode, see, e.g., Asheri 2007, 97-104.

²⁵ πρῶτον μὲν κατὰ χρήματα, δοξάζειν εἶναι πλουσιώτερον ἢ κατὰ τὴν αὐτῶν οὐσίαν (*Phil.* 48d).

²⁶ See Asheri 2007, 98.

those you have already seen was most fortunate. And <Croesus>, expecting that he was the most fortunate of men asked these things, but Solon not at all flattering, but speaking the truth says: “O King, Tellus the Athenian.” But Croesus, astonished at what had been said, asked vehemently: “How, indeed, do you judge that Tellus is the most fortunate?”

Because Croesus supposed that Solon’s acquaintance with his vast wealth made it clear that he was the happiest man alive, he asks his “Athenian Guest” (Ξεῖνε Ἀθηναῖε, 1.30.2) if in the course of his many journeys, someone he had seen was really the most fortunate of all (εἴ τινα ἤδη πάντων εἶδες ὀλβιώτατον, 1.30.2). From the start, Croesus puts a premium on the authority that rests with Solon because of his contact with many lands and their peoples around the world. As we can see from Herodotus’ authorial comments that follow his question, Croesus expects to hear confirmation that he is indeed the most fortunate (ὁ μὲν ἐλπίζων εἶναι ἀνθρώπων ὀλβιώτατος).²⁷ Just as in the example involving Bias/Pittacus, the narrator here grants the audience a privileged position by revealing Croesus’ thoughts through authorial commentary, and thereby draws attention to Croesus’ assumptions. Thus, ἐλπίζω acts as a narrative clue that helps us to understand better the nature of Croesus’ question and signals to the audience that Solon’s response will be contrary to Croesus’ expectation.

Rather than the pure surprise that could have resulted had Herodotus omitted the comment about Croesus’ assumption, Herodotus instead changes the emotional dynamics of the narrative so that we do not expect discovery of an answer from the learned and well-traveled Solon, but rather a correction of Croesus’ cultural arrogance and lack of insight. Solon does not respond with or later ask any questions himself, but instead responds immediately and definitively with the laconic answer “Tellus the

²⁷ As Konstan says, “Solon’s famous lecture on the good life is sparked by Croesus’ passion (*himeros*) to hear that he himself is most fortunate” (1987, 68).

Athenian.”²⁸ Solon’s means of correcting Croesus is therefore striking, in part, because of the ethnocentric answer he gives, for of all the places and peoples in the world he has visited, Solon names an Athenian like himself as the most fortunate.²⁹ Yes, it might not at first seem striking that Solon names a fellow Athenian as the most fortunate—we would *expect* that he knows about Athenians best—but he cites his fellow Athenian in direct response to Croesus’ question that situates Solon’s answer in the context of a *worldwide* ethnography.

The narrator emphasizes further that the intended focus of the episode is as much Solon’s answer as Croesus’ reaction. For we learn that Croesus is shocked (ἀποθωμάσας) by Solon’s response, which to the dumbfounded Croesus is truly a wonder (θῶμα) of its own, and therefore he vehemently (ἐπιστρεφέως)³⁰ asks why Solon named Tellus the most fortunate. We enjoy equally both Solon’s ethnocentric answers and Croesus’ frustration that Solon does not name him first in happiness. Yes, Tellus was a general example of an ordinary citizen who lived a good life, yet it is also

²⁸ Perhaps Herodotus further plays with cultural identities here by having Solon give a Spartan-like answer, only to have him later offer a stereotypically Athenian long-winded answer.

²⁹ Moles notes the connection between shared ethnicity of Solon and Tellus, but he uses this fact as support for his argument that Herodotus is evoking a parallel between Croesus and Pericles (including the Athenian/Alcmaeonid origin of the name Croesus), the Lydian empire and the Athenian empire (2002, 36). Asheri observes how Solon introduces Tellus first, surmising that “Herodotus evidently guessed that Solon would tend to give the first place to a good patriot” (Asheri 2007, 100). Cf. Redfield 1985, 102: “[Solon’s] moralism [is] founded on experience of the wide world—Croesus, asking Solon to approve his prosperity, expressly links Solon’s πλάνη and σοφίη, his ‘wandering’ and ‘wisdom.’ It is also a moralism critical of barbarian values—if some barbarians have it, they become the ineffective ‘warners’ of those who lead the barbarians. Solon thus displays the wisdom derived from *theoria* as something peculiarly Greek and something more than mere experience; the thoughtful Greek traveler comes to his experience confident that he can give a definitive interpretation of the non-Greek world he visits. He travels not so much to learn as to teach.”

³⁰ LSJ gives “earnestly, vehemently” for the translation in this specific context (Hdt. 1.30).

important to consider that Solon identifies him, a fellow Athenian, in the context of his own πλάνη.

When Croesus asks Solon who is the *second* most fortunate man after Tellus the Athenian, he reveals that his expectations about his own importance remain unchanged.³¹ Croesus invites further correction from the world-traveler Solon, here again through his answers to Croesus' question (1.31.1):

ὥς δὲ τὰ κατὰ τὸν Τέλλον προετρέψατο ὁ Σόλων τὸν Κροῖσον εἶπας πολλά τε καὶ ὄλβια, ἐπειρώτα τίνα δεύτερον μετ' ἐκεῖνον ἴδοι, δοκέων πάγχυ δευτερεῖα γῶν οἴσεσθαι. ὁ δὲ εἶπε· Κλέοβιν τε καὶ Βίτωνα. τούτοισι γὰρ ἐοῦσι γένος Ἀργείοισι βίος τε ἀρκέων ὑπῆν καὶ πρὸς τούτῳ ῥώμη σώματος τοιήδε·...

When Solon led Croesus on by saying many happy things (πολλά τε καὶ ὄλβια) about Tellus, **he asked who he thought the second man was after that man, thinking that he would surely carry away at least the second prize.** But Solon said, “Cleobis and Biton. For these Argives had a sufficient livelihood and in addition also had bodily strength of such a kind...”

While Croesus “expected” that Solon would name him the *most* fortunate man, he now thinks that “at least” (πάγχυ) he will be the *second* most fortunate man. Therefore, the narrative invites us again to revel in Croesus' reaction to Solon's answer concerning the second prize of happiness: Cleobis and Biton. While Solon does not tag the brothers immediately with the identifying epithet as he does Tellus the Athenian, he does indicate explicitly, after a brief pause, that they are Argive. Thus, of all the peoples in the world, the Athenian Solon names an Athenian the most fortunate, then Greek brothers from Argos, situated only about 90 miles away, as the second most fortunate.³²

³¹ See Asheri 2007, 101, on the idea of the second prize. Cf. Hdt. 8.123.2, where Themistocles is awarded the second prize by the Greek commanders after the battle of Salamis.

³² Solon's reference to Argos might have resonated with his Athenian audiences since it was allied with Athens against Sparta in 461.

Unlike his response to the first question, Croesus does not ask Solon to explain why he chose Cleobis and Biton as the second most fortunate. Rather, Solon continues his speech after naming the brothers and justifies his choice. At the conclusion of Solon's speech, Croesus' question to the Athenian sage borders on insult (1.32.1):

Σόλων μὲν δὴ εὐδαιμονίης δευτερεῖα ἔνεμε τούτοισι, Κροῖσος δὲ σπερχθεὶς εἶπε· ὦ ξεῖνε Ἀθηναῖε, ἢ δ' ἡμετέρη εὐδαιμονίη οὕτω τοι ἀπέριπται ἐς τὸ μηδέν, ὥστε οὐδὲ ἰδιωτέων ἀνδρῶν ἀξίους ἡμέας ἐποίησας;

Solon indeed allotted to these men the second prize of happiness, and Croesus in haste and anger said, “O Athenian Guest, does our happiness amount to so little that you do not consider us worthy of private individuals/your own countrymen?”

Croesus' annoyance at the repeated frustration of his expectations is reflected in his response to Solon. After Solon's speech on the virtues of the Argive brothers Cleobis and Biton, Herodotus says that Croesus asked his question “in haste and anger” (σπερχθεὶς), and while he uses the same address to Solon as he does at the beginning of the episode (ὦ ξεῖνε Ἀθηναῖε), it is not unreasonable to imagine that Croesus is now stressing the alterity of Solon. What is more, we find that Solon, in the course of his answers lowers the register of the exchange and therefore emphasizes his unwillingness to flatter Croesus (cf. 1.30.3, οὐδὲν ὑποθωπεύσας, ἀλλὰ τῷ ἐόντι χρησάμενος).³³ In this way, Solon's answers not only challenge Croesus' rigid thinking, but also invite us to appreciate a subtly incongruous humor found in the contrast between Croesus' formal questions and Solon's colloquial and almost glib answers.

³³ Pelling observes that the tone of Solon's response becomes increasingly informal, as especially indicated by the switch in his address of Croesus from the formal and ethnic address ὦ βασιλεῦ (1.30.3) to no address (1.31.1) to ὦ Κροῖσε (1.32.1 and 1.32.4); his final address is formal (ὦ βασιλεῦ, 1.32.9) and in this way suggests that a switching of the linguistic code has taken place in the exchange (2006, 105 and 116 n. 8; cf. Dickey 1996, 236-237).

Croesus provides another clue in his response that might indicate that he perceives Solon's answers have been Hellenocentric: ὥστε οὐδὲ ἰδιωτέων ἀνδρῶν ἀξίους ἡμέας ἐποίησας (1.32.1). While the reference to ἰδιωτέων ἀνδρῶν most obviously refers to the contrast of king to private citizen, as Tellus, Cleobis and Biton certainly are,³⁴ the basic sense of “one's own” people (with reference to the root adjective, ἴδιος, -α, -ον), which in the case of Solon means Athenians in particular and Greeks in general, offers a further layer of significance to his response.³⁵ Finally, Croesus' use of the possessive adjective “our” (ἡμετέρη) and the pronoun “us” (ἡμέας) perhaps underlies this sense.³⁶

Solon's pedantically long final answer, part mathematical (1.32.2-4)³⁷ and part detailed definition (1.32.5-9), might also reflect a cultural stereotype of Athenians and their intellectual tendencies, just as Croesus' failure to comprehend this elaborate answer helps to establish his portrait as well.³⁸ In this way, Solon here shares some

³⁴ Cf. 1.59.1 on Pisistratus' father Hippocrates as a “private citizen” and spectator at the Olympic Games (Ἴπποκράτει γὰρ ἔόντι ἰδιώτῃ καὶ θεωρέοντι τὰ Ὀλύμπια). See also 7.3.2 on Artabanus' argument that Xerxes had a more legitimate claim to the throne because Darius was a “private citizen” (ἰδιώτῃ) when Artobazanes was born. See Munson 2001, 13, “One well-known ideological contradiction in the mid-fifth century was that of the simultaneous desirability of exceptional (i.e., symbolically “royal”) status and normal (or citizen) status, as is illustrated in the *Histories*, for example, by the contrast of happiness between Croesus of Lydia and Tellus of Athens.” See also McGlew 1993, 30-32 and 196-212.

³⁵ The noun is used in this sense in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, where it is contrasted with “strangers”: περὶ τοὺς ξένους / καὶ τοὺς ἰδιώτας (Ar. Fr. 458-459) (LSJ entry 4 for ἰδιώτης: “ἰδιῶται, οἱ, *one's own countrymen*, opp. ξένοι”).

³⁶ We will see this same type of language in the exchange between Xerxes and Demaratus (7.101-105) later in this chapter (pp. 151-154).

³⁷ See Lateiner 1989, 32, for Herodotus' use of numbers. While the core content of Solon's answer echoes other musings on man's life (cf. Sophocles *Philoctetes* 305-306), I argue that the exaggerated style of Solon's answer produces a somewhat humorous effect. Dewald 1998, 601, observes here that “Solon's calendar reforms for Athens were well known, so it is not surprising that H[erodotus] here allows him a little pedantic arithmetical calculation about the number of days in a human life.”

³⁸ Cf. 5.49-51, an episode I will examine at the end of this chapter (pp. 154-159) where I see a similar contrast between Aristagoras' elaborately long speech to the Spartan king Cleomenes, and

similarities with the Socrates of Aristophanes' *Clouds* or the physician Eryximachus of Plato's *Symposium*, and his speech is both didactic and subtly humorous. Solon shows that happiness has little to do with material wealth through his careful use of vocabulary. The Greek term ὀλβιώτατον is generally translated as "happiest," and in the context of the story, this is logical. At closer examination, however, it becomes clear that this word is the key to Croesus' misunderstanding of Solon's advice in this story.

Solon is precise in his use of vocabulary and frustrates Croesus' initial expectation by juxtaposing another term, πλούσιος, "rich," sometimes taken as a synonym for ὀλβιος,³⁹ in his final reply to Croesus in 1.32.5-7. Thus, Solon challenges Croesus, who had expected a close connection between riches and happiness, by expanding the definition of Croesus' term, ὀλβιος, to the general level of happiness, and by identifying him simply as πλούσιος.⁴⁰ The narrative, therefore, highlights the

Cleomenes' pithy question. I argue that the quantity and quality of their responses represent cultural stereotypes, Ionian and Spartan, respectively.

³⁹ πλούσιος appears only eight times in Herodotus: 1.32 (three occurrences), 2.44, 3.57, 4.65, 7.190, and 8.33. The verb πλουτέω appears only in 1.32, 3.57, and 6.125, the famous story of the Athenian Alcmaeon, who visited Croesus' court. The adjective ὀλβιος appears 16 times in the *Histories* (1.30 (four occurrences), 1.31, 1.32 (three occurrences), 1.34, 1.86 (two occurrences), 1.216, 5.92e, 6.24, 6.61, 8.75; *LSJ* also notes ὀλβιος is poetic and unusual in prose), and nine of these instances occur in the Solon-Croesus episode.

⁴⁰ Cf. Immerwahr 1966, 158: "...the appearance of mere wealth is deceptive, and true prosperity is primarily the gift of fortune. Croesus' *olbos* is only *ploutos*." Cf. also Konstan 1987, 68: "...it is wealth, the most abstract kind of possession, that is the counterpoint to *olbos* or true well-being." Although I have found no suggestion that Aristophanes is parodying this passage, I detect a potential parody in *Knights* 157-161. Here, the slave faces the opposite challenge of convincing the Sausage Seller, who believes he is a nobody, that he is actually the most fortunate man. Echoes of the vocabulary used in Solon's speech also hint at this connection:

ὦ μακάρι', ὦ πλούσιε,
 ὦ νῦν μὲν οὐδεὶς, αὔριον δ' ὑπέρμεγας,
 ὦ τῶν Ἀθηνῶν ταγὲ τῶν εὐδαιμόνων. Ar. Eq. 157-161

incongruous nature of Solon’s precise vocabulary in relation to the simple answer that Croesus’ question seems to elicit.

Had Croesus accepted the wisdom of Solon’s previous responses, the sage’s final answer to Croesus could have brought about a calm resolution to the situation. Instead, however, Croesus shows by his actions that he not only misses the point Solon is making, but still believes he is the most fortunate man (1.33):

ταῦτα λέγων τῷ Κροίσῳ οὐ πως οὔτε ἐχαρίζετο, οὔτε λόγου μιν ποιησάμενος οὐδενὸς ἀποπέμπεται, κάρτα δόξας ἀμαθέα εἶναι, ὃς τὰ παρεόντα ἀγαθὰ μετεῖς τὴν τελευτὴν παντὸς χρήματος ὄρᾶν ἐκέλευε.

When he said these things, Solon did not in any way please Croesus, who did not make any account of his speech and sent him away, thinking him definitely stupid, who had dismissed his present good situation and bid him to look to the end of every affair.

While Solon incorporates maxims that summarize the gist of his arguments, Croesus, as we learn from authorial comment, reduces his entire interaction with Solon to a hostile estimation that the Athenian wise man is stupid (κάρτα δόξας ἀμαθέα εἶναι, 1.33). Croesus increasingly emphasizes the ethnic identity of Solon and becomes ever more hostile toward him as their conversation continues. The culminating description of the same man he first described in flattering terms (1.30) becomes simply a stupid (ἀμαθέα) Other, a distinctive and summary term that reminds us of a key target of ethnic humor.⁴¹

Solon uses a dry humor in his responses to Croesus that would surely have drawn in an audience for entertaining instruction. But what kind of audience? If Herodotus did visit Athens, as scholars generally agree,⁴² it is likely that he would have

⁴¹ Pelling 2006, 105: “...at the end Croesus dismisses Solon as an ‘ignoramus’ (*amathea*, I.33)—not just a ‘silly fellow’, but a word which contrasts with that initial reputation for much-travelled wisdom.”

⁴² Based, in part, on evidence from Eusebius, *Chron.*, Olymp. 83.4 (=445/444 BC) and Diyllus, *FGrH* 73 F 3=Plutarch, *de Malig.* 862B. See Ch. 1, p. 41 n. 28.

recited this passage, for it is the most famous exchange in the entire work. What better way to engage an Athenian audience than to explode Croesus' assumptions with their own Athenian sage Solon who counters with examples of fellow private citizen Greeks?

The progymnastic writer Theon mentions the Solon-Croesus episode in his discussions of narrative when a maxim is added “to each part of the narration,” which “is not appropriate in historical writing or in a political speech but belongs rather to the theater and the stage.”⁴³ Theon cites Herodotus, though, as one who does not fit the mold of “historical” writing:

...when [a maxim] is smoothly mixed in and these gnomic statements escape notice, the narration does somehow become charming, as in the first book of Herodotus. There he is speaking about human life, saying how it is not steadfast but has many changes in its course; then counting the number of days in human life as those in seventy years, he adds: “Of all these days one never brings anything alike to another.” Then (Solon) moralizes in this way (Herodotus 1.32): “Thus, Croesus, man is wholly accident.” (Theon 91-92; tr. Kennedy 2003, 39)

While Theon focuses on the “charm” of this episode, Plutarch observes the result of the humor that emerges from the narrative and that is directed at Croesus, who, though he calls Solon ignorant, emerges as ignorant himself in this and other episodes:

I omit the presentation of Croesus first as a prize ignoramus and braggart and fool (27; 30-33; 53-56; 71; 75) and then, after being made prisoner, as guide and counselor of Cyrus (88-91); Cyrus seems to be far and away the first of kings for intelligence and courage and generosity. The only good thing Herodotus records of Croesus is his honouring of the gods with plentiful and sizeable dedications (50-52; 92), yet he presents even this as an entirely ungodly action.⁴⁴ (Plutarch *de Malig.* 858D-E; tr. Bowen 1992, 37)

⁴³ Theon 90; tr. Kennedy 2003, 38-39.

