Because Herodotus offers no detailed statement of methodology in his Histories, scholars have looked elsewhere for clues to how he views his task as "historian." This article will expand the search for evidence of Herodotus's conception of his role to the recurring scenes in which he portrays barbarian kings as inquirers and investigators. Herodotus's inquisitive kings represent for him a powerful, but ambiguous, driving force in the human quest for information and knowledge. Through his depiction of them, the historian not only explores the character of autocrats, but also holds up a mirror to his own activity as inquirer. Once we recognize the metahistorical dimension of Herodotus's representation of inquiring kings, we can better understand the scenes in which these figures appear and the historian who sees his own enterprise reflected or distorted in their efforts.

Herodotean scholars have noted with interest how certain figures within the Histories engage in activities that overlap with those of the historian: Solon, the touring philosopher; Hecataeus, the prose-writer (λογοποιός); the Egyptian priests, who carry out researches (στορίζει) into the past. In addition, scholars have drawn

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the meetings of the American Philological Association in 1992. I am grateful to the following for their helpful criticisms of drafts of it: Deborah Boedeker, William F. Hansen, Eleanor W. Leach, S. Douglas Olson, Susan O. Shapiro, and this journal's two anonymous referees. Translations of Herodotus are adapted from D. Grene.

1. On Herodotus's self-presentation, see esp. Dewald (1987), Marincola (1987), and Lateiner (1989) 55–108. For convenience, I will refer to the narrator of the Histories—whom some label the histor so as to distinguish him from the historical Herodotus—as "Herodotus" or "the historian." At all points, however, I am speaking of the author's persona within his work rather than of the historical Herodotus. In addition, when I apply the modern label "historian" to Herodotus, I do not mean to beg any questions concerning his conception of his role within the work.

attention to the fact that the Histories' "wise advisers" embrace a Weltanschauung with which the historian himself is highly sympathetic, to judge by the statements he makes in propria persona. Few, however, have fully appreciated that Herodotus's kings—many of whom are rightly cautioned by these wise advisers—also share with the historian a significant quality: an avid interest in inquiry and investigation.

Herodotus and his kings—Scythian, Persian, Egyptian, and Ethiopian—regularly confront in their different domains the fundamental problem of how best to gather and assess information. Like the historian, kings in the Histories often "want to know" about various aspects of the physical and divine worlds, of human history and nomoi, and therefore initiate inquiries. The extraordinary means they possess and the power they exert over others, however, allow them to conduct inquiries that the historian could not hope to carry out. At times, the historian appears to admire, and identify with, these kingly inquirers, as he endorses or builds on their results. At other times, Herodotus draws attention to the fact that these kingly investigators employ despotic and coercive methods, and seek knowledge for corrupt ends, in particular, self-aggrandizement and conquest. In such cases, regal investigators appear as parodic imitators of the kind of inquiry that the historian embraces. Whether Herodotus identifies with or distances himself from his kingly inquirers, through his treatment of them he discloses his own views of the intellectual and ethical principles that should, but often do not, govern human investigations.


6. Herodotus repeatedly alludes to his own "desire to know" something: ἔθελον εἴδεναι, 2.3.1; βουλόμενος εἰδέναι ἱστόρειν, 2.19.3; θέλων ... εἴδεναι, 2.44.1. Müller ([1981] 311–12) notes that this frequently marks the starting point of a Herodotean investigation. Herodotus characterizes regal curiosity in similar terms: [ Cyrus] βουλόμενος εἰδέναι, 1.86.2; [Psammetichus] ἡθέλησε εἰδέναι, 2.2.1; [Rhampsinitus] βουλόμενον εὑρεθήναι, 2.121e1; [Darius] βουλόμενον ... εἴδεναι, 4.44.1; [Ariantas] βουλόμενον ... εἴδεναι, 4.81.5.