⁴⁴ Ἐὼ τοίνυν ὅτι τὸν Κροῖσον ἀμαθῆ καὶ ἀλάζονα καὶ γελοῖον φήσας ἐν πᾶσιν, ὑπὸ τούτου φησίν, αἰχμαλώτου γενομένου, καὶ παιδαγωγεῖσθαι καὶ νοουθετεῖσθαι τὸν Κύρον, ὃς φρονήσει καὶ ἀρετῇ καὶ μεγαλονοίᾳ πολὺ πάντων δοκεῖ πεπρωτευκέναι τῶν βασιλέων· τῷ δὲ Κροίσῳ μηδὲν ἄλλο καλὸν ἢ τὸ τιμῆσαι τοὺς θεοὺς ἀναθήμασι πολλοῖς καὶ μεγάλοις μαρτυρήσας, αὐτὸ τοῦτο πάντων ἀσεβέστατον ἀποδείκνυσιν ἔργον.

As we also see from Plutarch's comments, he seems annoyed by the shifting portraits that Herodotus presents and that we have noted are central to the historian's *modus operandi*. In the case of Croesus specifically, Plutarch cites an important counter-example in which Croesus appears more like a Greek sage such as Solon. As a means of supporting our argument about shifting portraits through the use of humor, let us now turn to the episode with Croesus and Cyrus that Plutarch references in his remarks above.

iv. Cyrus to Croesus (1.88-89)

While the moment of Croesus' transformation from "a prize ignoramus and braggart and fool" (Plutarch *de Malig.* 858D, tr. Bowen 1992, 37) to a wise man might well be when he cries out "Solon" three times on the pyre (1.86.3), Croesus is first depicted as a sage in 1.88 when he offers a bit of free advice to Cyrus. The immediate aftermath of Croesus' advice in 1.89, however, shows the cultural dimension that underlies Croesus' initial question, and therefore helps us to characterize more accurately the nature of this encounter between Cyrus and Croesus. This anecdote is useful not only for showing how Herodotus destabilizes the very cultural stereotypes and portraits he establishes in the larger *logos*—for Croesus here is completely different from the Croesus we met earlier in 1.27 and 1.30-33—but also for the subtle ways Herodotus uses humor through the voices of his characters in an individual episode. As we turn to the initial portion of this anecdote in 1.88, then, it is important to notice how Croesus conceals the cultural stereotype of the Persians that in part prompts his question:

ὁ μὲν ταῦτα ἔλεγε, Κῦρος δὲ αὐτὸν λύσας κατεῖσε τε ἐγγὺς ἑωυτοῦ καὶ κάρτα ἐν πολλῇ προμηθίῃ εἶχε, ἀπεθώμαζέ τε ὀρέων καὶ αὐτὸς καὶ οἱ περὶ ἐκεῖνον ἑόντες πάντες. ὁ δὲ συννοίῃ ἐχόμενος ἤσυχος ἦν. μετὰ δὲ ἐπιστραφεὶς τε καὶ ἰδόμενος τοὺς Πέρσας τὸ τῶν Λυδῶν ἄστῳ κεραΐζοντας εἶπε· ὦ βασιλεῦ, κότερον λέγειν πρὸς σὲ τὰ νοέων τυγχάνω ἢ σιγᾶν ἐν τῷ παρεόντι χρή; Κῦρος δὲ μιν θαρσέοντα ἐκέλευε λέγειν ὅ τι βούλοιο. ὁ δὲ αὐτὸν εἰρώτα λέγων· **Οὗτος ὁ πολλὸς ὄμιλος τί ταῦτα πολλῇ σπουδῇ ἐργάζεται;** ὁ δὲ εἶπε· Πόλιν τε τὴν σὴν διαρπάζει καὶ χρήματα τὰ σὰ διαφορέει. Κροῖσος δὲ ἀμείβετο· Οὔτε πόλιν τὴν ἐμὴν οὔτε χρήματα τὰ ἐμὰ διαρπάζει· οὐδὲν γὰρ ἐμοὶ ἔτι τούτων μέτα· ἀλλὰ φέρουσί τε καὶ ἄγουσι τὰ σά.

Croesus said these things, and Cyrus released him and had him seated near himself. Cyrus held him in high consideration, and he himself and all those around him were amazed when they saw Croesus. But Croesus was quiet, wrapt in thought. After he turned and saw the Persians sacking the city of the Lydians, he said, “O King, may I speak to you about what I am observing or should I keep quiet right now?” Cyrus bid him to take courage and to speak whatever he wanted. And Croesus asked him, saying, **“What are all these men doing so eagerly?”** And Cyrus said, “They are sacking your city and carrying away your property.” But Croesus answered, “Neither are they sacking my city nor my property. For none of these things is still mine. On the contrary, they are carrying off your possessions as plunder.”

Croesus uses an oblique humor that results from humor that is contrary to expectation rather than aggressive. In this way, Croesus’ advice most closely resembles that of Bias/Pittacus in 1.27, who, not unimportantly, actually persuades Croesus because of the oblique manner in which he offers his instruction.⁴⁵ This should not surprise us, for Croesus has just survived the pyre and seems aware of his new subordinate status to King Cyrus. We also see Croesus’ general demeanor further by the approach he takes to offering advice. Namely, although Croesus asks for permission to share his own observation, he instead asks Cyrus to make the observation. Thus, like Bias/Pittacus, Croesus elicits a response from his addressee. Yet, while Bias/Pittacus actively deceives Croesus in order to expose the fallacy of the Lydian king’s thinking, Croesus begins with a non-threatening question to Cyrus: what

⁴⁵ Unlike Solon in 1.30-33 and Sandanis in 1.71.2-4.

are these men doing so eagerly? (Οὗτος ὁ πολλὸς ὄμιλος τί ταῦτα πολλῇ σπουδῇ ἐργάζεται;).

Croesus does not identify the men as Persians or even as Cyrus' own (i.e., “your men”), but rather offers a detached observation that makes the situation generic: a victorious group of men is plundering a fallen city. It is only after Cyrus gives the response that Croesus knows he will make—namely Cyrus thinks the men are sacking Croesus' city—that Croesus contradicts him in order to teach him by presenting the situation from a strikingly different perspective.

Although Croesus initially conceals the cultural aspect of his remarks, he reveals them later when Cyrus asks him about the reasons underlying his observation. Like Bias/Pittacus, Croesus employs a single cultural stereotype to help explain his previous advice, and thus reveals that his earlier question was targeted specifically at the Persians because of their very nature as a people (1.89.2):

Πέρσαι φύσιν ἐόντες ὑβρισταὶ εἰς ἀχρήματα: ἦν ὧν σὺ τούτους περιίδης διαρπάσαντας καὶ κατασχόντας χρήματα μεγάλα, τάδε τοι ἐξ αὐτῶν ἐπίδοξα γενέσθαι: ὃς ἂν αὐτῶν πλεῖστα κατάσχη, τοῦτον προσδέκεσθαί τοι ἐπαναστησόμενον.

Persians are naturally violent and do not have possessions. If, therefore, you overlook these men who are plundering and acquiring great possessions, this certainly will be the result: expect that whoever of them acquires the most will rise up against you.

Again like Bias/Pittacus, Croesus here uses a cultural stereotype of his addressee's own people to help broaden his perspective and to show Cyrus that if he allows his men to continue plundering, he is actually inviting a challenge to the power he has just gained. What is more, Croesus' subtle humor (through his question in 1.88) allows him to present a stereotype of the Persians to the Persian king himself—a normally dangerous type of remark—and then to offer more direct and serious advice to the Persian king

about how to correct the situation (1.89.2-3). Croesus eliminates the hostility that would have resulted had he *laughed* at Cyrus in allowing his own city to be plundered, or the potential rebuke he might have met had he immediately offered a negative stereotype of the Persians. In this way, we see how Croesus teaches Cyrus that his troops are not looting the city of the Lydians, the Other, but actually his own.

While the plundering of a city would have been a common occurrence in war, Croesus offers a strikingly new perspective on what Cyrus observes. Herodotus' portrait of Croesus has completely changed, and Croesus now draws the sorts of connections that he was not able to previously when he was blinded by his power. Moreover, by addressing an explicit stereotype of the Persians to their very king, Croesus finds a novel way to persuade Cyrus.

The anecdote reminds us of the *historical* reasons that underlie the formation and use of humor, and alerts us to how easily cultural boundaries and identities change in wars.⁴⁶ Do the poor Persians, in a sense, transform into rich Lydians in this brief moment in the narrative before the very eyes of their Persian king and his new Lydian slave and counselor?⁴⁷ Croesus' easy use of a Persian stereotype before Cyrus, as well as Cyrus' happy acceptance of Croesus' remarks about the Persians, seems to confirm this. Indeed, we find that the humor in this episode points backwards to the maxim of 1.5.4, for powerful men witness the shifting of power and *nomoi* before their eyes.

⁴⁶ Cf. the wartime shipbuilding activities of 1.27.1-5 as the focus of the interaction between Bias/Pittacus and Croesus.

⁴⁷ See Flory 1987, 93, on this moment as the transition of the Persians from noble savages to prosperous aggressors. Cf. Thomas 2000, 108.

Herodotus also reminds us to stay alert to these shifting boundaries, for without the *sophie* of men like Croesus, we might miss the import of a seemingly everyday event in war. Then again, Croesus shortly after this episode seems not to have learned his lesson from Solon, for he blames Apollo for misleading him.⁴⁸ Herodotus, therefore, demonstrates again how fluid his portraits can be.

B. The Persians

i. Cambyses to the Egyptian Priests (3.29.1-2)

In the next anecdote, Herodotus offers instruction by encouraging us to reflect on the Persian king Cambyses' use of laughter at Egyptian *nomoi*. While we have come to expect that characters' rhetorical questions in the *Histories* convey wisdom, we see here how Herodotus disproves this assumption, for Cambyses' question proves his *madness*. Thus, Cambyses' use of aggressive laughter at Egyptian customs is instructive for the negative example it provides (3.29.1-2):

ὡς δὲ ἤγαγον τὸν Ἄπιν οἱ ἱερεῖς, ὁ Καμβύσης, οἷα ἐὼν ὑπομαργότερος, σπασάμενος τὸ ἐγχειρίδιον, θέλων τύψαι τὴν γαστέρα τοῦ Ἄπιος παίει τὸν μηρόν· γελάσας δὲ εἶπε πρὸς τοὺς ἱερέας· **ὦ κακαὶ κεφαλαί, τοιοῦτοι θεοὶ γίνονται, ἔναιμοί τε καὶ σαρκώδεις καὶ ἐπαίοντες σιδηρίων;** ἄξιος μὲν γε Αἰγυπτίων οὗτός γε ὁ θεός· ἀτάρ τοι ὑμεῖς γε οὐ χαίροντες γέλωτα ἐμὲ θήσεσθε. ταῦτα εἶπας ἐνετείλατο τοῖσι ταῦτα πρήσσοι τοὺς μὲν ἱερέας ἀπομαστιγῶσαι, Αἰγυπτίων δὲ τῶν ἄλλων τὸν ἄν λάβωσι ὀρτάζοντα κτείνειν.

When the priests led the Apis, Cambyses, just like someone somewhat mad (ὑπομαργότερος), having drawn his dagger, wishing to strike the belly of the Apis, smites its thigh. And with a laugh, he said to the priests, “**O evil heads, are the gods such as this, having blood inside and made of flesh and feeling iron?** This god is worthy of the Egyptians. But to be sure you, at any rate, will not get way with making me a laughingstock.” After he said these things, he ordered those whose function it is to do this to whip the priests, and to kill whomever of the other Egyptians they caught celebrating the festival.

⁴⁸ See Lateiner 1989, 197, Harrison 2000, 42-43, and Fisher 2002, 219-220.

While Cambyses' many outrages are noteworthy for demonstrating his character, the example here when he kills the sacred Egyptian Apis bull seems to disturb Herodotus most of all because Cambyses mocks the religious *nomoi* of the Egyptians.⁴⁹ Particularly notable in this passage is how explicitly the narrative marks Cambyses' aggressive humor, which we understand from Cambyses' remarks as a "counter-attack" to the humor he *perceives* the Egyptians have directed at himself. For in their religious celebrations, he believes the Egyptians are actually mocking him and the Persians for their disastrous military expeditions.⁵⁰ Cambyses' question, then, serves to characterize the crazed tyrant himself most of all, and also reveals his paranoia that the Egyptians have directed humor at him.⁵¹

While Tim Rood argues that Cambyses' mockery of the Egyptians could be read "simply as a sign that people regard their own customs as best,"⁵² the specific way in which Cambyses mocks the Egyptians demonstrates otherwise. Had Cambyses' merely *smiled* in quiet mockery at the Egyptian customs, it seems less likely that he would have

⁴⁹ See Christ 1994, 187-188, for further discussion. Dewald observes in connection with this scene that "[t]he extensive description of Egyptian religiosity in Book 2 has helped the reader understand how shocking Cambyses' behaviour is here" (1999, 634, note to 3.27-29). Griffiths cites *Iliad* 16.745-750, when Patroclus kills Hector's charioteer Cebriones, as a parallel to this scene because both reflect "the motif of incautious malicious laughter" (1995, 40-41). A difference that Griffiths does not note, however, is the important role of religious *nomoi* in this scene. Michael Flower remarks that "the epitaph on the grave stele and the inscription on the sarcophagus of this very Apis survive, and they record that Cambyses buried the bull with elaborate funeral rites" (2006, 280). If Herodotus' version of this story lacks factual basis, there seems to be a greater likelihood that he shaped the story to portray Cambyses as a crazed tyrant. See Griffiths 1989, 70-72, on the possibility that Herodotus portrays Cambyses and Cleomenes according to conventions of "wicked ruler" tales. We can suppose that Herodotus heard more negative traditions about Cambyses from the Egyptian priests.

⁵⁰ See *Histories* 3.25-27.

⁵¹ Cf. Lang: "Where there is no response, as in the case of the Egyptians taunted by Cambyses, the chief function seems to be that of characterizing the speaker, who is certainly shown in the event to be unreasonable" (1984, 49). In my opinion, however, Cambyses seems much more than "unreasonable," but rather delusionally mad, a judgment Herodotus confirms in 3.38.

⁵² 2006, 299.

drawn Herodotus' pointed comments. As anthropological studies of humor have shown, while smiling is often tolerated, laughter is not, for it oversteps the boundaries of acceptable outward behavior toward the customs of another people.⁵³ Thus, I argue, the particular key to this narrative is Cambyses' own explicit *laughter* at the Egyptian customs (γελάσας), as well as his perception that he is the object of the Egyptians' laughter (γέλωτα).⁵⁴ What is more, Herodotus himself goes on to mention Cambyses' laughter at *nomoi* numerous times and concludes from it that the Persian king is mad.⁵⁵ Thus we see how this episode in 3.29.1-2 serves as a stepping-stone to Herodotus' more explicitly didactic expression of this point in 3.38.1-2.⁵⁶

If Cambyses' laughter marks an obviously negative type of humor, what do we learn from it? Indeed, the humor revealed by Cambyses' *reductio ad absurdum* rhetorical question in this passage is more than only a sign of his own madness as one who cannot understand others' customs.⁵⁷ While it does not teach us by exposing the absurdity of

⁵³ See Ch. 1, p. 27.

⁵⁴ Scullion (2006, 201) likewise argues for the particular importance of Cambyses' mockery: "[Herodotus'] discussion of custom supports his inference that Cambyses 'was mad in a big way' on the ground that only a madman would mock 'holy and conventional things', *hiroisi te kai nomaiouisi* (3.38.1). The mockery Herodotus has primarily in mind is Cambyses' killing of the Apis bull (3.27-30.1, 33, 64.3). He gives no sign of accepting the premise that the bull done to death is a god, and one naturally assumes that he would reject this as he rejects or doubts other epiphanies. Thus mockery even of unsound custom argues madness." See also Halliwell 2008, 18.

⁵⁵ See 3.37.2-38.2 for Herodotus' numerous references to Cambyses' laughter: *κατεγέλασε, καταγελάων, and γέλωτα*. Herodotus in his authorial voice declares that Cambyses was "greatly mad" (*ἐμάνη μεγάλως ὁ Καμβύσης*, 3.38.1). In 3.30.1, Herodotus says the Egyptians believed Cambyses went mad because he killed the Apis bull. See Thomas 2000, 34-35, on the scholarly debate about the reasons for Cambyses' madness. Cf. the narrative characterization of both Cambyses and Maeandrius as "somewhat mad" (*ὑπομαργότερος*, 3.29.1 and 3.145.2, respectively).

⁵⁶ See Christ 1994, 187-189. Cf. Deioces, who outlawed laughter in his presence (1.99.1).

⁵⁷ See 1.131.1. Cambyses is working on the assumption that gods are as Herodotus tells us that the Persians envisage them—not as anthropomorphic but as abstract forces. Cf. Scullion 2006, 202, and Rood 2006, 296.

another's logic, like the questions asked by Bias/Pittacus and Sandanis earlier, it still serves a didactic function because it warns the audience about the extreme behavior of tyrants who are so mad that they commit violence against the *nomoi* of other people. Thus, humor that takes the form of laughter at another people's most sacred religious *nomoi* transgresses acceptable behavior, and connected with this transgression is disaster.⁵⁸

Cambyses' interaction by proxy with the Ethiopian king (3.17-25) just before this passage offers an interesting contrast to this episode, for there the Ethiopian king justifiably mocks Cambyses and the Persians' *nomoi*.⁵⁹ Moreover, unlike Croesus and Xerxes who occasionally use *reductio ad absurdum* questions for wise instruction (1.88 and 7.147.2-3, respectively), Cambyses never does. John Gammie observes how Cambyses embodies the stereotype of the typical monarch Otanes presents in the Constitutional Debate (3.80): "...for some reason the historian chose to portray Cambyses as the stereotype of which the speech of Otanes is but a summary. Without exception, each one of the characteristics of the typical tyrant is exemplified by Cambyses—and in the case of some characteristics, several times over."⁶⁰

At the same time, Cambyses does exhibit wise insight at the end of his life (3.64-66), and thus Herodotus destabilizes his portrait of the Persian king he portrays here so emphatically. Again, let us consider Gammie's observations: "Herodotus's portrait seems so strangely divided: the harsh but occasionally compassionate, sober, and, at

⁵⁸ Cf. Lateiner 1977, Flory 1978, and Dewald 2006.

⁵⁹ See Ch. 3, pp. 102-115, for more.