On a number of occasions, Herodotus uses ἱστορέω or words of the same root to describe his inquiry: for its usage and its significance, see Connor (1993). Herodotus applies the verb twice to Croesus (1.56.1–2), and repeatedly to the tyrant Periander (1.24.7, 3.50.3, 3.51.1 bis).
I. THE CURIOUS KING

Herodotus’s kings are intensely curious about the world around them and pursue the objects of their curiosity in unusual ways. Herodotus’s tale of Darius and the Paeonian wonder-woman illustrates well the nature of many Herodotean narratives about kingly inquiry:

It happened that Darius saw (δούμενον) something that made him desire (ἐπιθυμήσαι) to command Megabazus to conquer the Paeonians and take them right out of Europe and into Asia. There were two Paeonians, Pigres and Mantyes, who themselves wished to rule over the Paeonians. As soon as Darius had crossed into Asia, these men came to Sardis and brought with them their sister, who was tall and beautiful. They kept watch (φυλάξαντες) until Darius had established himself in the outskirts of the Lydian city, and this is what they did: they dressed up their sister as well as ever they could and sent her out to fetch water, with a vessel on her head, leading a horse behind her with a bridle on her arm, and spinning flax. As she passed by, Darius noticed her—for what was done by this woman was not done as by the women of the Persians, Lydians, or any of the people of Asia. So he noticed it. (ὥς δὲ παρεξήμε ἡ γυνή, ἐπιμελὴς τῷ Δαρείῳ ἐγένετο· οὗτε γάρ Περσικά ἦν οὗτε Λύδια τὰ ποιεύμενα ἐκ τῆς γυναικὸς, οὗτε πρὸς τῶν ἐκ τῆς Ἀσίας οὐδαμῶν. ἐπιμελὴς δὲ ὃς οἱ ἐγένετο . . .) Whereupon he sent certain of his bodyguard, bidding them keep watch (φυλάξαι) on what the woman would do with the horse. The soldiers followed her, and when she came to the river, she watered the horse; and after watering him she filled the vessel with water and went back the way she had come, bearing the water on her head and drawing the horse after her with a bridle on her arm, while she constantly turned the spindle. Darius, in wonder at what he heard from the spies and what he had observed himself, bade the men lead the woman into his sight (θωμάζων δὲ ὁ Δαρείος τὰ τῇ ἥκουσε ἐκ τῶν κατασκόπων καὶ τὰ αὐτὸς ὁρα, ἤγειν αὐτὴν ἐκέλευε ἐκωτῷ ἐς ὅψιν).

(5.12-13.1)

When the woman and her brothers were brought before Darius, Herodotus continues, the king inquired into the girl’s national origins (5.13.1) and, when he learned that she was a Paeonian, inquired further about her homeland (5.13.2). Finally, he asked “if all the women in that country were as hard-working as she” (5.13.3). When her brothers, in keeping with their plan, assured him that this was the case, Herodotus relates, Darius ordered his general Megabazus to conquer these people and bring them to Asia (5.14-15).

This ostensibly simple tale exhibits many of the typical features that we encounter throughout the Histories in Herodotus’s tales of kingly curiosity and its satisfaction. First, kingly investigation here and elsewhere bears a curious resemblance to that of the historian, both in substance and in form. Substantively, ethnological difference apparently piques Darius’s curiosity, just as it does the historian’s:
it is not the girl’s beauty that catches Darius’s eye, Herodotus notes, but rather the ethnological oddity she represents (“what was done by this woman was not done as by the women of the Persians, Lydians, or any of the people of Asia”). The historian calls attention to Darius’s reflection on this fact by lingering over it (ἔπισκεψε τῷ Δαρείῳ ἐγένετο ... ἐπισκέψε τῇ ὡς οἱ ἐγένετο.). The form of Darius’s investigation also recalls that of the historian. According to Herodotus, what Darius heard from his spies together with what he had himself observed evoked his wonder, and prompted him to have the woman brought forward into his sight for further examination. The breakdown of Darius’s sources of information into what he has heard from others and what he has himself observed, his ultimate preference for autopsy, and the sense of wonder that drives his inquiry, are all reminiscent of Herodotus’s own method.8