⁶⁰ 1986, 180.

least partially, remorseful king in the framing *logoi* (3.1-15; 65-67) stands in such marked contrast to the all too conventional portrait of the erratic, power-drunk, and half-crazed (or fully mad?) king in the center (3.16-38, 60-64).⁶¹ As we have come to expect, then, we can never become too comfortable with Herodotus' portraits, for he manipulates the portrait of even the most egregiously insane Cambyses.

ii. *Xerxes to Demaratus* (7.101-105)

One of the most important didactic episodes comes in an exchange between Xerxes and Demaratus, whom Xerxes has called to ask for advice (7.101-105). Here Xerxes represents the Persians and Demaratus the Greeks and specifically the Spartans, whom he understands well from his time as their king (7.103.1-3):

ταῦτα ἀκούσας Ξέρξης γελάσας ἔφη· Δημάρητε, οἷον ἐφθέγγεσθε ἔπος, ἄνδρας χιλίους στρατιῇ τοσῆδε μαχήσεσθαι. ἄγε, εἰπέ μοι, σὺ φῆς τούτων τῶν ἀνδρῶν βασιλεὺς αὐτὸς γενέσθαι. **σὺ ὦν ἐθελήσεις αὐτίκα μάλα πρὸς ἄνδρας δέκα μάχεσθαι;** καίτοι εἰ τὸ πολιτικὸν ὑμῖν πᾶν ἐστὶ τοιοῦτον οἷον σὺ διαιρέεις, σέ γε τὸν κείνων βασιλέα πρέπει πρὸς τὸ διπλήσιον ἀντιτάσσεσθαι **κατὰ νόμους τοῦς ὑμετέρους.** εἰ γὰρ κείνων ἕκαστος δέκα ἀνδρῶν τῆς στρατιῆς τῆς ἐμῆς ἀντάξιός ἐστι, σέ δέ γε δίζημαι εἴκοσι εἶναι ἀντάξιον· καὶ οὕτω μὲν ὀρθοῖτ' ἂν ὁ λόγος ὁ παρὰ σεῦ εἰρημένος. εἰ δὲ τοιοῦτοί τε ἐόντες καὶ μεγάθεα τοσοῦτοι, ὅσοι σὺ τε καὶ οἱ παρ' ἐμὲ φοιτῶσι Ἑλλήνων ἐς λόγους, αὐχέετε τοσοῦτον, ὅρα μὴ μάτην κόμπος ὁ λόγος οὗτος εἰρημένος ἦ. ἐπεὶ φέρε ἴδω παντὶ τῷ οἰκότι· **κῶς ἂν δυναίαιτο χίλιοι ἢ καὶ μύριοι ἢ καὶ πεντακισμύριοι, ἐόντες γε ἐλεύθεροι πάντες ὁμοίως καὶ μὴ ὑπ' ἑνὸς ἀρχόμενοι, στρατῶ τοσῶδε ἀντιστήναι;** ἐπεὶ τοι πλεῦνες περὶ ἕνα ἕκαστον γινόμεθα ἢ χίλιοι, ἐόντων ἐκείνων πέντε χιλιάδων.

After he heard these things, Xerxes laughed and said, “Demaratus, what sort of statement did you utter that a thousand men would fight with such a large army? Come, tell me, you said that you were the king of these men. **Will you then be willing on the spot to fight against ten men?** Indeed, if your entire state is such as you define it, it is fitting that you, their king, should fight against twice as many according to your customs. For if each of those men is equivalent to ten men of my army, you then I want to be equivalent to twenty. And thus the statement you have made would be corrected. But if they are such a sort and so great in size as you and those Greeks who come to address me boast, make sure you haven't boasted in vain. Come now, let me look with all reasonableness: **How could 1,000 or 10,000 or 50,000 men, all alike being free and not**

⁶¹ 1986, 181.

ruled under one man, be able to contend with so large an army? Since if they are five thousand, we turn out to be more than one thousand for each one of them.

Demaratus attempts to instruct Xerxes about the *nomoi* of the Spartans so that Xerxes will understand how formidable they are. The Persian king gets caught up in his numerical superiority, however, and believes that enslavement is the only way to motivate troops to fight when they are outnumbered.⁶² Moreover, we see “code-switching” in this example in which Xerxes changes the dynamics of the exchange from formal to informal. By using the phrase ἄγε, εἰπέ μοι at the beginning of his speech, Xerxes lowers the register of the exchange so that the key of the speech act is amenable to the ethnic emphasis he incorporates throughout his response.⁶³

While Demaratus now serves Xerxes as an advisor and is part of the Persian forces, Xerxes distances himself in this speech from Demaratus. He speaks to Demaratus of *his* state (τὸ πολιτικὸν ὑμῶν πᾶν), *his* customs (κατὰ νόμους τοὺς ὑμετέρους), and contrasts them with his own (εἰ γὰρ κείνων ἕκαστος δέκα ἀνδρῶν τῆς στρατιῆς τῆς ἐμῆς ἀντάξιός ἐστι). He also reminds Demaratus that he was king of “these” men (σὺ φῆς τούτων τῶν ἀνδρῶν βασιλεὺς αὐτὸς γενέσθαι), and in this way makes Demaratus the sole authority on Spartan *nomoi*.

From the authorial comment that precedes his speech, we know that Xerxes laughs (γελάσας) when Demaratus tries to explain that the size of the Spartan force is irrelevant because Spartans band together to confront any army, no matter the size.⁶⁴ Xerxes’ first question (σὺ ὧν ἐθελήσεις αὐτίκα μάλα πρὸς ἄνδρας δέκα μάχεσθαι; “Will

⁶² See p. 131, note 18 above.

⁶³ Cf. p. 138, note 33 above on code-switching in the Solon-Croesus episode (1.30-33).

⁶⁴ As we have seen in the previous example, Cambyses also laughs in connection with his gross disregard for Egyptian *nomoi*.

you then be willing on the spot to fight against ten men?" 7.103.1) reflects well the laughing tone of his entire response and addresses distinctly the numerical disparity between the Spartans and the Persians.

Xerxes demonstrates in 7.103.3 that he is obsessed with the size of his own army and believes that numerical superiority trumps whatever determination the Spartans (or any other peoples) might present.⁶⁵ Moreover, Xerxes follows up on the issue of army size to address freedom versus slavery. Namely, he thinks it ridiculous that a free Spartan would willingly fight against numerous foes. In this way, this second *reductio ad absurdum* question shifts the focus from Persian might to the absurdity of Spartan *nomoi*, and particularly their willingness to fight at such an apparent disadvantage.

Demaratus, however, attempts to instruct Xerxes that he is correct in his assessment, to a certain extent, and in this way he tries to win over Xerxes. The Spartans are not free, but rather are enslaved to Law (ἔπεστι γάρ σφι δεσπότης νόμος, 7.104.4). While Demaratus is intellectually skillful, Xerxes still thinks Demaratus and the Spartan culture he advocates for are laughable, as we learn from Xerxes' comment in 7.103.5 (τῶν σὺ ἐὼν ἄπειρος πολλὰ φλυρῆεις). Moreover, Herodotus tells us that Xerxes laughs and makes a joke of Demaratus' explanations (Ξέρξης δὲ ἐς γέλωτά τε

⁶⁵ Sara Forsdyke cites this passage as evidence that "the Greeks attributed their victory over the Persians in part to their free and open political system" and this question in 7.103.3 "illustrates by contrast to the Greek victory that ensues, the validity of Greek belief in the military value of political freedom," which she argues is similar in Aeschylus' *Persians* (2006, 233). Moreover, she says that "the idea of a connection between political freedom and military strength probably arose following the Greek victory as a way of articulating Greek identity and maintaining panhellenic unity in the aftermath of the Persian Wars" (ibid.). In this way, Forsdyke convincingly shows how complex the political implications are that we find in Xerxes' remarks here. Cf. Konstan 1987, 62-69, esp. 66: "[Demaratus] advises Xerxes not to interest himself in the numbers of the Greeks, since they would fight no matter how few. Xerxes gets a chuckle out of this, and he sets to work calculating the number of Persians each Spartan would have to face, adding the observation that the Greeks do not even fight under a single authority (7.103.3)." Solon displays a similar fascination with numbers as a form of proof in his conversation with Croesus (1.32), though he uses numbers to warn, whereas Xerxes here uses numbers to boast.

ἔτρεψε, 7.105). By laughing at Demaratus' explanation of Spartan *nomoi*, Xerxes reveals his complete incomprehension; at the same time, Demaratus later reveals at Thermopylae (7.209.2) that he interpreted Xerxes' laughter here as aggressive, even though this is contrary to what the narrative tells us about Xerxes' actual feelings—he was not angry and sent Demaratus away civilly (οὐκ ἐποίησατο ὀργὴν οὐδεμίαν, ἀλλ' ἠπίως αὐτὸν ἀπεπέμψατο, 7.105). Therefore, we see again through the eyes of Demaratus the important role of mockery and shame in Spartan culture.⁶⁶

C. The Spartans

Aristagoras and Cleomenes (5.49-51)

Finally, I will consider the exchange between the Ionian Aristagoras and the Spartan Cleomenes. In a Spartan version of the story, as Herodotus tells us, Aristagoras tried to persuade Cleomenes that the Spartans should help the Ionians by taking on Darius and the Persians.⁶⁷ Aristagoras brought along a “bronze tablet on which there had been engraved a map of the whole earth and all the seas and all the rivers” (χάλκεον πῖνακα ἐν τῷ γῆς ἀπάσης περιόδου ἐνετέμνητο καὶ θάλασσά τε πᾶσα καὶ ποταμοὶ πάντες, 5.49.1). As Aristagoras addresses Cleomenes, he gestures to this map and, like the Samians' bag, it plays a significant role in highlighting Spartan *sophie*.

⁶⁶ (7.209.2) Ἦκουσας μὲν καὶ πρότερόν μιν, εὔτε ὀρμῶμεν ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα, περὶ τῶν ἀνδρῶν τούτων ἀκούσας δὲ γέλωτά με ἔθει λέγοντα τῆ περ ὤρων ἐκβησόμενα πρήγματα ταῦτα. On laughter and shame in Spartan culture, see David 1989 and Richer 1999. Cf. 6.67.1-3, discussed earlier in Ch. 2 on pp. 54-58.

⁶⁷ For a recent treatment of this episode, see Pelling 2007, 179-201, especially 187-201.

Aristagoras presents a long-winded and carefully articulated argument, including an appeal to the common heritage of the Ionians and Spartans.⁶⁸ He observes that the Persians—whom he identifies only as “barbarians”—are not formidable (οὔτε γὰρ οἱ βάρβαροι ἄλκιμοί εἰσι, 5.49.3). They fight with bows (τόξα) and short spears (αἰχμὴ βραχέα), and wear trousers (ἀναξυρίδας) and bonnets (κυρβασίας) into battle (5.49.3). Because of these customs, according to Aristagoras, the Persians are easy to defeat (εὐπετέες χειρωθῆναί εἰσι, 5.49.4).⁶⁹ After presenting his cultural observations, Aristagoras summarily describes the great wealth that is to be won from the Persians, who are richer than anyone else: gold, silver, bronze, rich clothes, beasts of burden and slaves (5.49.4). The Lydians, Phrygians, Syrians, Cilicians, Armenians, and Matieneans, whom Aristagoras points out on his map, likewise offer further wealth so that, by conquering the Persians, whom he describes as richer than all the rest (τοῖσι συνάπασι ἄλλοισι, 5.49.4), the Spartans would “challenge Zeus in riches” (τῷ Διὶ πλοῦτου πέρι ἐρίζετε, 5.49.7).⁷⁰ After one last brief focus on the poor land of the Spartans, Aristagoras

⁶⁸ J. M. Hall brings out the significance of Aristagoras’ plea to the Spartans as an appeal to their “blood-brothers” (ὁμαίμονας), as Hall translates. He calls this an appeal “to the same unity of blood which Herodotus later presents as one of his four defining criteria of Hellenic identity” in 8.144.2 (2002, 35).

⁶⁹ Cf. 5.97.1, where Aristagoras seems to repeat a similar speech to the Athenians, though his Athenian speech is presented much more briefly in *oratio obliqua* and without reference to Persian trousers and bonnets; the Athenians also hear how the Persians do not fight with spears and shields (ὡς οὔτε ἀσπίδα οὔτε δόρυ νομίζουσι εὐπετέες τε χειρωθῆναι εἴησαν), as opposed to what they do use, bows and short spears, as Aristagoras says here. This might represent Aristagoras’ attempt to emphasize Greek unity by showing, through inversion, their common way of fighting. Pelling suggests that “*oratio recta* tends to direct more attention to how people are talking, *oratio obliqua* to the substance of what they say (thus Hecataeus has indirect speech at 5.36 and 125, whereas the rhetorically adept Aristagoras gets direct speech at 5.30-1, 33, 49; at 8.108-9 Eurybiades has indirect, Themistocles direct speech)” (2006, 104).

⁷⁰ This same overreaching argument later persuades the Athenians (5.97.1-2), who send 20 ships, which Herodotus calls the “beginning of evils for the Greeks and barbarians” (αὐτὰ δὲ αἱ νέες ἀρχὴ κακῶν ἐγένοντο Ἑλλησὶ τε καὶ βαρβάροισι, 5.97.3). Scullion argues that Herodotus here demonstrates how the Greeks share responsibility with the Persians for the outbreak of the war: “Xerxes’ overreaching desire to make the Persian empire coextensive with ‘the aether of Zeus’ (7.8γ1.2) corresponds to Greek

ends with a rhetorical question that, by asking how the Spartans could refuse such an offer of wealth and luxury, seems to cap a perfect performance. Abruptly, the Spartan king tells Aristagoras that he will not answer him immediately, but in two days (5.50.1-3):

ἐπεῖτε δὲ ἡ κυρὴ ἡμέρη ἐγένετο τῆς ὑποκρίσιος καὶ ἦλθον ἐς τὸ συγκείμενον, εἶρετο ὁ Κλεομένης τὸν Ἀρισταγόρην ὀκοσέων ἡμερέων ἀπὸ θαλάσσης τῆς Ἰώνων ὁδὸς εἴη παρὰ βασιλέα. ὁ δὲ Ἀρισταγόρης, τᾶλλα ἐὼν σοφὸς καὶ διαβάλλων ἐκείνον εὖ, ἐν τούτῳ ἐσφάλη· χρεὸν γάρ μιν μὴ λέγειν τὸ ἐόν, βουλόμενόν γε Σπαρτιήτας ἐξαγαγεῖν ἐς τὴν Ἀσίην, λέγει δ' ὡν τριῶν μηνῶν φὰς εἶναι τὴν ἄνοδον. ὁ δὲ ὑπαρπάσας τὸν ἐπίλοιπον λόγον τὸν ὁ Ἀρισταγόρης ὄρητο λέγειν περὶ τῆς ὁδοῦ, εἶπε· ὦ ξεῖνε Μιλήσιε, ἀπαλλάσσεο ἐκ Σπάρτης πρὸ δύντος ἡλίου· οὐδένα γὰρ λόγον εὐπέεα λέγεις Λακεδαιμονίοισι, ἐθέλων σφέας ἀπὸ θαλάσσης τριῶν μηνῶν ὁδὸν ἀγαγεῖν.

When the appointed day came for the decision and they came to the agreed on place, Cleomenes asked Aristagoras how many days' journey it was from the Ionian sea to the Persian king. Aristagoras, who had been clever (σοφὸς) up to this point and was doing a good job of deceiving him, slipped up in this response. He should not have spoken the truth, if he planned to lead the Spartans to Asia, but in fact he said that the journey inland would take three months. Cleomenes cut short the rest of the speech Aristagoras was starting to make about the journey and said: "Milesian stranger, depart from Sparta before sunset. For you say nothing good to the Lacedaemonians when you wish to take them away from the sea on a three months journey."

From the start of this entire episode, there is an underlying stereotypical manner in which the two parties behave, Aristagoras representing the Ionians and Cleomenes the Spartans. After two days' time, we expect that Cleomenes might answer with a simple yes or a well-thought out response that would somehow explain why the Spartans would refuse the opportunity to achieve great wealth and power. Instead, however, the whole exchange comes down to a single, laconic question: "How far is Susa from the Ionian sea?" The narrator adds a comment that Aristagoras had been clever (σοφὸς) until this time and says that he should have lied to the Spartans if he

overreaching and Aristagoras' claim that those who support the Ionian revolt and capture Susa will 'challenge Zeus in wealth' (5.49.7)" (2006, 195). On the sensibility of the Athenians' actions, see Pelling 2007, 185-186. For parallels between Herodotus' account of the Ionian Revolt and Thucydides' Sicilian Expedition, see Kallet 2001, 87-97.

wanted to get them to march on Susa. In this way, Herodotus reduces the elaborate arguments of Aristagoras to Cleomenes' one brief inquiry, and thus shows how severely the clever Ionian commander misjudged the Spartans. Cleomenes reflects, in the brevity of his question, the stereotypical speech of the Spartans, and this encourages the audience to reflect on its brevity in contrast to the Ionian verbiage.⁷¹ Thus, the length and styles of speech reflect the cultural identities of the speakers, as well as the stereotypical speaking styles of each.⁷²

By belittling the Persians' style of fighting and dress, Aristagoras attempts to increase solidarity with the Spartans as fellow Greeks, in contrast to the Persians, who are simply called "barbarians" (βάρβαροι, 5.49.3) here.⁷³ What is more, Aristagoras is also persuasive in conjuring up a picture of the ease of conquering the Persians and all

⁷¹ Dewald here comments on the stereotypical contrast in Ionian and Spartan styles of speech: "Cleomenes here is typically Spartan in his brief reply to Aristagoras' long-winded arguments" (1998, 671 note to 5.49-51). Cf. Thucydides 1.86, where the ephor Sthenelaidas characterizes the differences between the Athenians, who are prone to make long-winded speeches and have lots of ships and money, and the Spartans, who act swiftly and powerfully and support their allies. Rood 2006, 295, importantly observes that "Herodotus himself proceeds to give in his own person the description of the route (including numbers of stages and parasangs) that Aristagoras was prevented from giving (5.52-4)."

⁷² Cf. Chiasson (2003, 16), who contrasts the appearance of οἶδα in 7.238.2, where Herodotus comments authoritatively about Persian customs and Xerxes' treatment of Leonidas' corpse, with Aristagoras' speech here: "The second example confirms, with humor and beyond doubt, that it is the voice of the *histor* (like *historie*, related etymologically to οἶδα) that speaks so emphatically in this version of the idiom. For in Book 5, with wicked irony, Herodotus places a similarly confident claim in the mouth of Aristagoras, instigator of the ill-fated Ionian Revolt. This irresponsible charlatan (as Herodotus portrays him) misrepresents himself to the Spartan king Cleomenes as a full fledged practitioner of ἱστορίη, complete with a map of the earth and the idiom of the trade, describing the Phrygians as πολυπροβατώτατοι τε ἑόντες πάντων τῶν ἐγὼ οἶδα καὶ πολυκαρπώτατοι (having the most flocks, of all the men that I myself know, and the richest harvests, 5.49.5). In addition to the emphatic subject ἐγὼ I note the impressively polysyllabic superlatives, which recall Adrastus' βαρυσυμφορώτατος; (though of course without the emotional impact that it commands in its highly charged context). In describing Adrastus' abject misery, therefore, Herodotus uses an idiom most closely paralleled by the description of superlative marvels in the realm of ethnographic research."