At the same time, however, crucial and, as we shall see, typical differences emerge here between the historian and his regal investigator. First, Darius’s observation of the Paeonian woman takes the form of keeping watch (φυλάξας) and spying (ἐπὶ τῶν κατασκόπων) through his agents and is thus distinct from the historian’s more innocuous use of eyewitnesses. Second, despotic power over others and the threat of coercion are present throughout Darius’s investigation: not only are the agents who carry out the king’s bidding subject to his authority, but also the woman whom the guards bring forward for interrogation (5.13.1).9 Third, Darius’s curiosity has a very pragmatic side that sets it apart from that of the historian. Although initially Darius appears, like the historian, to inquire simply to satisfy his curiosity, his investigation emerges as (and was perhaps all along) the gathering of intelligence for conquest.10 Herodotus prepares his reader for this twist at the story’s opening: Darius’s observation (ἐπισκέψει) of something,

7. These elements crop up regularly in a variety of kingly inquiries (note in particular the prominent role of θόμα):  
1) After Cyrus puts Croesus on the pyre, he hears Croesus calling out, wonders what he is saying, and therefore sends interpreters to question him. They eventually force him to reply (1.86.3–4). Later, Cyrus interviews Croesus in person (1.87.3–4).  
2) Rhampsinitus is amazed (θωμάσας, 2.121β1) at the disappearance of treasure from his storeroom and therefore sets out to discover who is responsible. His curiosity (βουλόμενον εὑρεθήναι, 2.121ε1) about the identity of the thief drives him to extraordinary measures. Finally, he concedes defeat and, by promising rewards, brings the thief forward into his sight (δίππν, 2.121ζ1). The king is greatly amazed (μεγάλως θωμάσας, 2.121ζ2) by him and marries his daughter off to him. On the episode as an inquiry, see Bloomer (1993) 45. On its narrative form, see Munson (1993a) 37–41.  
3) When Cambyses conducts his sadistic trial of Psammenitus, he is amazed (θωμάσας) at what his guards report about Psammenitus, and therefore sends a messenger to interrogate him (3.14.8).  
4) When Darius learns (ὑποθέμενος) that Intaphrenes’ wife has chosen to save her brother rather than her husband or one of her sons, he is amazed (θωμάσας), and therefore sends a messenger to ask her to explain her odd choice (3.119.5).  
8. On these features of Herodotean inquiry, see supra, n. 1 and n. 5.  
10. While the questions that Darius poses to his Paeonian interlocutors resemble those regularly put to Homeric travelers, they turn out to have a very specific and cynical purpose.
Herodotus notes, leads him to desire (ἐπιθυμεῖσαι), not a beautiful woman—as one might otherwise expect from the story’s opening—but rather conquest. Kingly observation and inquiry, we shall see, are often a prelude to aggression against foreign peoples.

A final paradigmatic feature of this tale of kingly inquiry is its ironic frame. Herodotus suggests that Darius is not the free inquirer he imagines himself to be, since he is manipulated by the Paeonian brothers (5.12, 5.13.3): Darius keeps watch (φυλάξαι, 5.12.3) on the girl because her brothers have kept watch (φυλάξαντες, 5.12.2) for him in order to implement their plan. Although the brothers’ scheme appears to backfire ultimately since Darius evidently does not place them, as they intend, over the Paeonians, Darius’s susceptibility to their stratagem raises doubts about his independence as investigator. Elsewhere too we shall see that Herodotus is attuned to the inner motivations and the external forces that drive, and in some cases, limit regal investigation.

Barbarian kings within the Histories engage in three overlapping types of investigation that intrigue the historian: measurement, exploration, and experiment. Let us first consider Herodotus’s presentation of kings as measurers and explorers, and then focus on his particularly interesting portrayal of kings as experimenters.