⁷³ Immerwahr notes how Herodotus uses βάρβαρος in a "purely ethnographic sense" early in the *Histories* (introductory sentence, 1.57-58) to mean simply "non-Greek," while later, as here, the Persians are called "the barbarians" as a slur (by a character, not Herodotus) (1966, 296-297, n. 169).

the benefits that come with that conquest. It is therefore easy to understand why Herodotus says that “up to this time, Aristagoras had been clever.”⁷⁴

Aristagoras uses bribe after bribe to encourage Cleomenes to abandon the simple, rugged life that the Spartans have always known,⁷⁵ and in fact does not give up after Cleomenes’ rejection and terse command that he remove himself from Sparta before sunset. Rather, the exchange continues in such a way that we are encouraged again to consider the importance of respect for *nomoi* that Aristagoras does not show. When he wants Cleomenes to dismiss his young daughter Gorgo from their later interaction,⁷⁶ Cleomenes refuses and tells him to speak with the girl in attendance, an action that hints at the Spartan custom for women to be treated with the respect of men. As the Ionian commander tries more explicitly to bribe Cleomenes, his daughter Gorgo says simply: “Father, the stranger will corrupt you with bribes if you don’t take your leave” (Πάτερ, διαφθερέει σε ὁ ξεῖνος, ἢν μὴ ἀποστὰς ἴης).

We also see in this exchange a demonstration of Aristagoras’ assumption that the Spartans are slow to comprehend or simply stubborn, and need an abundance of arguments as well as a physical object, here a bronze map (5.49), to win the Spartans’ assistance.⁷⁷ Like the example of the Spartans and the Samians (3.46), we see this

⁷⁴ Cf. Mardonius’ argument about the ease of the conquest of Greece at 7.5.1-3.

⁷⁵ Cf. Cyrus’ accusation of Greek susceptibility to bribes in 1.153 and Pausanias’ dinner party display in 9.82, at which he mocks Persian luxury and contrasts it with Spartan simplicity.

⁷⁶ Gorgo is later married to Leonidas (7.205) and, as Dewald observes in 7.239, “has something of her father’s ability to decipher objects” (1998, 671 note to 5.49-51), as we see at the end of this episode.

⁷⁷ Dewald compares the power of the map as an enticing object to the purple coat worn by an Ionian ambassador in 1.152. I argue that the contrast of these two episodes demonstrates more powerfully the humorous incongruities in this anecdote. For in 1.152, Herodotus simply says the Spartans were attracted to the purple garment, but ultimately unpersuaded. He does not there report through the direct speech of the characters what happened at that meeting as he does here. Professor

stereotype about Spartans called into question and disproved, but not before Herodotus has offered us an extended opportunity to consider how *sophie* is reflected more in the behavior of the Spartans than the Ionians.⁷⁸ Dewald rightly notes how the map adds to the humor of the episode:

The humour of this account comes in part from the way the map, the physical object, transmits truths its owner wants kept hidden, under Cleomenes' acute questioning. Cleomenes' acuity also stands in sharp contrast to the later credulity of 30,000 Athenians', who will fall for Aristagoras' optimistic pitch (5.97). (1998, 671, n. to 5.49-51)

I would add, moreover, that humor results from the way the map does not offer proof of what Aristagoras is saying, but rather, by its silent and almost laconic nature, renders his long-winded arguments mute and invites Cleomenes' pivotal question.⁷⁹

II. Conclusion

As I have argued in this chapter, humor often serves an important didactic function in the *Histories*. In the examples I have discussed, we see a subtle humor

Smith points out to me that the bronze map would have still been an object of great rarity and curiosity in the 490s.

⁷⁸ Powell 1989, 175, observes the vitality of the stereotype of the Spartans' lack of intelligence in the comments of numerous modern scholars and ancient authors: "Sparta is accused of 'folly', 'arrogant stupidity', 'disasterous ineptitude', 'characteristic selfishness and lack of foresight'. Her commanders were 'rather dull-witted and stubborn'. Even Grote could write of the 'slackness and stupidity' of Sparta. In this matter a strong lead was given by Thucydides. He wrote of Brasidas as 'an able speaker—for a Spartan'. Elsewhere he stated emphatically that, with their slowness and lack of (strategic) daring, the Spartans 'proved, as on many other occasions, the most convenient people in the world for the Athenians to oppose in war'. As with other reports of his on Spartan history, Thucydides' comments on the mental capacity of Spartans are interestingly close to Sparta's own propaganda, as known or reconstructible. Herodotos records the making of a long speech by Samians at Sparta, to which the Spartan authorities replied that they had forgotten the start of it and did not understand the rest." On this last example, see Ch. 2, pp. 62-63. Waters observes other "chief slights" on the Ionians in 4.142, 6.11, and 6.86 (1966, 169 n. 31).

⁷⁹ Cf. Dewald 1993, 64, who characterizes this anecdote as a place where "Herodotus allows himself overt amusement as narrator, when the attempted manipulation of an object fails to work as the manipulator had initially intended." Later, she remarks that "Aristagoras' πίναξ...is translated into a number, and Herodotus finds it amusing that its interpreter is the very man who should have been most interested in keeping the object suggestively silent" (ibid.). See also Munson 2001, 209-211.

(usually contrary to expectation and sometimes aggressive) that draws our attention to customs and cultural identities. Wise advisors, like Bias/Pittacus, Sandanis and Croesus (in 1.88) skillfully use incongruous humor as a way of making their advice more palatable, especially in the presence of a monarch, and use questions as a way of inviting his (and our own) active thought. In this way, humor helps to challenge rigid thought obliquely, as we saw especially in the case of Solon, whose examples of fortunate men challenge Croesus not only because they are ordinary citizens, but also because they are decidedly Greek. Therefore, I suggest that Solon, who offers his examples of the Athenian Tellus and the Argive Cleobis and Biton in the context of his *world-wide* travels, demonstrates a strikingly ethnocentric perspective that further challenges Croesus. In the case of Cambyses and Xerxes, Herodotus invites us to reflect on the inappropriateness of their laughter at the customs of others. Finally, in the case of Cleomenes and Aristagoras, we find an instance of unintended instruction, in which the truth Cleomenes wants to know emerges, with the aid of humor, at the expense of Aristagoras' elaborate spiel and his truly didactic map.

CHAPTER FIVE: MEMORIALIZING HUMOR

As I have shown, characters in the *Histories* use various forms of humor as they attempt to understand their own identities and the identities of other peoples. Derision, witty retorts, acts of humorous deception, and didactic humor help to make the cultural conflicts of the Persian Wars more memorable; in addition, in certain episodes humor is even more closely tied to the idea of memorial, sometimes associated with physical monuments, but more often with characters' lapidary words that become their own kind of *erga*.¹ In this way, these anecdotes simultaneously reflect the oral tradition from which they were taken and transcend the narrative.

I begin my discussion by returning to Herodotus' proem. Here, Herodotus memorializes the past by including brief aetiologies of previous wars between the East and West. He elaborates in an expected way to show how the conflict between the Greeks and the Persians fits into the larger pattern of Greek wars with other "barbarians." At the same time, however, Herodotus shows how his own inquiries can be playfully and radically different:

One might call [Herodotus'] use of humour a point of intersection between 'story' and 'history'. And if our interpretation of the opening chapters is right he does more: he points to one of the ways by which to read his book. For instance, whatever one's opinion of the origin or the source of the first five chapters may be, the salient point is that Herodotus opened his work with them and wrote or 'edited' them in a certain manner. As they stand they are his and only his, whether or not he found them in an assumed Persian source, discussed the matter with λόγοι of whatever description,

¹ Cf. Immerwahr 1960 on *ergon* in Herodotus and Thucydides.

composed them as a free composition or whatever else scholars may think. (Shimron 1989, 70)²

While Shimron does not explore the significance of Herodotus' references to Persian and Phoenician *logioi* in the proem, Dewald argues that because Herodotus adopts these foreign perspectives, he makes familiar Greek mythology exotic and rationalized:

...for those who want to think more deeply, these stories of reciprocal violent abduction, rationalized and stripped of their literary embellishments, present the forcible exchange of women as a model for the ambiguity of resulting cultural identities—how will their children identify themselves, or be identified by others? In the rationalized, non-mythic way these *logoi*, or stories, are presented here, at the beginning of the *Histories*, they serve as a warning that very often in what we are about to read things will not be as simple as they first seem. Greek myth here has become exotic and at the same time rationalized, by being looked at temporarily through Persian and Phoenician eyes. (1998, 597, note to 1.1)

Scholars like Dewald and Shimron show us how important the opening chapters are for understanding the rest of Herodotus' *Histories*. We might even say that Herodotus offers us, with the aid of humor, a proleptic memorial of what his own account will bring. Indeed, the subtle humor of the proem, apparent in Herodotus' tongue-in-cheek tone, functions as a narrative tool with which he skillfully manipulates tradition.³ He memorializes the background of the Persian Wars by making it novel and

² Cf. also Shimron's Ch. 3, "Myth, Mythology, and Mythography" (1989, 17-25). Dewald 1998, 597 note to 1.1, and others have called into question the extent to which the accounts are actually Persian: "H[erodotus] has begun by narrating what Persian *logioi*, or 'experts', have told him. One has to decide whether to take him at his word here, or to see this statement as merely part of the joke, since it might well have been obvious to H[erodotus]'s audience that the stories the Persian *logioi* tell are Greek ones." How and Wells (1912/1928), argue that "H[erodotus]'s story is decidedly Greek, and not Persian, in colouring: cf. vi.54; vii.150.2 for a like (supposed) Persian acquaintance with Greek myths; a similar knowledge is attributed to the Egyptians ii.91.5. Such combinations certainly come from Greek sources, not native ones." See also Asheri 2007, 74, who calls the Persian and Phoenician 'sources' "pure invention and a literary convention."

³ Because numerous scholars have already established the humorous dimension to the proem, I will not devote time to reestablishing the proem's humorous nature. See How and Wells 1912/1928; Gomme 1954; Lennep 1969; Casevitz 1985; Shimron 1989; Dewald 1990, 1998, 2006; Lateiner 1989 and 2002. I have adopted Dewald's apt description of Herodotus' narrative presentation of the four abductions as "tongue-in-cheek" (1999, 596-597).

even more memorable through a “humorous arabesque”⁴ that calls our attention to the differences in peoples’ customs.⁵ What is more, Herodotus shows us early on how humor will function in the context of *nomoi*, for we witness how the Persians find the Greeks’ anger over the custom of women-snatching a ridiculous reason for going to war with Troy. Therefore, Herodotus offers here a model for the way he will incorporate humor in his presentations of different peoples’ customs through the eyes of his characters.

As we have often found, Plutarch offers important insights about Herodotus’ humor in his essay on Herodotus’ malice. In the case of the proem, Plutarch seems outraged at Herodotus’ narrative presentation, particularly in reference to the Trojan War:

Πρῶτα δὴ πάντων ὡσπερ ἄφ’ Ἑστίας ἀρξάμενος Ἰοῦς τῆς Ἰνάχου θυγατρὸς, ἦν πάντες Ἕλληνες ἐκτεθειῶσθαι νομίζουσι ταῖς τιμαῖς ὑπὸ τῶν βαρβάρων καὶ καταλιπεῖν ὄνομα πολλαῖς μὲν θαλάτταις, πορθμῶν δὲ τοῖς μεγίστοις ἄφ’ αὐτῆς διὰ τὴν δόξαν, ἀρχὴν δὲ καὶ πηγὴν τῶν ἐπιφανεστάτων καὶ βασιλικωτάτων γενῶν παρασχεῖν, ταύτην ὁ γενναῖος ἐπιδοῦναί φησιν ἑαυτὴν Φοῖνιξι φορητοῖς, ὑπὸ τοῦ ναυκλήρου διαφθαρεῖσαν ἐκουσίως καὶ φοβουμένην μὴ κύουσα φανερὰ γένηται. Καὶ καταψεύδεται Φοινίκων ὡς ταῦτα περὶ αὐτῆς λεγόντων, Περσῶν δὲ τοὺς λογίους μαρτυρεῖν φήσας ὅτι <τὴν Ἰοῦν> μετ’ ἄλλων γυναικῶν οἱ Φοίνικες ἀφαρπάσειαν, εὐθὺς ἀποφαίνεται γνώμην τὸ κάλλιστον ἔργον καὶ μέγιστον τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἀβελτερίᾳ τὸν Τρωικὸν πόλεμον γενέσθαι διὰ γυναικᾶ φαύλην. «Δῆλον γάρ, φησίν, ὅτι, εἰ μὴ αὐταὶ ἐβούλοντο, οὐκ ἂν ἠρπάζοντο». Καὶ τοὺς θεοὺς τοίνυν ἀβέλτερα ποιεῖν λέγωμεν, ὑπὲρ τῶν Λεύκτρου θυγατέρων βιασθειῶν μηνίοντας Λακεδαιμονίοις καὶ κολάζοντας Αἴαντα διὰ τὴν Κασάνδρας ὕβριν·

Herodotus makes his start on his own hearth, as it were, with Io daughter of Inachus (1.1.3). The universal Greek opinion is that non-Greeks have deified her in their worship, that her fame has bestowed her name on many seas and on major straits, and that she has been the fountainhead of distinguished royal families. Our excellent author says (5.2) she gave herself up to Phoenician traders when she had been seduced by their captain, with her own consent, and was afraid of the pregnancy starting to show. That, he falsely alleges, is the Phoenician tale of Io. After claiming “learned

⁴ Dewald’s characterizing phrase (1990, 220). Cf. Lateiner’s description of the proem as “a curious and humorous game with the audience” (2002, 376).

⁵ Benardete brings out this point well (1970, 9).

Persians” (1.1.1) in evidence for the story that Io was carried off by the Phoenicians with other women, he at once reveals his view, that the greatest and most glorious deed of Greece, the Trojan war, was a piece of folly caused by a worthless woman; it is plain, he says (4.2), that no young woman allows herself to be abducted if she does not wish to be. Are we then to say that the gods too were acting in folly when they were angry with the Spartans for the violation of the daughters of Leuctrus and when they punished Ajax for his violation of Cassandra?

(Plutarch *de Malig.* 856 F; tr. Bowen 1992, 29)

Plutarch suggests what sort of memorial he thinks that Herodotus has left: a frivolous account of serious Greek tradition that belittles “the greatest and most glorious deed of Greece” (τὸ κάλλιστον ἔργον καὶ μέγιστον τῆς Ἑλλάδος) as a “piece of folly caused by a worthless woman” (ἀβελτερία...διὰ γυναῖκα φαύλην, *de Malig.* 856 F, tr. Bowen 1992, 29). Plutarch’s comments also illuminate for us the cultural dimension of Herodotus’ humor by contrasting the “universal Greek opinion” (πάντες Ἕλληνας...νομίζουσι) about “non-Greeks” (βαρβάρων) with that of Herodotus himself, whom Plutarch seems to be slighting with the term γενναῖος.⁶ Plutarch’s bitter *reductio ad absurdum* rhetorical question at the end of the excerpt also reinforces the general tone of his remarks about Herodotus’ proem. While I think that Plutarch misinterprets Herodotus’ malicious intent, he does draw our attention to an aspect of Herodotus’ method. Specifically, he shows how Herodotus manipulates cultural perspectives and does not always present the past in a way that we might anticipate.⁷

⁶ For the ironical sense of γενναῖος, cf. D.H. 7.46 (*LSJ*).

⁷ Cf. Dewald 1990, 220: “For all its humor, the proem suggests that it will not always be easy in the *Histories* of Herodotus to tell the Same from the Other.” See also Shimron 1989, 70: “A general conclusion will be to warn against applying too rigid criteria to his work. At least this much should be clear that he applies humor impartially, wherever his sympathies or antipathies may lie. If so, it is advisable to be careful about his assumed political and other inclinations. If he is impartial when talking with tongue in cheek, might he not be a little detached from his objects of love—let alone his hates—also when talking in earnest?”

I. Memorializing Humor Associated with Physical Monuments

Some of the most memorable accounts of the Egyptian *logos* incorporate a variety of humor that helps to characterize the Egyptian people and their *nomoi*. What reader of Herodotus does not remember the slapstick account of Rhampsinitus' treasury (2.121) or the stelae Sesostri inscribed with female genitalia (αἰδοῖα γυναικὸς προσενέγραφε, 2.102) to commemorate those peoples he conquered easily and who did not put up a fight?⁸ We find that the humor in each of these episodes is connected to physical monuments, and in the case of Egypt especially, Herodotus focuses more on monuments than he does in his descriptions of any other locale.⁹ Perhaps second in its share of monuments is Babylon, and it is here that Herodotus presents one of the most memorable examples of a humor that characterizes people's cultural identities through their unique monuments.¹⁰ The story of the Babylonian queen Nitocris' tomb helps, on one level, to characterize the Babylonians, and reminds us of how the clash of cultures is naturally tied to warfare. At the same time, the episode invites us to reflect on the typical connection between monarchs' monuments and their megalomania, and to consider whether Nitocris fits this model.¹¹

⁸ On Sesostri's stelae in the context of Herodotus' use of epigraphic evidence, see Osborne 2002, 511-513, and West 1985. Cf. the destabilizing anecdote in which the priest of Hephaestus forbids Darius to erect a statue of himself in front of statues Sesostri had dedicated. As the priest explained, Sesostri defeated not only as many peoples as had Darius, but also the Scythians, whom Darius had not conquered. According to Herodotus, Darius conceded this point to the priest (2.110).

⁹ On the connection between the megalomania of kings and their monuments, see Christ 1994, 173 n. 19. Professor Smith reminds me of Samos, which Herodotus discussed for its three great engineering projects (3.60).

¹⁰ I explored the idea of the clustering of Egyptian monuments as physical examples of *erga* as well as the ways they encourage the audience to consider the massive Athenian building program in my master's thesis, *Associative Thought in Herodotus' Account of the Egyptian Erga* (Chapel Hill, 2000).

¹¹ For more on the connection between the megalomania of kings and their monuments, see Christ 1994, 173 n. 19.

The Tomb of the Babylonian Queen Nitocris (1.187)

In his article on kings and tyrants in Herodotus, John Gammie speaks dismissively of the entire episode involving the Babylonian queen Nitocris (1.187) as an “anecdote [that] seems more designed to amuse than to portray Darius as presumptuous” (1986, 182).¹² Like Gammie, other scholars have paid little attention to the importance and implications of the humor involved in the interaction between the two monarchs in this anecdote. As we will see, the queen’s inscribed words help to memorialize her tomb, her own cleverness, and the greed of Darius (1.187):

ἡ δ’ αὐτὴ αὐτὴ βασιλεία καὶ ἀπάτην τοιήνδε τινὰ ἐμηχανήσατο. ὑπὲρ τῶν μάλιστα λεωφόρων πυλέων τοῦ ἄστεος τάφον ἐωυτῇ κατεσκευάσατο μετέωρον ἐπιπολῆς αὐτέων τῶν πυλέων, ἐνεκόλαψε δὲ ἐς τὸν τάφον γράμματα λέγοντα τάδε· τῶν τις ἐμεῦ ὕστερον γινομένων Βαβυλῶνος βασιλέων ἦν σπανίση χρημάτων, ἀνοίξας τὸν τάφον λαβέτω ὅκόσα βούλεται χρήματα· μὴ μέντοι γε μὴ σπανίσας γε ἄλλως ἀνοίξῃ· οὐ γὰρ ἄμεινον. οὗτος ὁ τάφος ἦν ἀκίνητος μέχρι οὗ ἐς Δαρείον περιήλθε ἡ βασιληίη. Δαρείω δὲ καὶ δεινὸν ἐδόκεε εἶναι τῆσι πύλῃσι ταύτῃσι μηδὲν χρᾶσθαι καὶ χρημάτων κειμένων καὶ αὐτῶν τῶν γραμμάτων ἐπικαλομένων μὴ οὐ λαβεῖν αὐτά. τῆσι δὲ πύλῃσι ταύτῃσι οὐδὲν ἐχρᾶτο τοῦδε εἵνεκα, ὅτι ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς οἱ ἐγίνετο ὁ νεκρὸς διεξελαύνοντι. ἀνοίξας δὲ τὸν τάφον εὗρε χρήματα μὲν οὐ, τὸν δὲ νεκρὸν καὶ γράμματα λέγοντα τάδε· εἰ μὴ ἄπληστός τε ἕας χρημάτων καὶ αἰσχροκερδής, οὐκ ἂν νεκρῶν θήκας ἀνέωγες. αὕτη μὲν νυν ἡ βασιλεία τοιαύτη τις λέγεται γενέσθαι.