II. MEASUREMENT AND SELF-AGGRANDIZEMENT

A hallmark of Herodotean inquiry is the historian’s fascination with measurement and enumeration. In mapping out the world and in describing its peoples, Herodotus regularly reckons distances, measures depths and heights, and calculates the size of armies or populations. Furthermore, he is intrigued by extremes in nature and in human achievement, and by limits, both geographical and moral. Similarly, Herodotus’s kings are intensely interested in measuring and enumerating. Although at times they engage in these activities, as the historian does, simply to satisfy intellectual curiosity, more often their goal is to glorify themselves. Their self-aggrandizing measurements provide the historian with vivid examples of the excess that he is so interested in measuring.

Occasionally, sheer curiosity prompts a king to measure something. Consider, for example, Herodotus’s account of the story he heard of Psammetichus’s attempt to measure the depths of the “springs of the Nile”:

11. For imperialism as a kind of lust, see Thuc. 6.13.1 and passim.
12. This is especially evident in Herodotus’s portrayal of Xerxes’ inquiry into the dream vision that appears to him (7.12–18), discussed below.
14. Cf. Bloomer ([1993] 49): “Herodotus is unkingly or unaristocratic in his narrative’s figured resistance to kingly appropriation of the superlative, to the equation of the superlative with royal or noble birth.”
That the springs are unfathomable, the clerk [of the holy things of Athena in the city of Sais] said, Psammetichus, king of Egypt, demonstrated through experiment (ἐς διάπειρας . . . ἀπυκέρταξα); for the king had twisted a cable thousands of fathoms long and let it down to the depths but could not find bottom. If, then, what the clerk described actually happened, he showed, I believe, that there are certain strong eddies there and a countercurrent, and, as the water rushes against the mountains, the testing-line (καταπειρητηρήτην) let down cannot reach bottom.

(2.28.4–5)

Although Herodotus doubts that his informant has any exact knowledge of the Nile’s source (2.28.2) and wonders about the historicity of the experiment described (2.28.5), his strong interest in measurement prompts him to report the supposed investigation. One recalls, in fact, that earlier in his Egyptian logos, the historian himself instructs the reader on how one might use a testing-line to confirm that the Nile deposits silt far out into the sea (2.5.2). There is surely an element of competition then in Herodotus’s criticism of the method of this fellow-surveyor: although Psammetichus, a king with unlimited resources, has at his disposal a testing-line “thousands of fathoms long” (contrast the eleven-fathom testing-line of which Herodotus speaks at 2.5.2), he fails to see the error that the historian, with his superior insight, points out.

Despite the criticism Herodotus levels, his basic affinity with this regal investigator is striking. In fact, the very phrase he uses to describe Psammetichus’s measuring trial (ἐς διάπειρας . . . ἀπυκέρταξα) appears later in the Egyptian logos to describe the historian’s own activities as inquirer (ἐγὼ ἐς διάπειρας ἀπυκέρτη, 2.77.1). The phrase appears only in these two places in the Histories. As we shall see below in our discussion of Psammetichus’s inquiry into the most ancient language (2.2), this is not the only occasion on which Herodotus identifies closely with Psammetichus as investigator.

Unlike Psammetichus (and Herodotus), most barbarian kings engage in counting and measuring largely because they seek to reassure themselves of their power and demonstrate their greatness to others. From the start of the Histories, this general tendency of barbarian potentates is evident. Croesus believes himself to be the happiest of men because of the quantity of his riches (1.30.1–3) and fails to take into account, as Solon pointedly informs him, the calculation that human life is the sum of a large number of days, and that no man can be considered happy until he has reached the end of those days in good fortune (1.32).16 Ultimately, Croesus learns through experience that his reckoning was, as Solon warned him, premature.

15. I translate καταπειρητηρήτην as “testing-line,” rather than the more usual “sounding-line,” to emphasize its root sense and connection to διάπειρα (“test,” “trial,” “experiment,” “proof”), which also appears in the passage.
It is not only in counting their riches, but also in calculating the number of their subjects, that barbarian kings reveal themselves to be egotistical and misguided measurers. Herodotus emphasizes this point in three different cases involving regal censuses.