This same queen also devised the following trick. Over the gates of the town’s most frequented thoroughfare, she fashioned a tomb for herself in mid-air above the gates themselves. She had these words carved onto the tomb, “Whatever king of Babylon later than I needs money should open the tomb and take however much money he wishes. No one should open it if he is not short of money.” This tomb was undisturbed until the time when the kingdom came to Darius. It seemed a terrible thing to Darius not to use these gates with both money lying there and with the words themselves calling not to take it. He could not use these gates because he would be passing his head under a corpse as he went through. After he opened the tomb, he did not find money, but a corpse and the following words: “If you were not insatiate of money and shamefully greedy, you would not open the tombs of corpses.” Now this queen is said to have proven herself such a woman as this.

¹² Cf. West (1985, 296), “Even more unlikely are the inscriptions from the tomb of the (fabulous) Babylonian queen Nitocris, which rebuked Darius for his greed (1.187); these are simply part of the legend of Darius’ avarice (3.89.3), and need not detain us.” On the historicity of the anecdote and the related source traditions, particularly Zoroastrian, see Dillery 1992.

Like Amasis with his footbath-turned-religious statue, the Babylonian queen Nitocris plays a purposeful practical joke here.¹³ Nitocris, however, sets up and reveals the trick not through the tomb alone, but also through the tomb's exterior and interior inscriptions. Thus, the inscriptions serve the same function in this tale as do Amasis' words in the account of his footbath. The tomb's position above the gates initially attracts interest, and the exterior inscription offers the tantalizing bait that encourages the reader of the inscription to subjugate the idea of the tomb as a funerary monument to the idea of it housing treasure. In this way, the tomb's exterior inscription serves as a touchstone for its reader's character. Herodotus' text adds another layer of memorialization to the story when it tells us that no one, including most significantly any Babylonian king, had disturbed the tomb before Darius (οὗτος ὁ τάφος ἦν ἀκίνητος μέχρι οὗ ἐξ Δαρεῖον περιῆλθε ἡ βασιληΐη). In this way, Herodotus invites us to scrutinize Darius' actions and to consider why they are worth recounting.

As the anecdote plays out, we discover how the physical artifacts—the tomb and its inscriptions—offer lingering proof of both the queen's *sophie* and Darius' greed. The objects allow the dead queen to chastise and mock Darius *in perpetuum*, and Herodotus' text adds, not insignificantly, the most important memorializing record of the account of Nitocris and Darius. As Nitocris' hidden inscription reveals, Darius' violation of a tomb reflects his individual greed and more generally the Persian *nomos* for acquisition.¹⁴ Throughout this entire account, we find a complex web of warfare, cultural conflict, powerful leaders, monuments, life, death, and humor.

¹³ For further discussion of Amasis, see Ch. 3, pp. 86-94.

¹⁴ Cf. the Ethiopian king's comments on the Persian desire for acquisition (3.21). See Ch. 3, pp. 102-115, for further discussion of this episode.

In her discussion of the tale of the Babylonian queen Nitocris (1.187), Leslie Kurke observes the narrative's focus on Nitocris over Darius, and especially her cleverness in creating an evolving memorial:

In a sense, Nitocris' tomb is a paradox made concrete, a 'self-consuming artifact' that invites its own desecration. Yet the queen's foresight and the double inscription she leaves behind, outside and inside the tomb, appropriate the tomb's violation and transform it into her own triumph. Thus, rather than defacing her memory, the opening of her tomb triggers her enduring remembrance through her own words (γράμματα λέγοντα τάδε) and the narrative in which they are embedded (in this case, Herodotus's own account). Nitocris has the last word, and it is thus appropriate that the paragraph closes with her characterization.

In all this, Darius is merely the stooge, first of the clever queen and then of Herodotus's narrative reenactment of the trick. Still, as we have seen, it is no accident that of all the Persian kings, it is Darius who takes the queen up on her offer. In his single-minded pursuit of gain, Darius quite cheerfully violates the memorials of the dead—their peaceful rest and the remembrance that comes to them from their tombs. By this violation he earns the designation ἄπληστος...χρημάτων ("insatiate of money") and αἰσχροκερδής ("greedy for base gain"). (1999, 84-85)

As Kurke points out, Darius provides the most definitive proof of his insatiable greed when he violates sacred funerary *nomoi*.¹⁵ At the same time, however, the Persian king's violation does not result in the desecration of the tomb so much as in the "triumph" of the queen, as Kurke puts it. We see that the queen's hidden inscription makes lapidary the derisive comments the queen inscribed while still alive, and in this way memorializes her *sophie* and wit.

Nitocris' hidden inscription indicates that she possesses such a level of *sophie* that she seems to foresee a Persian conquest, part of her reason for contriving this trick. Kurke characterizes the Persian king correctly when she says that "Darius is merely the stooge, first of the clever queen and then of Herodotus's narrative

¹⁵ Kurke also has a brief discussion on the parallels between Darius and Polycrates (3.123.1 and 3.72) in this regard, and notes that they "are the only two rulers in the *Histories* Herodotus explicitly says coined money" (1999, 102).

reenactment of the trick,” for we see that just as the narrative emphasizes the *sophie* of the queen, so too it offers an unflattering portrait of Darius.¹⁶ In this way, Herodotus casts a shadow on the extent of Darius’ victory over Babylon, perhaps to foreshadow the impending death of Cyrus by the clever and vengeful Massagetan queen Tomyris (1.214).

The story of Nitocris does not end with this anecdote, however. As scholars have noted, Herodotus explicitly compares the Egyptian queen Nitocris with the Babylonian queen Nitocris: τῆ δὲ γυναικὶ οὐνομα ἦν, ἣτις ἐβασίλευσε, τό περ τῆ Βαβυλωνίῃ, Νίτωκρις, 2.100.2.¹⁷ Because Herodotus presents the Babylonian queen before the Egyptian queen, he encourages us to consider the Egyptian queen’s actions in light of the Babylonian queen’s actions. With her trick, the Egyptian queen exacts revenge from those involved in her brother’s murder. She invites them to her new underground dining chamber and then floods it with a river she diverts into it through a secret channel. Also unlike the Babylonian queen, the Egyptian queen does not revel in her craftiness once the trick is performed, but instead, as Herodotus tells us, “she jumped into a chamber full of ashes to escape punishment” (ρίψαι ἐς οἴκημα σποδοῦ

¹⁶ Interestingly, Plutarch catalogues this anecdote under Darius, and not the Babylonian queen, in his *Apophthegmata regum* (Stadter 2008, 55 n. 10). This may reflect Plutarch’s interpretation of the scene, namely that it emphasizes the greed of Darius over the *sophie* of the queen.

¹⁷ See, e.g., Munson 2001, 51-52. Flory 1987, 43, also notes the parallels between the Egyptian queen Nitocris and Massagetan queen Tomyris, both clever and vengeful queens who employ fatal banquets. The type of *dolos* in each, which is used to take revenge for a family member of the queen, the brother and the son, respectively, also strengthens the connections between the Egyptian Nitocris and the Massagetan Tomyris. Immerwahr notes the parallelism between Cyrus’ campaign against the Massagetae (1.201-216) and the preceding Babylonian *logos*, which he argues “underlines the contrast between Cyrus’ greatest achievement and his destruction” (1966, 93). Munson points out that “homonymy may be a sign of substantial similarities between the name bearers,” and cites, in addition to Nitocris, the examples of Cleisthenes (5.69.1 and 5.67.1) and Smerdis (3.61-80) as particularly noteworthy (2005, 47 n. 83).

πλέον, ὄκως ἀτιμώρητος γένηται, 2.100.4).¹⁸ Thus, Herodotus offers the Egyptian queen as a foil for the Babylonian queen, and the effect is primarily destabilizing. Here, just like the different kinds of tricks I discussed in Ch. 3 (pp. 73-121), we never know how a trick will turn out. If we were comfortable with the image of the Babylonian Nitocris' witty retort to Darius, here, only a little later in the text, the Egyptian Nitocris' trick violates our expectations for witty humor and we are left to reflect on the way the trick so rapidly transformed into deadly vengeance.¹⁹

So, what does Herodotus memorialize in his account of the Babylonian queen Nitocris' tomb? To be sure, the text encourages us to remember the trick as an indication of the Babylonian queen's character, for he ends the tale with a summary phrase immediately following his presentation of her tomb's interior inscription: "Now this queen is said to have proven herself such a woman as this" (αὕτη μὲν νυν ἡ βασίλεια τοιαύτη τις λέγεται γενέσθαι).²⁰ In addition to the character of Nitocris, we also remember her physical tomb with its memorable inscriptions, as well as the greed of Darius, who embodies the Persian *nomos* for acquisition.

Moreover, Herodotus memorializes in the episode more generally the clash of cultures, the feistiness of the conquered vis-à-vis their conquerors, and the comeuppance of imperialists. In the cases of both the Babylonian and Egyptian queen, Herodotus' effort to memorialize the tricks themselves is also significant, for by

¹⁸ Flory argues that in her suicide, the Egyptian Nitocris "recalls the nobility of Arion and Prexaspes and thus illustrates the most positive moral side of the 'clever, vengeful woman'" (1987, 43).

¹⁹ Cf. Alexander and the Persian Ambassadors (5.18-22; discussed in Ch. 3, pp. 115-120).

²⁰ Kuhrt argues that this phrase implies that Herodotus found this story in general circulation (2002, 478).

recounting them and reenacting them in his text, he encourages us to reflect on them and the various forms they take.

II. Memorializing Humor Associated with Battles

Based upon the anthropological argument that individuals use humor especially in times of war,²¹ we should not be surprised to find significant examples of humor associated with Herodotus' battle descriptions. But how does humor function in the context of serious and dramatic military descriptions? Let us begin our inquiry by considering the thoughts of Thomas Harrison. In his chapter entitled "The Persian Invasions," Harrison often cites passages that incorporate humor without identifying the humor, generally or specifically.²² In the following excerpt, however, we find that even Harrison cannot deny how memorable various forms of humor are in this military context:

The witticisms of the Spartan Dieneces are characteristic of a brand of smart repartee that runs through Herodotus' account of the war. 'Themistocles', the Corinthian Adeimantus warns, 'those who in races jump the gun are whipped'; 'but those who are left behind', Themistocles retorts, 'win no prizes' (8.59; cf. 8.61, 125). Megacreon of Abdera similarly advised the Abderites, crippled by the costs of feeding Xerxes' forces, to give thanks to the gods that Xerxes demanded only one meal a day (7.120). (2002, 563).

Harrison here reminds us of several episodes we have already discussed, and also points to a larger trend in Herodotus' account of war that we are bringing into

²¹ For further discussion, see Ch. 1, pp. 42-44.

²² Harrison's unconvincing acknowledgement of the *Histories'* humor is punctuated by his jab at Shimron's important 1989 study, which he calls "appropriately humourless" (2000, 6 n. 24). For criticism of Harrison's failure to acknowledge Herodotus' humor, see Lateiner 2002 (cf. Introduction, p. 2, n. 2). In this regard, Harrison's remarks about (or lack of remarks about) humor in his 2000 study on religion in Herodotus are reminiscent of Plutarch in his essay on Herodotus' malice: while actively rejecting Herodotus' humor, Harrison in fact identifies important instances of humor.

focus here. As we reflect on major battles in the text, we find humor in discrete anecdotes where characters utter memorable remarks. What is more, we do not find humor inappropriately in the middle of battle descriptions, but rather before the combat has begun or after it has concluded. As evidence of this, we have only to think of Themistocles' remarks after the battle of Salamis (8.125.1-8.126.1),²³ mentioned above, the Pitanean commander Amompharetus' boulder vote before the beginning of the Battle of Plataea not to retreat (9.55), and Pausanias' display of a Persian versus a Laconian meal to the Greek commanders after the battle of Plataea (9.82).²⁴ Yet, it is hardly satisfying or enlightening to say only that the battle descriptions contain "smart repartee," as Harrison does above. Rather, we must ask as few scholars have, "What is the *purpose* of the humor?"

Some of the most prominent examples of humor associated with a battle are found in Herodotus' account of Thermopylae (7.207-226). As Gareth Morgan has remarked, "[Herodotus] has immense skill in alternately tautening and relaxing the tensions of his writing... [and t]he Thermopylae episode is an outstanding example of this."²⁵ While humor may seem odd in conjunction with the disaster there, Morgan's characterization of Herodotus' balance of tension and relaxation points to the way humor operates in the dramatic account and helps to make it one of the most memorable in the entire *Histories*. At the same time, Morgan's characterization of the

²³ For further discussion, see Ch. 2, pp. 65-68.

²⁴ For more on this episode, see Dewald 2006, 149; Tritle 2006, 219; and David 1989, 2-4.

²⁵ Morgan 1976, 75.

Thermopylae narrative also reminds us of Amasis' bow metaphor (2.173.3-4),²⁶ for in conjunction with the serious narrative there are moments of purposeful humor.

The first two examples precede the start of the battle, where the humor is best understood according to incongruity and relief theories of humor. In the final example after the battle has ended, we find ridicule directed at Xerxes, who tries to trick the Greeks into thinking there are fewer Persian casualties than there actually are. Let us now turn to the first of the three anecdotes: the famous description of Xerxes' and Demaratus' conversation about the "strange" behavior of the Spartans.

A. Thermopylae: Xerxes and Demaratus (7.208-210)

Just as he is in 7.101-104,²⁷ Xerxes is baffled by Spartan actions in 7.208-210 and asks Demaratus to help him understand. The following episode, rich in ethnographic content, shows well the role humor plays to confirm the character of the Spartans that Demaratus has already described to Xerxes. Much like the way that Herodotus' narrative isolates Cambyses for our scrutiny as he laughs at Egyptian religious *nomoi* (3.29.1-2),²⁸ so too is the humor here internal to the text. While a major focus in this account is the Spartans' behavior and its way of foreshadowing their courage in the deadly battle to come, the narrative also focuses our attention specifically on Xerxes'

²⁶ See Ch. 3, pp. 91-93, for further discussion.

²⁷ See Ch. 4, pp. 151-154, for further discussion.

²⁸ See Ch. 4, pp. 147-151, for further discussion.

reaction to the Spartans' behavior, as well as the serious consequences of his internal and aggressive laughter at the Spartans' *nomoi* before battle (7.208-210):²⁹

(208) ταῦτα βουλευομένων σφέων ἔπεμπε Ξέρξης κατάσκοπον ἰπέα ιδέσθαι ὀκόσοι εἰσὶ καὶ ὅ τι ποίειεν. ἀκηκόεε δὲ ἔτι ἐὼν ἐν Θεσσαλίῃ ὡς ἀλισμένη εἶη ταῦτη στρατιῇ ὀλίγη, καὶ τοὺς ἡγεμόνας ὡς εἶησαν Λακεδαιμόνιοι τε καὶ Λεωνίδης, ἐὼν γένος Ἡρακλείδης. ὡς δὲ προσήλασε ὁ ἰπεὺς πρὸς τὸ στρατόπεδον, ἐθηεῖτό τε καὶ κατῶρα πᾶν μὲν οὐ τὸ στρατόπεδον· τοὺς γὰρ ἔσω τεταγμένους τοῦ τείχεος, τὸ ἀνορθώσαντες εἶχον ἐν φυλακῇ, οὐκ οἶά τε ἦν κατιδέσθαι· ὁ δὲ τοὺς ἔξω ἐμάνθανε, τοῖσι πρὸ τοῦ τείχεος τὰ ὄπλα ἔκειτο. ἔτυχον δὲ τοῦτον τὸν χρόνον Λακεδαιμόνιοι ἔξω τεταγμένοι. τοὺς μὲν δὴ ὥρα γυμναζομένους τῶν ἀνδρῶν, τοὺς δὲ τὰς κόμας κτενιζομένους. ταῦτα δὴ θεώμενος ἐθώμαζε καὶ τὸ πλῆθος ἐμάνθανε. μαθὼν δὲ πάντα ἀτρεκέως ἀπήλαυνε ὀπίσω κατ' ἠσυχίην· οὔτε γὰρ τις ἐδίωκε ἀλογίης τε ἐκύρησε πολλῆς· ἀπελθὼν τε ἔλεγε πρὸς Ξέρξην τά περ ὀπώπεε πάντα.

(209) ἀκούων δὲ Ξέρξης οὐκ εἶχε συμβαλέσθαι τὸ ἐόν, ὅτι παρεσκευάζοντο ὡς ἀπολεόμενοι τε καὶ ἀπολέοντες κατὰ δύναμιν· ἀλλ' αὐτῷ γελοῖα γὰρ ἐφαίνοντο ποίειν, μετεπέμψατο Δημάρητον τὸν Ἀρίστωνος, ἐόντα ἐν τῷ στρατοπέδῳ. ἀπικόμενον δὲ μιν εἰρώτα Ξέρξης ἕκαστα τούτων, ἐθέλων μαθεῖν τὸ ποιούμενον πρὸς τῶν Λακεδαιμονίων. ὁ δὲ εἶπε· Ἡκουσας μὲν καὶ πρότερόν μεν, εὔτε ὀρμῶμεν ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα, περὶ τῶν ἀνδρῶν τούτων· ἀκούσας δὲ γέλωτά με ἔθβευ λέγοντα τῇ περ ὤρων ἐκβησόμενα πρήγματα ταῦτα. ἐμοὶ γὰρ τὴν ἀληθείην ἀσκέειν ἀντία σεῦ, ὦ βασιλεῦ, ἀγὼν μέγιστός ἐστι. ἄκουσον δὲ καὶ νῦν. οἱ ἄνδρες οὗτοι ἀπικάται μαχησόμενοι ἡμῖν περὶ τῆς ἐσόδου καὶ ταῦτα παρασκευάζονται. νόμος γὰρ σφι οὕτω ἔχων ἐστί· ἐπεὰν μέλλωσι κινδυνεύειν τῇ ψυχῇ, τότε τὰς κεφαλὰς κοσμέονται. ἐπίστασο δέ· εἰ τούτους τε καὶ τὸ ὑπομένον ἐν Σπάρτῃ καταστρέψαι, ἔστι οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἔθνος ἀνθρώπων τὸ σέ, βασιλεῦ, ὑπομενέει χεῖρας ἀνταειρόμενον· νῦν γὰρ πρὸς βασιληίην τε καλλίστην τῶν ἐν Ἑλλήσσι προσφέρειαι καὶ ἄνδρας ἀρίστους. κάρτα τε δὴ Ξέρξῃ ἄπιστα ἐφαίνετο τὰ λεγόμενα [εἶναι] καὶ δευτέρα ἐπειρώτα ὄντινα τρόπον τοσοῦτοι ἐόντες τῇ ἐωυτοῦ στρατιῇ μαχήσονται. ὁ δὲ εἶπε· ὦ βασιλεῦ, ἐμοὶ χρᾶσθαι ὡς ἀνδρὶ ψεύστη, ἦν μὴ ταῦτά τοι ταῦτη ἐκβῆ τῇ ἐγὼ λέγω. ταῦτα λέγων οὐκ ἔπειθε τὸν Ξέρξην.

(210) τέσσερας μὲν δὴ παρήκε ἡμέρας, ἐλπίζων αἰεὶ σφεας ἀποδρήσεσθαι· πέμπτη δέ, ὡς οὐκ ἀπαλλάσσοντο ἀλλὰ οἱ ἐφαίνοντο ἀναιδείῃ τε καὶ ἀβουλίῃ διαχρεώμενοι μένειν, πέμπει ἐπ' αὐτοὺς Μήδους τε καὶ Κισσίους θυμωθεῖς, ἐντειλάμενός σφεας ζωγρήσαντας ἄγειν ἐς ὄψιν τὴν ἐωυτοῦ. ὡς δ' ἐσέπεσον φερόμενοι ἐς τοὺς Ἑλληνας οἱ Μῆδοι, ἔπιπτον πολλοί, ἄλλοι δ' ἐπεσήσαν, καὶ οὐκ ἀπήλαυνον καίπερ μεγάλως προσπταίνοντες. δῆλον δ' ἐποίηεν παντὶ τεω καὶ οὐκ ἦκιστα αὐτῷ βασιλείῃ ὅτι πολλοὶ μὲν ἀνθρωποὶ εἶεν, ὀλίγοι δὲ ἄνδρες. ἐγένετο δὲ ἡ συμβολὴ δι' ἡμέρης.

²⁹ Cobet argues that Herodotus crafts his narrative “in such a way as to keep the difference [between Greek and oriental history] in the reader’s mind,” as he does especially in 7.101-105 & 209, 9.15 f., and 1.1-5, where he “[o]f course” adopts the perspectives of the Greeks (2002, 398). While Cobet is correct to point out the distinct presentation of the different perspectives of the Greeks and Persians, he equates Herodotus’ own perspective with that of his narrative. Rather, in my view, the contrasts in ethnic perspectives are more didactic than derogatory.

(208) While they were planning these things, Xerxes sent a scout on horseback to see how many men there were and what they were doing. He had heard while still in Thessaly that a small band had assembled and that the leaders were Lacedaemonians and Leonidas, from the line of Heracles. When the cavalryman approached the camp, he watched and looked down on only part of the camp, for some of the men were arranged inside the wall, which they had put up again and were keeping under guard, and it was not possible to inspect them. But he did find out about those men outside the wall, whose weapons lay in front of the wall. At this time, the Lacedaemonians happened to be stationed outside. He saw some of the men, in fact, exercising naked, and others combing their hair. He was astonished when he saw this and he took note of their number. After he had gathered this information precisely, he went back quietly. No one pursued him or regarded him much. When he came back, he told Xerxes all the things he had seen.

(209) Upon hearing these things, Xerxes was not able to comprehend the truth, that they were preparing to be destroyed or to destroy to the best of their ability. In fact, to him they appeared to do laughable things, and he sent for Demaratus, the son of Ariston, who was in the camp. When he arrived, Xerxes asked about each of these things, wishing to understand the behavior of the Lacedaemonians. But Demaratus said, “You also heard me earlier about these men, when we were setting against Greece. And after you heard me saying this, you made me a subject of laughter here when I said how I saw that these matters would turn out. It is a very great aim for me to practice the truth when I deal with you, King. So listen now. These men have come to fight us for the pass and they are preparing themselves for this purpose. For this is their custom (νόμος): whenever they are about to risk danger to their life, they arrange their hair. And believe me: if you defeat these men and those awaiting in Sparta, there is no race (ἔθνος) of men that will raise hands against you, King. For now you are attacking the finest kingdom of the Greeks and the best men.” This explanation seemed really unbelievable to Xerxes and a second time he asked how they would fight with his own army with such a small number of men. And Demaratus said, “King, consider me a liar if these things do not turn out as I say they will.” Even though he said this, he did not persuade Xerxes.

(210) Xerxes allowed four days to pass, and always expected that the Spartans would run away. But on the fifth day, when they did not leave, but appeared to be staying through impudence and folly, he angrily sent against them the Medes and the Cissians, and ordered them to bring them back alive into his sight. When the Medes rushed against the Greeks many fell, but others came on in turn; yet they did not drive the Spartans back, though they were suffering extraordinary casualties. This made it clear to everyone, not least to the king himself, that there were many people, but few real men. And the engagement lasted throughout the day.

The order of Xerxes’ inquires—1) How many Spartans are there? and 2) What are they doing?—is significant. As we have witnessed in Xerxes’ behavior earlier in 7.101-105 and in the narrative’s further comment here that Xerxes had heard there was only a small force of Spartans assembled (ὡς ἀλισμένη εἶη ταύτη στρατιὴ ὀλίγη), Xerxes seems

to send a spy not to find out information so much as to confirm the earlier report about the small size of the force. Thus, the reconnaissance mission might reflect less Xerxes' curiosity than his expectation that the Spartans were severely outnumbered, and in this way, Xerxes might be attempting to bolster his own confidence because of his superior numbers of troops.³⁰

At the beginning of this passage, Herodotus allows us to observe the Spartans together with the spy, who finds not the *number* of the Spartans, but their *behavior* most striking: some were combing their hair and others were exercising naked (τοὺς μὲν δὴ ὄρα γυμναζομένους τῶν ἀνδρῶν, τοὺς δὲ τὰς κόμας κτενιζομένους).³¹ According to the narrative, the Persian spy reacts to the Spartans' behavior with "surprise" (ἐθώμαζε), and it is only after he takes in the striking Spartan scene that he continues to fulfill the first part of his mission—to count the number of Spartan soldiers. And indeed, the narrative emphasizes the paucity of Spartan men before the wall at Thermopylae by the spy's ability to count their number "exactly" (ἀτρεκέως).³²

³⁰ Cf. Harvey's remarks about the Spartan chorus near the end of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (1247-1270): "Aristophanes dwells on...the numbers of the Persians, and then changes the subject. No one would guess that the battle of Thermopylae had been a Spartan defeat" (1994, 47).

³¹ Socrates says in *Pl. Rep.* 5.452c-d that it was not long ago that it was a source of laughter and shame to Greeks and barbarians for a man to be seen naked, but when Cretans and Spartans found it practical to be naked for athletic contests, it was no longer considered ludicrous. See Halliwell 2008, 285. Cf. Hdt. 1.10.3 on the connection between nakedness and shame in Lydian custom for a man to be seen naked, and Thuc. 1.6.5 on naked exercise among the Greeks as a relatively recent custom. Macan observes here that "[t]hese employments appear to have astonished the barbarian. The superb explanation follows in the next chapter with Hellenic irony." Both the 1998 Waterfield Oxford translation and the 1920 Godley Loeb translate γυμναζομένους as "exercising naked;" de Sélincourt (1954) translates this participle as "stripped for exercise." Professor Smith suggests to me that the Spartans were practicing athletic competition and were not wearing their armor (cf. *Il.* 16.815, and Hdt. 2, 141.5), and may, but need not, have been naked.

³² In contrast, it was impossible to tell precisely the size of the Persian force with Xerxes, as Herodotus stresses in 7.187.

While Macan argued in reference to this passage that it is not the activities of the Spartans that Xerxes finds ridiculous so much as their small number, we find that even though Xerxes expects to hear about the small number of these men, it is the spy's news about the strange Spartan *behavior* that prompts him to summon Demaratus. Why would Xerxes need Demaratus to explain further about the small *number* of Spartans when this would only confirm the earlier report the narrative tells us he had heard? Is it not the striking actions of the Spartan warriors that prompt his request for cultural explanation from the former Spartan king? Besides, even if Xerxes is obsessed with numbers, he has already had an extended conversation with Demaratus about the numbers of Spartans versus Persians in 7.101-104, and it therefore seems less likely that he would ask the same sort of question again.

The narrative emphasizes the pre-battle behavior of the Spartan warriors by explaining the *nomoi* they were practicing even before Xerxes consults Demaratus for further information: ἀκούων δὲ Ξέρξης οὐκ εἶχε συμβαλέσθαι τὸ ἐόν, ὅτι παρεσκευάζοντο ὡς ἀπολεόμενοι τε καὶ ἀπολέοντες κατὰ δύναμιν. Therefore, the *histor* draws us into his confidence and isolates Xerxes and his reaction at the Spartans' *nomoi* for our scrutiny. Unlike the Persian spy, who is surprised, Xerxes finds the Spartans' behavior "laughable" (γελοῖα), and we therefore see in his attitude condescension directed at the Spartans because of their *nomoi*.³³ While Xerxes seems to

³³ Although he does not stress the distinction, Konstan does indicate how the spy and Xerxes react differently to the Spartans' pre-battle behavior: "Xerxes finds this information funny, and again summons Demaratus for an explanation, which in turn he finds implausible" (1987, 67). What I hope to be addressing in my discussion is *why* Xerxes finds the Spartans' behavior laughable—this is surely because he is unable to comprehend the Spartans' *nomoi*—and how Herodotus memorializes the battle of Thermopylae and the clash of Persian and Spartan cultures with this vivid anecdote.

comprehend that there exist different *nomoi* between the Spartans and the Persians, he ultimately cannot understand these differences.

What we discover in Demaratus' speech to Xerxes, moreover, confirms that Xerxes has behaved in this way before and that now, in fact, Demaratus is hesitant to give his opinion because the last time he did, Xerxes made him "an object of laughter" (γέλωτά με ἔθει, 7.209.2).³⁴ This is not an insignificant remark from Demaratus, for the narrative earlier presents the story of his mockery at the hands of Leotychidas' messenger (ἐπὶ γέλωτί τε καὶ λάσθη, 6.67.2), a story that reflects the close connection between laughter and shame in Spartan culture, as scholars have convincingly argued.³⁵

While Xerxes does not laugh at Demaratus again, the narrative explicitly tells us that Demaratus does not persuade him (κάρτα τε δὴ Ξέρξη ἄπιστα ἐφαίνετο τὰ λεγόμενα). We have only to remember Sandanis' advice to Croesus earlier to see an echo in the narrative language that encourages us to reflect on the parallels between the two episodes. As we might remember also, both anecdotes include a simple statement in a penultimate position in the respective tales before concluding with narrative proof that the monarchs were wrong:

ταῦτα λέγων οὐκ ἔπειθε τὸν Ξέρξη.
Saying these things, Demaratus did not persuade Xerxes. (7.209.5)

³⁴ See Lateiner 1977, 178-179. Munson observes that while "Herodotus' foreigners evaluate Greek customs, they are almost always critical," but notes that two exceptions—here and 8.26.3—"occur in the highly celebratory narrative of Thermopylae, where we also find the similarly exceptional case of an entirely misguided criticism of Greek culture by a foreigner (7.103.3)" (2001, 145, and 145 n. 32). Cf. Munson later (2001, 233, and 233 n. 5): "Unlike the narrator, characters are frequently in wonder at the behaviors, utterances, or appearances of foreigners, because they are different," for which Munson cites this example along with 3.23.2, 4.9.2, 4.111.1, and 5.13.1.

³⁵ See David 1989 and Richer 1999, 96-97.

ταῦτα λέγων οὐκ ἔπειθε τὸν Κροῖσον.
Saying these things, Sandanis did not persuade Croesus. (1.71.4)

While Demaratus promises that Xerxes can call him a liar (ἀνδρὶ ψεύστη) if he is not right about the Spartans,³⁶ the narrative discloses that Xerxes comes to this realization on his own. Herodotus allows us to watch how the Spartans stand their ground and then repeatedly defeat the waves of forces that Xerxes sends against them. Xerxes finally understands the truth Demaratus tried to tell him when he comprehends that his laughter at the customs of the Spartans was inappropriate: although he has a large force, he has few real men (πολλοὶ μὲν ἄνθρωποι εἶεν, ὀλίγοι δὲ ἄνδρες).³⁷ Therefore, like Croesus on the pyre (1.86), Xerxes has a moment of realization that brings to fulfillment a wise advisor's words and which shows how inappropriate his earlier laughter at Spartan *nomoi* was.

Or does he? Xerxes later in 7.234 explicitly acknowledges that Demaratus was correct and seeks the former Spartan king's knowledge about the Spartans: are all the rest of the men like those 300 who just died, and how can he defeat them? While Demaratus offers a strategy of occupying the island of Cythera near Sparta, an island that the Spartan sage Chilon had once said would be a cause of disaster for the Spartans (7.235.2) and Xerxes is initially convinced, it is Xerxes' brother Achaemenes who

³⁶ Compare Demaratus' exclamations here and earlier:

ᾧ βασιλεῦ, ἐμοὶ χρᾶσθαι ὡς ἀνδρὶ ψεύστη, ἢν μὴ ταῦτά τοι ταύτη ἐκβῆ τῆ ἐγὼ λέγω.
King, treat me as a liar if these things do not turn out as I say they will. (7.209.5)

σοὶ δὲ εἰ φαίνομαι ταῦτα λέγων φλυηρέειν, ἀλλὰ σιγᾶν θέλω τὸ λοιπόν·
If I seem to you to speak nonsense when I say these things, then I wish to remain silent in the future. (7.104.5)

³⁷ Xerxes will utter a similar comment later in the battle of Salamis that his men have become women and his women have become men (Οἱ μὲν ἄνδρες γεγόνασί μοι γυναῖκες, αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες ἄνδρες, 8.88.3), a remark that echoes Artemisia's ironic advice that he not commit himself to a naval battle (οἱ γὰρ ἄνδρες τῶν σῶν ἀνδρῶν κρέσσονες τοσοῦτόν εἰσι κατὰ θάλασσαν ὅσον ἄνδρες γυναικῶν, 8.68a1).

ultimately sways Xerxes.³⁸ Achaemenes does so in part by suggesting that Demaratus is offering destructive advice because he wants to sabotage the entire Persian expedition. As proof, Achaemenes makes use of a negative cultural stereotype: “Greeks really enjoy acting in such ways, for they envy prosperity and hate their superior” (καὶ γὰρ δὴ καὶ τρόποισι τοιούτοισι χρεώμενοι Ἕλληνες χαίρουσι τοῦ τε εὐτυχέειν φθονέουσι καὶ τὸ κρέσσον στυγέουσι, 7.236.1). As the episode finishes, Xerxes decides to favor his brother’s advice to keep the entire fleet intact and not send a squadron to Cythera.

As the audience would have known the rest of the story, they also know that Xerxes could have adopted an even more effective strategy versus Sparta. Surely with the Peloponnesian War looming or even underway at the time when Herodotus was presenting his *Histories*, Demaratus’ advice must have resonated with an Athenian audience in terms of its usefulness as a strategy against the Spartans. Indeed, we know that the Athenians did occupy Cythera in 424 BC.³⁹ In this way, Herodotus might be offering another layer of significance to this important encounter between the Spartans and Persians, which functions primarily to memorialize Spartan bravery and *nomoi*.

³⁸ Xerxes’ curious approval of Demaratus’ advice and decision to reject it is reminiscent of his later treatment of Artemisia (8.68-69; cf. 8.101-103). For Chilon, see also 1.59.2 (discussed in Ch. 3, p. 78). Cf. Demosthenes’ strategy in 425 BC to use the island of Sphacteria as a base for attacking the Spartans (Thucydides 4.3).

³⁹ Dewald 1998, 710, note to 7.234-238. Cf. Thucydides 4.53-54. See Ch. 1, p. 42 n. 29 on issues of dating and publication. Many scholars cite 7.235 as a reference to the Peloponnesian War. See, e.g., Raaflaub 2002, 166 n. 56, and Thomas 2000, 20 n. 59, who mentions 7.235 as one of “Herodotus’ own oblique references to events early in the Peloponnesian War.” Other items she cites are: 6.98.2 (Artaxerxes), 7.137 (Athenian execution of Spartan envoys in 430 BC), and 9.73.3.

B. Thermopylae: Artificial Shade and the Persians' Arrows (7.226)

While the narrative establishes Xerxes' laughter at the Spartans' *nomoi* as a sign that he misunderstands the Spartans' bravery, at the end of the battle description proper, Herodotus offers one of the most memorable moments of humor associated with the heroic Spartans (7.226):

Λακεδαιμονίων δὲ καὶ Θεσπιέων τοιούτων γενομένων ὅμως λέγεται ἀνὴρ ἄριστος γενέσθαι Σπαρτιήτης Διηνέκης· τὸν τότε φασὶ εἰπεῖν τὸ ἔπος πρὶν ἢ συμμειῖξαι σφέας τοῖσι Μήδοισι, πυθόμενον πρὸς τευ τῶν Τρηχινίων ὡς ἐπεὰν οἱ βάρβαροι ἀπίωσι τὰ τοξεύματα, τὸν ἥλιον ὑπὸ τοῦ πλήθεος τῶν οἴστων ἀποκρύπτουσι· τοσοῦτο πλήθος αὐτῶν εἶναι. τὸν δὲ οὐκ ἐκπλαγέντα τούτοις εἰπεῖν ἐν ἀλογίῃ ποιούμενον τὸ τῶν Μήδων πλήθος, ὡς πάντα σφι ἀγαθὰ ὁ Τρηχίνιος ξεῖνος ἀγγέλλοι, εἰ ἀποκρυπτόντων τῶν Μήδων τὸν ἥλιον ὑπὸ σκιῇ ἔσοιτο πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἡ μάχη καὶ οὐκ ἐν ἡλίῳ. ταῦτα μὲν καὶ ἄλλα τοιούτοτροπα ἔπεά φασι Διηνέκεα τὸν Λακεδαιμόνιον λιπέσθαι μνημόσυνα.

While the Lacedaemonians and Thespians were brave, the Spartiate Dienece is said to have been the bravest. They say that he spoke these words before they fought with the Medes, once he had learned from some one of the Trachinians that whenever the barbarians let loose their arrows, they hide the sun by the number of their arrows; so great is their number. But he was not frightened by these things and, considering the number of the Medes unimportant, said that the Trachinian stranger's news was entirely good for them. For if the Medes should hide the sun, the battle against them would happen in the shade and not in the sun. They say that Dienece the Lacedaemonian left this and other similar sayings as a memorial.