When Herodotus inquires into the population of Scythia and is "unable to ascertain with precision the number of Scythians" (πλήθος δὲ τὸ οὐκ οἷς τε ἐννόμην ἀτρεχέως πυθέσθαι, 4.81.1), he turns to the results of an earlier measurer, the Scythian king, Ariantas. Ariantas, "wishing ... to know the number of Scythians" (βουλόμενον ... εἰδέναι τὸ πλήθος τὸ Σκυθέων), ordered each of his subjects, on penalty of death if any should disobey, to present one bronze arrowhead to him (4.81.5). He then resolved (καὶ οἱ δὸξαι) that the collected arrowheads should be forged into a huge bronze bowl and left behind as a monument (μνημοσύνην) (4.81.6). Despite the initial resemblance between the historian and Ariantas as curious measurers, the use to which Ariantas puts the arrowheads he collects gives his inquiry a distinctly regal appearance: Ariantas, like Darius in the tale of the Paeonian wonder-woman, seeks information not for its own sake ultimately, but rather to advance his own selfish ends. Ariantas’s monument thus provides the historian with an indirect measure not only of the population of Scythia (his initial area of inquiry), but also of the enormous power and ego of the Scythian potentate under whose threats it came into being.

Not long after Herodotus relates this anecdote, he describes how Darius engaged in a similar enterprise. As Darius led the Persian army against Scythia, he halted the army near the river Artescus, where

he appointed a special place for the army, and he ordered them, as each man passed by this place, every single one, to place a stone on it. The army did as he ordered, and so, when he marched away, he left these great heaps of stones there.

(4.92)

17. Flory ([1987] 174, n. 32; cf. Lateiner [1989] 63) points out that where Herodotus uses "ἀτρεχέως of his own knowledge, in more than 90 percent of the cases the usage is negative."

18. The phrase καὶ οἱ δὸξαι suggests a shift in purpose on Ariantas's part: whereas the original impetus for the census was the wish to determine the number of Scythians, once the arrowheads were collected, Ariantas saw an opportunity to leave a monument of his reign.

19. For kingly monuments as evidence of μεγαλοφοσύνη, see esp. 7.24, with Immerwahr's ([1960] 265–66) comments. Dewald ([1987] 159; cf. Dewald [1993] 55–56) notes the epistemological problem that the bowl poses for the historian: "he can describe the bowl, and he can give a rough estimate of size, but he cannot translate this knowledge into a concrete, communicable reality in words and numbers." On the role of objects in Herodotus, see Lateiner (1987) 95–100,115–16, Dewald (1993), and Hedrick (1993) 17–26.

Although Armayor ([1978a] 49–57) and Fehling ([1989] 223) question whether Herodotus could have seen a bowl of such dimensions, Pritchett ([1993] 132–38) presents a credible defense of the historian's accuracy.
Like Ariantas, Darius commands those in his power to provide physical tokens of
themselves, which, when gathered together, serve as a monument to their multitude
and to the power of the king who not only rules such numbers, but also can have
this and any other whim carried out. Since, however, Darius already knows the
number of his troops and has set up inscriptions listing this information (4.87), his
reckoning, unlike Ariantas’s, evidently has no practical side to it and is strictly a
gesture of self-aggrandizement.