In this memorable anecdote, Dienece transforms the Trachinian's news about how frighteningly large a force the Persians have in a witty retort that offers proof that he was the bravest (ἄριστος) of the Spartans.⁴⁰ Dienece's remark calls further attention to the account of the battle, and in an "historical" sense, shows how he tries both to bond the Spartan and Thespian soldiers together and to reduce their stress. At the same time, Dienece's humor acts as relief in the narrative for the tension of the tragic end of the battle. The humor seen in the witticism simultaneously alerts us to how

⁴⁰ Dienece's reputation as the bravest of the Spartans seems to be based, in part, on his dexterity in using wit here. On the importance of jesting contests in the Spartans' education at the *syssitia*, see David 1989, 4-5.

serious the overall situation is and makes the moment and words that much more pivotal. In this way the humor of Dieneses' saying functions in the largest context according to the release theory of humor.

In addition to the content of the witty retort, we must pay attention to its context.⁴¹ Namely, Herodotus says that Dieneses told this story before the Spartans and Thespians began their battle with the Persians. Macan thinks it odd that Herodotus chose to include this *bon mot* of the otherwise insignificant Dieneses while he omits a famous saying attributed by others to Leonidas.⁴² I would argue, however, that it is the vivid and memorializing humor Herodotus found in this anecdote that compelled him to include it. What is more, Herodotus' choice to include this *bon mot* of Dieneses over proverbs associated with Leonidas perhaps reveals that Herodotus aimed to memorialize the Spartans as a group, and not just their general Leonidas.

In reference to Herodotus' choice to present the witty remark of Dieneses, but none from Leonidas, Alfred Bradford offers the following as a way of answering the objection brought by Plutarch *Moralia (Apophthegmata Laconica)* 225a-e:⁴³

The passages show Herodotus at his best, not just, as so often said, as a rhetorician and stylist, but as a diligent and fair historian. He reports nothing that could not have been known, except when he explicitly identifies his own conjecture that Leonidas stayed to fulfill a prophecy from the Delphic oracle. He does not put into Leonidas' mouth such gems as 'Eat a hearty breakfast, men, for we will have dinner in Hell', or the reply to Xerxes' demand that he surrender his weapons, 'Come and take them', nor does he attribute Dieneses' remark to Leonidas. In fact, Herodotus does not report in direct

⁴¹ Other ancient authors who cite this witty remark are Plutarch *Moralia (Apophthegmata Laconica)* 225B; Stobaeus *Florilegium*, 7.46; Valerius Maximus 3.7, ext. 8; Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 1.42 (101). As Munson observes, Dieneses' pithy remark is characteristic of Spartan speech: "The Spartans in Herodotus dislike long speeches, literalize metaphors, and mistrust abstractions," for which she also cites as examples 3.46 and 7.135.3 (2001, 115 and 115 n. 211).

⁴² "Why does not [Herodotus] preserve the much grander bon-mot of Leonidas? Pergite, animo forti, Lacedaemonii: hodie apud inferos fortasse cenabimus (Cicero, *Tusc. D.* 1. 42. 101)."

⁴³ For more on Plutarch's *Apophthegmata*, see Stadter 2008, 53-66.

discourse a single remark of Leonidas. He gives no clues to his personality at all.⁴⁴ Further, as far as the one witty remark goes, he tells us that Dieneces was known for clever remarks, he left behind a memorial of wit, and with this *bon mot* he squelched a Trachinian man. (The Trachinians were the liaison between the Spartans and the navy.) (1994, 65-66)

Since the remark that was uttered *before* the battle is told only *after* the battle is completed, it acts further as a sort of analeptic memorial that makes us linger on and think back to the courageous deeds earlier narrated. If we wonder about Herodotus' own impression of the power of the Dieneces anecdote, we need only to review his concluding remark, as Bradford mentions above: Herodotus calls this a memorial (μνημόσυνα) left by Dieneces, and characteristic of the types of sayings he uttered (7.226.2).⁴⁵ Not unlike his remark at the conclusion of the tale of Nitocris' tomb, Herodotus here offers us an explicit remark that encourages us to remember his narrative. While in the case of the Babylonian queen Herodotus memorializes her trick along with her witty inscribed retort, here he records the words of Dieneces as a memorial. And indeed, what reader over the last 2500 years does not remember Dieneces' remark?⁴⁶ What better proof do we need that humor serves as one of the

⁴⁴ Bradford here neglects the narration of 7.220-222 that does, for sure, offer us insight into Leonidas' personality.

⁴⁵ Cf. 4.144, where as a way of introducing Megabazus, whom Darius had placed in command of his troops in Europe (4.143), Herodotus relates that Megabazus left this saying (ἔπος) as an "undying memorial" (ἀθάνατον μνήμην) to the people of the Hellespont (4.144). When Megabazus found out in Byzantium that the Chalcedonians had founded their city 17 years before the Byzantine settlers had established theirs, he said the following: "They [i.e., the Chalcedonians] would not have chosen to settle in an uglier place when a more attractive place was available, unless they were blind!" (οὐ γὰρ ἂν τοῦ καλλίονος παρεόντος κτίζειν χώρου τὸν αἰσχίονα ἐλέσθαι, εἰ μὴ ἦσαν τυφλοί).

⁴⁶ Dieneces' quip is so effective that it almost becomes a maxim, for I would surmise that most remember the words more readily than the man who said them. Further support for this assertion comes from the other ancient authors who cite this remark (see note 41 above). None of them attributes the saying to Dieneces or to any other specific individual.

most effective narrative tools with which Herodotus can ensure that the deeds of the Greeks and barbarians are not forgotten (cf. μνημόσυνα)?

C. Thermopylae: Xerxes' attempt to hide Persian losses (8.24-25)

The final example of memorializing humor associated with Thermopylae comes well after the account of the battle proper. Just as we have seen in previous examples about Thermopylae, moreover, it offers an unflattering portrait of the Persian Xerxes (8.24-25):

(8.24) ἐνθαῦτα δὲ τούτων ἐόντων Ξέρξης ἐτοιμασάμενος τὰ περὶ τοὺς νεκροὺς ἔπεμπε ἐς τὸν ναυτικὸν στρατὸν κήρυκα. προετοιμάσατο δὲ τάδε· ὅσοι τοῦ στρατοῦ τοῦ ἑωυτοῦ ἦσαν νεκροὶ ἐν Θερμοπύλῃσι (ἦσαν δὲ καὶ δύο μυριάδες), ὑπολιπόμενος τούτων ὡς χιλίους, τοὺς λοιποὺς τάφρους ὀρυζάμενος ἔθαψε, φυλλάδα τε ἐπιβαλὼν καὶ γῆν ἐπαμειβάμενος, ἵνα μὴ ὀφθείησαν ὑπὸ τοῦ ναυτικοῦ στρατοῦ. ὡς δὲ διέβη ἐς τὴν Ἰστιαίην ὁ κήρυξ, σύλλογον ποιησάμενος παντὸς τοῦ στρατοπέδου ἔλεγε τάδε· Ἄνδρες σύμμαχοι, βασιλεὺς Ξέρξης τῷ βουλομένῳ ὑμέων παραδίδωσι ἐκλιπόντα τὴν τάξιν [καὶ] ἐλθόντα θεήσασθαι ὅπως μάχεται πρὸς τοὺς ἀνοήτους τῶν ἀνθρώπων, οἳ ἤλπισαν τὴν βασιλέος δύναμιν ὑπερβαλέεσθαι.

(8.25) ταῦτα ἐπαγγειλαμένου, μετὰ ταῦτα οὐδὲν ἐγένετο πλοίων σπανιώτερον.⁴⁷ οὕτω πολλοὶ ἤθελον θεήσασθαι. διαπεραιωθέντες δὲ ἐθηεῦντο διεξιόντες τοὺς νεκροὺς· πάντες δὲ ἠπιστέατο τοὺς κείμενους εἶναι πάντας Λακεδαιμονίους καὶ Θεσπιέας, ὀρώντες καὶ τοὺς εἰλωτας. οὐ μὲν οὐδ' ἐλάνθανε τοὺς διαβεβηκότας Ξέρξης ταῦτα πρήξας περὶ τοὺς νεκροὺς τοὺς ἑωυτοῦ· **καὶ γὰρ δὴ καὶ γελοῖον ἦν**.⁴⁸ τῶν μὲν χίλιοι ἐφαίνοντο νεκροὶ κείμενοι, οἳ δὲ πάντες ἐκέατο ἀλέες συγκεκομισμένοι ἐς τῷσδε χωρίον, τέσσερες χιλιάδες. ταύτην μὲν τὴν ἡμέρην πρὸς θέην ἐτράποντο, τῇ δ' ὕστεραίη οἱ μὲν ἀπέπλεον ἐς Ἰστιαίην ἐπὶ τὰς νέας, οἳ δὲ ἀμφὶ Ξέρξην ἐς ὁδὸν ὀρμέατο.

(8.24) While they were there, Xerxes made arrangements for the dead bodies and sent a herald to the fleet. He made these arrangements beforehand: however many dead bodies from his own army there were at Thermopylae (and there were 20,000), he left behind about a thousand of these. He dug graves and buried the rest, having thrown leaves and having heaped up earth on top in order that they not be seen by the sailors of the fleet. When the herald crossed to Histiaea, he assembled the entire army and said these things, "Allied men, King Xerxes grants permission to those of you who wish

⁴⁷ In relation to this phrase, Macan remarks "...there is a suspicion of persiflage about Hdt.'s expression." This is one of the varieties of humor seen in style that Demetrius provides; see Ch. 1, p. 18.

⁴⁸ As Macan comments in regard to this phrase: "the comic Nemesis proceeds."

to leave your station and go to see how we fight against those **foolish** men who expected that they would overcome the power of the Great King.”

(8.25) Once he had made these announcements, nothing was thereupon harder to find than a boat—so many people wanted to go see. After they had crossed over, they looked about as they were walking through the corpses. They all believed that those lying there were all Lacedaemonians and Thespians, though they were also seeing the helots. Neither did what Xerxes had done about his own dead men escape the notice of those who had crossed over (sc. from Histiaea). **And in fact, it was really ridiculous.** The thousand corpses of these men of the one side (sc. Xerxes’ army) were lying there in plain view, but the others (sc. other corpses, i.e. the Greeks) all lay together, having been brought together to the same place, four thousand. They spent this day for observation, and on the next they sailed back to the ships at Histiaea, and Xerxes’ army set out on the road.

While the regal Persian herald presents a culturally arrogant message to the members of Xerxes’ Greek fleet, the narrative ultimately presents Xerxes, and not the Spartan dead, as “foolish” (ἀνοήτους). Specifically, the narrative highlights Xerxes’ inability to deceive, as well as his obsession with sight and making heaps.⁴⁹ As we learn, Xerxes’ men *are* deceived when they see the Spartans, for they believe the helots are dead Spartans and therefore believe that the Spartan losses are more significant than they actually are.⁵⁰ Thus, we find when Xerxes did not intend to deceive, he was successful. On the other hand, Xerxes’ attempt to make the Persian losses look smaller absolutely fails—the narrative tells us that the Greeks were not deceived (οὐ μὲν οὐδ’ ἐλάνθανε τοὺς διαβεβηκότας Ξέρξης ταῦτα πρήξας περὶ τοὺς νεκροὺς τοὺς ἔωυτοῦ, 8.25.2). Interestingly however, we do not discover anything more about these men’s thoughts about Xerxes’ trick—we are only told that they are not convinced by it.

⁴⁹ Cf. Konstan 1987, 62-63.

⁵⁰ Whitby comments on the importance of the helots in this scene, as well as during the battle proper: “At Thermopylae, even if one helot fled from the scene after leading his blind master back to the fighting (VII 229 1), it appears that some helots remained with Leonidas to the bitter end, since their corpses could be confused with Spartans and Thespians by the Greek sailors in the Persian fleet (VIII 25 1)” (1994, 94).

Rather, it is *authorial* comment that declares how foolish is Xerxes' attempt to hide his own losses: καὶ γὰρ δὴ καὶ γελοῖον ἦν· (8.25.2). We even sense a parallel between Herodotus the author and the Ethiopian king earlier: for each laughs at the attempt of a Persian king to deceive. Xerxes is exposed for his *euethie*; the Greek members of the Persian fleet, while they detect Xerxes' trick, are not credited with *sophie*, since Herodotus gives no further indication that they deciphered anything complicated—again, he calls Xerxes' attempt ridiculous. Further, as noted above, these same fleet members do not accurately understand the Spartan losses, which also include the helots who, perhaps in keeping with Spartan attitudes toward the helots, are forgotten.⁵¹

Binyamin Shimron emphasizes Herodotus' own voice in this anecdote about Xerxes: "In his own name Herodotus heaps ridicule on [Xerxes] in 8.25 for the clumsy attempt to deceive his Greek subjects on the number of the Persian dead at Thermopylae..." (1989, 66).⁵² While such a statement may seem strong, the language we have discussed in the passage does offer a parallel to Herodotus' most direct laughter in 4.36.2.⁵³ Donald Lateiner also emphasizes how the narrative highlights Xerxes' foolishness, and at the same time brings out the ethnic contrast between the Persian Xerxes and the Greek sailors: "The improbable Greek tale reported by Herodotus served to bring Xerxes into contempt and asserts the limit of Greek gullibility, at least in the face of Persian military-political propaganda. The barbarian fraud is seen as such at

⁵¹ For more on the role of the helots in Spartan culture, see Whitby 1994, 87-126, esp. 93-95.

⁵² Shimron here also discusses how Xerxes acts similarly in his flight as he does in 8.25. Shimron calls the story in 8.115 "not very honorific" and suggests that Xerxes' entire flight is "more than a little ludicrous" when "[r]ead against the foil of his magnificent march into Greece" (ibid.).

⁵³ See Ch. 2, pp. 46-47.

once” (1990, 233). Angus Bowie sees parallels between this anecdote and that of 8.118, and, importantly, reminds us of the historical purpose of Xerxes’ sightseeing invitation:

Though intended as a morale-booster (24.2), in H[erodotus]’s version this visit to the battlefield becomes a farce as Xerxes tries unsuccessfully to hide the extent of the Persian losses... Such sightseeing breaks are not unparalleled: Xerxes himself was keen to visit Troy (7.43) and see the mouth of the Peneius (7.128), as were the Spartans to see the Persian dead at Marathon (6.120); and when Cambyses invaded Egypt, Greek sightseers followed his army (3.139.1); cf. Thuc. 6.24.3. Tricks with graves are not the sole preserve of Xerxes; cf. 9.85.3, where Greek cities that did not fight at Plataea nonetheless built cenotaphs there to disguise their shame. (2007, 116)

As Herodotus discusses the graves of the Persian dead, moreover, he helps to memorialize through these hidden tombs the same hidden disasters that the *Persians* suffered in their victory over the Spartans. Again we are encouraged to think of the battle of Thermopylae, which emerges not as a Persian victory so much as a testament to the brave Spartans who died fighting to their deaths. The tomb-hiding attempt of Xerxes allows Herodotus a way to underscore the Greeks’, and specifically the Spartans’, valor over the sheer numbers of the Persians, and offers an example of a rare instance of authorial derision directed at Xerxes.⁵⁴ Here the narrative, just as Xerxes does in 7.101-105 and 7.208-209, focuses on the numbers of the Persians, and again, just as we saw in Dienece’s quip, numbers are used as the basis of ridicule. Both Herodotus, in his authorial voice, and the Greek sailors scoff at Xerxes’ simpleminded trick; we sense that Herodotus intentionally brings out the numbers as a way of showing how shortsighted is Xerxes’ confidence in his large force.

Directly preceding this narrative, moreover, Herodotus reports the secret message the Athenian Themistocles inscribed on rocks for the Ionian members of Xerxes’ fleet. There he went on to emphasize, in his authorial voice, how the Athenian

⁵⁴ Cf. 4.36.2.

general had fashioned a plan that would be successful either by making Ionians switch sides, or by making Xerxes distrustful of the Ionian sailors and therefore not allow them to take part in the naval fighting (8.24). Such a narrative intimation of the Athenian Themistocles' *sophie* contrasts sharply with the narrative laughter at Xerxes' *euethie*.

In his message, moreover, Themistocles introduces language that specifically calls our attention to the struggles the Greeks had in uniting into one force (8.22.2), for by making such an explicit plea Themistocles draws our attention to the lack of Greek unity.⁵⁵ In particular, he asks them to remember that they were the original cause of hatred between the barbarians and the Greeks (μεμνημένοι ὅτι ἀπ' ἡμέων γέγονατε καὶ ὅτι ἀρχῆθεν ἢ ἔχθρη πρὸς βάρβαρον ἀπ' ὑμέων ἡμῖν γέγονε, 8.22.2). What is more, the outburst of Tritantaechmes that follows Xerxes' ridiculous ruse also sets up a strong contrast between the Greeks and the Persians (8.26).⁵⁶

As we reflect on Herodotus' presentation of Thermopylae and other battles, we find that he seems cognizant of the proper time (*kairos*) to incorporate humor: either in

⁵⁵ Cf. the exchanges between Adeimantus and Themistocles in 8.59-61. See Munson 2001, 224.

⁵⁶ See Konstan 1987, 61-62 and 68-70, on the significance of the contrasts between money and valor in this anecdote. Flower views this episode as a parallel to 7.102 and 9.82, which all show that "the Persians attained a high degree of luxury as compared to the simpler and poorer Greeks" (2006, 285); cf. Thomas 2000, 107 n. 8, who compares this with other examples of Persian luxury: 1.133.3-4 on food, 135 on luxury, 3.20.1-22 on gifts, 7.135 on the wealth of the satrap, 9.82 on Persian and Spartan banquets and 9.81-83 on the booty from Plataea. Hans van Wees uses Tritantaechmes' characterization of the Greeks to demonstrate how their behavior at the end of the *Histories* (9.120.3-4) is consistent with *nomoi* of high ideals (2002, 348). Donald Lateiner uses this example as evidence of Herodotus' bias in favor of *isonomia*: "Self-imposed constraints or *nomos* can promote national achievement. Greeks exert themselves for recognition of excellence (*ἀρετή*), for 'worthless' laurels, and for freedom, not for money, a tyrant's benediction, or from fear (7.102.2, 103.3, 8.26.3). There is a kind of explanation latent in this view, namely that social structure determines a nation's political fate, although Herodotus has not yet found the theoretical and abstract terminology to express it so concisely" (1989, 186).

the build-up to or in the aftermath of a battle.⁵⁷ We might say, therefore, that humor memorably frames the drama of the battles so that we anticipate and are encouraged to reflect on their accounts.

III. Memorializing Humor Associated with Political Conflicts

While I frequently detect memorializing humor connected with monuments and battles, I also find some of the most prominent examples of it in descriptions of political conflicts associated with particular Hellenic groups. The memorable tales of Alcmaeon and Hippocleides (6.125-129), often taken merely as entertaining digressions, draw our attention to the important historical reputation of the Alcmaeonidae, whose most famous successor was directing the massive Athenian building program and leading the Athenians at the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War.