Herodotus relates a third instance of regal census-taking in connection with
Xerxes’ massive expedition against the Greeks (7.59.3–60.3). As in the Ariantas
episode, Herodotus draws on the results of regal calculation in a situation where
his own information is deficient. The historian explains that, while he cannot
“speak with any precision (οὐχ ἐξώ ἐπειν τὸ ἀτεχές) as to how great a number
each contingent provided,” Xerxes reckoned that they totaled 1,700,000 men. To
judge by the detail with which Herodotus proceeds to describe the king’s method of
measuring, he is intrigued by it. First, Xerxes’ agents collected (συναγαγόντες) ten
thousand men in a single place and, having packed them together (συννάξαντες)
as close as possible, marked a circle around them. Next, they removed the men,
had a dry-wall constructed on this circle, and proceeded to measure the remaining
multitudes by herding them successively into this standard ten-thousand troop pen.
While Ariantas and Darius perform their reckonings by heaping up tokens that
represent their subjects, Xerxes packs his soldiers themselves into an enclosure and
treats them as if they were objects. Thus, although Herodotus approves of the
sum total thereby attained and adopts it without qualification in his own inquiry, he
suggests that Xerxes’ method of counting betrays a despot’s attitude toward, and
power over, his subjects.

It is not only Xerxes’ herding of his troops that reveals his despotic character,
but also the use to which he eventually puts the results of his census. Initially, Xerxes
appears to have a strictly strategic interest in determining the size of his forces and
arranging them by nation (7.60), and in inquiring into, and gathering information
about, the various contingents (7.100). The construction of the narrative, moreover,
encourages the reader to view Xerxes as an objective gatherer of information: the
historian intrudes into the text (7.61–7.99) between the two passages that describe
Xerxes’ investigations (7.60 and 7.100) and himself catalogues the contingents.

20. For the use of tokens in Persian census-taking, see Procop. Bell. Pers. 1.18.52–53, with
21. συννάξαντες is Reiske’s plausible emendation of συνάξαντες in A B d. According to LSJ,
nάσσω is frequently applied to inanimate objects, e.g., dirt (Hom. Od. 21.122) and feces (Hp. Nat.
Puer. 24). For the king’s subjects as (disposable) objects, see 8.118.
22. On Herodotus’s sources for his catalogue, see Armayor (1978b) and Lewis (1985) 116–17.
no army will be able to resist his multitudes and attempts unsuccessfully to elicit a similar reckoning from Demaratus (7.101–5). Thus, like Ariantas and Darius, Xerxes cannot engage in counting without reflecting on his own greatness.

When Herodotus conspicuously juxtaposes his own interest in measuring with that of his kingly inquirers in the Ariantas and Xerxes episodes, he invites his reader to compare, and ultimately distinguish between, his approach and theirs. The historian, unlike his kingly measurers, does not subordinate his measuring of the world to his own egotistical concerns. Although this may seem dubious grounds on which to congratulate the historian, since arguably he is not subject to the same temptations as kings, Herodotus suggests elsewhere that this objectivity cannot be taken for granted among non-regal inquirers. He faults his predecessor Hecataeus for falling short in this very area.

When Hecataeus was in Egypt, Herodotus relates, he attempted to “reckon his own family’s descent (γενειαλογήσαντι [τε] ἔωτον) back to a god in the sixteenth generation” (2.143.1). The Egyptian priests, however, Herodotus reports with satisfaction, “did for him what they did for me, too—though I was not reckoning the generations of my family (ἐπὶ ἄριθμοι; 2.143.4; cf. ἐξηριθμευον, 2.143.2, ἄριθμέοντες, 2.143.3) that no man had been born from a god in the three hundred and forty-five generations about which they knew. Hecataeus’s source of embarrassment is Herodotus’s source of pride: unlike his predecessor, Herodotus does not succumb to this sort of self-interested reckoning.4

III. EXPLORATION AND CONQUEST

Herodotus shares with his kingly inquirers a drive not only to measure, but also to explore, the world. The historian is indefatigable in pursuing information in person, and seemingly at a moment’s notice is prepared to travel to a distant location to satisfy his curiosity (2.44). When autopsy is not feasible, however, he seeks out and interrogates those who have traveled to faraway places. Although at times Herodotean kings explore—in their own persons or through their agents—because they, like the historian, are simply curious about the unknown, frequently their

23. Note how Demaratus (7.102.3, 7.104.3–5), like Solon (1.32), rejects the simplistic and egotistical calculation of a barbarian king. On Demaratus and Xerxes, see Boedeker (1987b) 195–96. On Xerxes’ frequent desire to gaze (θεῶσαι) on things, see Immerwahr (1966) 182 and Konstan (1987) 62–69. Konstan (62–63) points out the close connection between Xerxes’ “peculiar passion ... for looking things over” and his “objectification or reification of value.”