The stories of Alcmaeon's visit to Croesus' treasury and of the contest of suitors for Cleisthenes' daughter are two of the most memorable in the entire work. They are so memorable, in fact, that they almost supercede the very serious issue in connection with which Herodotus presents them: the rumor that the Alcmaeonidae tried to sabotage the Greeks after the battle of Marathon by signaling to the Persians with a shield (6.121). The wealth of the family is explained by Croesus' beneficence; at the same time, we are left to ponder the significance of Alcmaeon's extreme avarice.⁵⁸ His grotesque stuffing of not only his clothes, but also his mouth, epitomizes greed, and it is at this greedy display that Croesus explicitly laughs and then offers to give Alcmaeon

⁵⁷ Cf. Griffiths 1995, 38-39, who argues for Herodotus' strong sense of τὸ πρέπον in his use of humor.

⁵⁸ Cf. the Persian King Darius' greed in 1.187, as discussed above on pp. 166-171.

the same amount of gold again (6.125).⁵⁹ Let us now take a closer look at the other half of the pair of famous stories: that involving the aristocratic suitor Hippocleides.

The Suitors of Agariste and the Dancing of Hippocleides (6.126-129)

One of the best known instances of a variety of humor that helps to characterize the Athenians occurs near the end of the story of Cleisthenes and Hippocleides (6.126-129). The obvious humor that punctuates the end of the tale is preceded by the lengthy account of the many suitors from all parts of Greece and their distinguishing merits that make the contest particularly dramatic.⁶⁰ All of Greece is represented, and the contest of the suitors sounds something like an Olympic contest in its scope.

Although there was a large and noteworthy pool of suitors, Herodotus says that Cleisthenes preferred the two suitors from Athens, one the descendant of Alcmaeon and the other Hippocleides, who particularly distinguished himself by his displays of manly virtue (ἀνδραγαθίην, 6.128.2). Noteworthy too is the fact that the story of Hippocleides comes as the contest between the suitors has been in effect for over a year, in which Cleisthenes has tested the young men intensively, and is finally going to announce his selection. By building it up in this way, the narrative thus makes the account of Hippocleides even more memorable.

⁵⁹ Professor Smith suggests to me that we see here an appreciative laughter from Croesus, who though he does not understand Solon's notion of success, does understand the language of gold-dust.

⁶⁰ Even Waters observes the "humorous nature" of this and the previous tale with Alcmaeon (6.125). At the same time, though, he dismisses the significance of the tale *because* of its humor: "The tale of Agariste's wedding is another case of inclusion of a good story for its own sake. It has no relevance whatever to the Persian Wars, except that its outcome contributed to the importance and influence of the Alkmaionid clan in the affairs of Athens from the mid sixth century onward" (1972, 161).

When selecting a husband for his daughter, Cleisthenes, the tyrant of Sicyon, preferred Hippocleides (6.128). On the very day of the wedding, when Cleisthenes was to announce his preference, an intoxicated Hippocleides asked for a tune from the pipe-player and started dancing. Hippocleides liked his own dancing, but Cleisthenes became suspicious of the whole situation when he saw the suitor's behavior (ὄρέων ὅλον τὸ πρῆγμα ὑπώπτευε, 6.129). Hippocleides next asked for a table, danced a Laconian dance, then some Attic figures, and finally stood on his head and moved his legs about as if they were his hands (τοῖσι σκέλεσι ἔχειρονόμησε 6.129).⁶¹ The very act of Hippocleides' vulgar dancing reflects a variety of ancient humor catalogued in the *Tractatus Coislinianus*⁶² and which we can further explain by the ridiculous incongruity found between the careful preparation leading up to Hippocleides' successful year-long performance and his vulgar dance. We find a punctuating set of utterances at the end of the Herodotus' account: Cleisthenes' exclamation, "Son of Tisander, you've danced away your marriage!" and Hippocleides' witty reply, "It's no concern to Hippocleides!" (Οὐ φροντὶς Ἴπποκλείδη, 6.129).⁶³

Had the tale ended here, we might think that it appears only as an extraneous digression. However, Herodotus indicates that his audience must be familiar with the name Hippocleides, for he says that it is from this tale that the saying has risen (ἀπὸ τούτου μὲν τοῦτο ὀνομάζεται, 6.130.1).⁶⁴ While he does not explain further, we

⁶¹ For evidence about the different types of dances alluded to in this tale, see Scott 2005, 427-428.

⁶² Vulgar dancing: ἐκ τοῦ χρῆσθαι φορτικῇ ὀρχίσει, VI.6.

⁶³ Scott 2005, 429, note to 6.130.1: "Hippocleides' conduct would be a blow to Cleisthenes' τιμή (cf on §65.1), and the speech that follows is a masterpiece of diplomacy to rectify that..."

⁶⁴ Scott 2005, 429, note to 6.129.4: "The proverb was already in Herm fr 16 K-A (fifth century); and often cited later, e.g. Luc *Apol* 15; Ps-Luc *Philopat* 29; Eust *Il* 1.246 ad 1.598; Suda and Hesych sv. We

understand that Herodotus means for this story of Hippocleides to be didactic and mnemonic, for Hippocleides had every advantage and had won his superior standing over the long period of a year in contest.⁶⁵ One drunken moment of stupidity, however, erased his long advantage and proved costly, for it is Megacles, the other Athenian, who merited no further description in the account, who wins Agariste's hand in marriage and is the father of Cleisthenes and grandfather of Pericles. On the other hand, Herodotus might be offering the witty Hippocleides as a model of one who stood up to a tyrant. This latter view would be more consistent with Herodotus' negative portrayals of tyranny.⁶⁶

Carolyn Dewald discusses how the Hippocleides' tale particularly characterizes the Athenians and also suggests another possible political implication for it that would have resonated with Herodotus' fifth-century audience:

It is quite likely that clusters of oral accounts like these, some of them marked by a distinctive regional or ethnic brand of humour, remained in circulation and thus available to Herodotus as much as a century later, precisely because they were funny and were passed down to him with their humour intact, possibly in the context of clusters of similar stories. In one sense, it is oblique testimony to Herodotus' integrity as an ethnographer that he so often reports the point of the anecdote, even when its larger purpose within his ongoing narrative is a serious historical one. In the case of all the Alcmaeonid stories, the context suggests that in play are probably a thinly-veiled allusion to the pretensions of Pericles' crypto-tyrannical position as the *primus inter pares* in Athens at the height of Athens' fifth-century democracy and the resentments this gave rise to in Athenian political circles. (2006, 152)

Even if Plutarch does not try to understand the purpose of the Hippocleides' story, he reveals that he still has it at the forefront of his mind and remembers it

may speculate whether, behind the story, lurks an unwillingness on the part of Hippocleides to marry Agariste."

⁶⁵ Shimron 1989, 70, shows awareness of the didactic element of this story when he notes that it has a moral, but he does not explain further. See also Griffiths 1995, 43-44.

⁶⁶ See Plutarch's criticism of Herodotus' treatment of the Alcmaeonidae in *de Malig.* 858B-C and 862C-863B. For the complexities of Herodotus' treatment of the Alcmaeonidae, see Baragwanath 2008, 27-34.

vividly. In his essay on Herodotus' malice, he abruptly interjects a mocking remark directed at Herodotus, out of sequence with his discussion of Herodotus' narrative account about the battle of Thermopylae, where he believes that Herodotus has unjustly treated the Thebans. In his remark, therefore, we witness how Plutarch transforms what all would recognize to be a humorous characterizing story of the Alcmaeonidae, and uses it for his own mockery of Herodotus, retaliation for his perception that Herodotus has wrongly accused the Thebans of medizing at Thermopylae:

...δοκεῖ μοι, καθάπερ Ἴπποκλείδης ὁ τοῖς σκέλεσι χειρονομῶν ἐπὶ τῆς τραπέζης, εἰπεῖν ἂν ἐξορχούμενος τὴν ἀλήθειαν· «οὐ φροντὶς Ἡροδότῳ.»

I'm reminded of Hippocleides (6.129), who danced with his legs on the table: Herodotus seems to be dancing away the truth, and saying "I could hardly care less." (Plutarch, *de Malig.* 867B; tr. Bowen 1992, 71)⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Cf. how Plutarch uses the Ethiopian king's aggressive humor directed at the Persians' *nomoi* against Herodotus himself (*de Malig.* 863D; see Ch. 3, pp. 114-115). Scott 2005, 428-429, notes that Plutarch uses the "somewhat commoner ἐξορχέομαι," instead of Herodotus' ἀπορχέομαι, "a verb that usually recurs only in later retellings of the story."

CONCLUSION

While many scholars have observed humor in the *Histories*, few have undertaken studies on the topic. Those scholars who have published their remarks about humorous elements in the *Histories*, moreover, have more often noted its presence than explored its forms or pondered its purpose.¹ This study contributes to our understanding of humor in the *Histories* by arguing that it is best understood in the context of Herodotus' ethnography, with particular reference to the *nomoi* of different peoples. Humor in the *Histories* alerts us to serious issues, sometimes in the context of the narrative and at other times by inviting our reflection on the cultural and historical context in which Herodotus was writing. In this way, the processes of humor we see in Herodotus' text help educate us to be better readers of his *Histories*.

In my discussions, I have drawn from ancient and modern discussions of humor, and especially from the anthropological concept of ethnic humor, which we find in all cultures and in all periods of history. Through humor, individuals are able to test the cultural limits of their own society, and in their use of humor, we witness their active attempts to understand themselves and others. Herodotus' portrayal of the Persian Wars offers a valuable example of this phenomenon and at the same time gives us a sense of the cultural conflicts in the fifth century. While Herodotus certainly was not

¹ For scholars who have addressed the purpose of Herodotus' humor, see Lateiner 1977, 180-181; Shimron 1989, 70-71; and Dewald 2006, 160.

writing a catalogue of humorous anecdotes about the Persian Wars, he did not purge his *Histories* of them, either. As scholars have recently argued, the truths that Herodotus was interested in may be different from those which we would expect.² Following this line of thought, we might even say that Herodotus' portrayal of his characters using humor is *historical*, for it represents what anthropologists have come to recognize: that humor is a real and expected concomitant of war.

In his research, Herodotus offers a glimpse of the humor that must have circulated during his day,³ and I argue that he uses it purposefully. Through humor—which in the *Histories* appears primarily as derision, witty retorts, *reductio ad absurdum* logic in proverbial expressions, acts of humorous deception, remarks and actions that are contrary to expectation, puns, persiflage, and vulgar dancing—Herodotus invites his readers to appreciate striking cultural differences. At times, he encourages us to embrace cultural stereotypes only to challenge these same stereotypes repeatedly, and the effect of this is both didactic and memorializing.⁴ Who are the “Greeks” when they appear so variously and exemplify so many different *nomoi*?⁵ Who are the “barbarians”

² E.g., Marincola 2007, 60-67, and Baragwanath 2008, 55-81.

³ Cf. Dewald 2006, 148-149, who argues that “it is a reasonable supposition that Herodotus was able to collect many such stories [involving humor] in the mid-fifth century BCE—that is, that they were still around to be collected—because their wit had left them in oral circulation for three or four generations. The quality of the humour often suggests the nature of the biases, animosities, and rivalries of the various governing classes that had told and retold them, until they could be saved from extinction—from becoming *exitēla*, as the poem says—by the workings of Herodotus' stylus in about 440 BCE.”

⁴ And often, as we have seen, these are cultural stereotypes of various Greeks, a point Pelling 1997 brings out strongly *contra* the more rigid view of Hartog 1980/1988.

⁵ Hall, who argues that our perception of the Greeks as a single group reflects more of a modern notion than an ancient perception (2002, 172). As he remarks, “Regardless of the nature and strength of collective consciousness that they assign to Greeks of the Archaic period, most historians have recognized that the Persian War of 480-479 BC represented a decisive moment in the way the Greeks conceived of their own identity” (175). Cf. Munson in the conclusion to her study *Telling Wonders*: “Herodotus achieves a demythologized reconstruction of Greek resistance to the Persian invader and the

when the Egyptians call the *Greeks* barbarians, and the nomadic milk-drinking Scythians call the *Spartans* the only Greeks with whom you could hold a sensible conversation (4.77.1)?⁶ To be sure, this cultural dimension of Herodotus' humor adds a further layer of complexity to our notions of Herodotus' ethnographic practices, and complicates what may appear at times to be simple descriptions of different peoples' *nomoi*.

Herodotus also encourages us to embrace his own views of cultural relativity,⁷ which must find some basis in his own diverse Greek-Carian background and in worldview he gained from his home in Halicarnassus and from his many travels, on which he must have observed many different *nomoi*. Therefore, even though we would expect that the cultural perceptions and stereotypes which emerged during the course of the war would have only strengthened by the time he was writing, Herodotus seems resistant to adopting these rigid portraits wholesale. As the tensions between the Athenians and Spartans were growing stronger with the onset of the Peloponnesian War, we expect that some of the same stereotypes connected to these two peoples were in some ways reinforced and in other ways dramatically changed. And indeed, Herodotus' shifting portraits of these two groups of Greeks seem to reflect this

later attempts of different groups of Greeks to interpret the event in their own ways. He portrays what the Greeks conceive Greekness to be as it actually manifested itself in precious moments at Marathon, Thermopylae, Salamis, and Plataea. His is, however, a qualified portrayal that reveals at least the fragility, if not the utter falsity, of the cultural superiority to which the Greeks lay a claim" (2001, 272-273).

⁶ Cf. Pelling on the story of Anacharsis' remarks about the Spartans: since the Peloponnesians tell the story, the episode is "all the more telling...for it suggests that *the Peloponnesians themselves* have this sort of construction, challenging Greek ethnic stereotypes and doing so by linking Spartan and Scythian. Even to the Peloponnesians, the Other is not looking so Other as all that" (1997, 4; Pelling's italics).

⁷ Cf. 3.38.

dynamic. Thus, when we consider the historical context in which Herodotus was writing, it is no surprise that our examination of humor in the *Histories* reveals such a complex portrait of different peoples.

Even though he wrote his essay *de Malignitate Herodoti* five centuries after Herodotus published his work, Plutarch still helps us gain insight into the character of the *Histories*' humor.⁸ By manipulating the *Histories*' humor for his own attacks on Herodotus, Plutarch reveals his perception that Herodotus was at times using humor as a tool of cultural aggression. At other times, we find that Plutarch incorporates the *Histories*' humor at unexpected moments in his text as a means of deriding Herodotus more generally.⁹ Yet Plutarch does not distinguish between Herodotus and his characters. Rather, for Plutarch, any humor connected with cultural beliefs or practices in the *Histories* seems to reveal the historian's own beliefs. My view is that

⁸ Lennep in particular notices the importance of Plutarch's essay for understanding humor in Herodotus: "Through his total lack of humor, Plutarch proceeds to assemble the funniest passages in Herodotus' work—these have irritated him most. His comments are priceless" (Plutarchus slaagt er door zijn volstrekte humorloosheid in een keur van de gekste passages uit het oeuvre van Herodotus bijeen te brengen: de passages die hem het meest geërgerd hebben. Zijn commentaren kunnen dan onbetaalbaar zijn" (1969, 123; tr. by my colleague, M. Schwartz). Cf. also Dewald 2006, 158: "In some respects, Plutarch is a better reader of [Herodotus' humor] than many of Herodotus' modern commentators." When we reflect on Plutarch's perception of the malice of Herodotus, whom he calls a "barbarophile" (φιλοβάρβαρος, *de Malig.* 12), we find that Plutarch equates it with *ethnic* attacks. We suspect that Plutarch aligns himself with Thucydides, who does not use humor as a tool for narrating past realities. Consider, for example, two explicit references Plutarch makes to Thucydides in the opening of his essay. First, Plutarch says that "[e]ven though Cleon's misdeeds were plentiful, Thucydides gave no clear account of them, and he dealt with Hyperbolus the demagogue in one phrase, calling him 'a wretched character', and leaving it at that" (*de Malig.* 3; tr. Bowen 1992, 23). Second, Plutarch comments on the practice of Herodotus to include versions of stories that are not credible, and says the following: "Many historians entirely omit less creditable versions; in the case of Themistocles, Ephorus says the man knew of Pausanias' treacherous dealings with the king's generals 'but he wasn't persuaded; and when Pausanias let him into the secret and invited him to share the same hopes, Themistocles wouldn't even entertain the idea.' Thucydides, on the other hand, has entirely ignored the story, effectively condemning it" (*de Malig.* 5; tr. Bowen 1992, 25). Based upon Plutarch's explicit approval of Thucydides' modus operandi here and his condemnation of Herodotus' throughout his essay, it is reasonable to conclude that Plutarch was more comfortable with the variety of history writing that Thucydides practiced.

⁹ Cf. 863D on the Ethiopian king and 867B on Hippocleides.

Plutarch's conflation of Herodotus' characters and Herodotus himself leads to his misjudgment of the *Histories*' humor. At the same time, by understanding this conflation, we understand how Plutarch might have interpreted the *Histories* in the way that he did.

So how does Herodotus use humor? To be sure, Herodotus tends to avoid using humor in his authorial voice, though we do find his tongue-in-cheek proem (1.1-5), his comments about the gullibility of the Athenians (1.60), his laughter at mapmakers (4.36.2), and his authorial comment about the ridiculous ruse of Xerxes (8.24-25). Rather, most humor in the *Histories* is focalized through the voices of the characters, and while we sometimes experience humor vicariously from the perspective of its instigator, it usually arises from Herodotus' overall narrative presentation. Still yet, we sometimes observe a lone character laughing in text—like Cambyses and Xerxes—and feel uncomfortable, for we know that their laughter is inappropriate.

At some times, characters in the text use aggressive varieties of humor—usually derision and witty retorts—to best their opponents. At other times, characters in the text use humorous deception as a tool of aggression. Many of the trickster figures use deception to dupe a member of another group, and in this way play along with Herodotus' fondness for highlighting the *sophie* of certain characters. What is more, wise advisors use humor that is contrary to expectation as an oblique tool of persuasion that makes the delivery of wisdom more palatable and effective, especially in the presence of a monarch.

Finally, I examined humor that helps to memorialize monuments, battles, and political disputes. As we see through the example of Herodotus' account of

Thermopylae, humor helps to memorialize the battles in which the Greeks and barbarians valiantly fought. This memorializing humor comes in a variety of forms and encapsulates the cultural conflicts that accompany the physical battles. Laughter directed at the *nomoi* of others in the context of warfare is dangerous and reminds us of the tension of the conflict and the seriousness of the battles. At other times, such as in the case of Dieneces, humor offers brief moments of respite. This narrative rest is not without purpose, however, for Herodotus encourages us to linger on the accounts that he presents, and most importantly, to remember them.

When I first encountered many of the accounts I have discussed in this study, I found them charming. In my fascination over the years with Herodotus' text, it is humor that has helped me remember these episodes and has encouraged me to ponder how they fit into the larger context of the work. It seems that in my own inquiries, however insignificant, I have discovered one of the enduring ways that Herodotus accomplishes the purposes he sets forth in his proem.

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