24. Cf. Bloomer (1993) 45–46: “But not only kings go astray in the search for the superlative ... in tracing his genealogy back only sixteen generations to the divine, [Hecataeus] as well has failed to discern the true superlative—the last god and the first mortal to live on earth have been greatly miscalculated (2.144).”

interests are more strategic than intellectual. This is particularly evident when they gather information through spies in preparation for their imperialistic ventures.

At times Herodotus identifies closely with the kingly explorers whom he portrays, for example, when the historian’s inquiry into the source of the Nile leads him to report Etearchus’s prior inquiry into this question (2.31–33.2). According to men of Cyrene, Herodotus reports, Etearchus, king of the Ammonians, once questioned some Nasamonians who appeared at his court as to “whether they could say anything more concerning the deserts of Libya [i.e. Africa]” (εἴ τι ἔχουσι πλέον λέγειν περὶ τῶν ἑρῆμων τῆς Λιβύης, 2.32.3). In response, the Nasamonians related how “among them certain arrogant (ὑβριστάς) men of princely lineage” had cast lots among themselves and had chosen five of their number

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	ext{ὅψομένους τὰ ἑρῆμα τῆς Λιβύης, καὶ εἴ τι πλέον ἴδοιεν τῶν τὰ μακρότατα ἴδομένων. (2.32.3)}
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to inspect the deserts of Libya, and to see if they would discover something more than those who had so far prospected farthest.

These explorers, the Nasamonians reported, brought back from their expedition stories of a distant city, beside which ran a great, crocodile-infested river that flowed from west to east (2.32.7). When Etearchus heard this description, he conjectured (οὐχεῖ πάντα ἴδομένων), therefore, they fail to draw significant inferences from their observations. In contrast, Etearchus conducts a successful investigation without venturing abroad: although he has not seen what the Nasamonian princes have, he seeks out information concerning their travels and extracts from it new and important knowledge. Thus through intelligent conjecture Etearchus surpasses the unfruitful efforts of the Nasamonian princes.

As Herodotus narrates this episode, however, a further competition emerges, one between the historian and Etearchus. This rivalry arises from the fact that Etearchus plays a role in which we often see Herodotus. First, he, like Herodotus, is curious to find out something more about distant lands and therefore interviews informants. Second, Etearchus, like the historian, draws his own conclusions from the information he receives: although Etearchus’s informants, like some of the

26. When Herodotus characterizes the Nasamonian princes as ὑβριστάς, therefore, he is not condemning exploration per se, but rather the arrogant spirit with which these explorers set out and the attitude that keeps them from intelligently assessing what they see.
historian's own, do not realize the value of the information they possess, Etearchus recognizes its importance and uses it to conjecture about the source of the Nile. The connection between Herodotus and Etearchus is confirmed by the historian's reaction to Etearchus's conjecture: Herodotus immediately expresses his approval of Etearchus's reasoning (καὶ δὴ καὶ ὁ λόγος οὗτος σωτρὶ συφέει, 2.33.2), and then proceeds to build on Etearchus's conjecture with a further conjecture of his own (καὶ ὃς ἐγὼ συμβάλλομαι, 2.33.2): the Ister, Herodotus suggests, runs a course across Europe that is roughly parallel to, and of equal measure with, the Nile (2.33.3–34).

Scholars have frequently noted that this equation of the Nile and Ister is a prime example of Herodotus's tendency to envision the world in symmetrical terms. At the same time, this equation is itself connected with another symmetrical association, namely, the one that sets in parallel the inquiring activities of Etearchus and Herodotus.

If, however, Herodotus envisions himself and Etearchus as engaged in similar kinds of inquiry, his own bold (even if, to the modern eye, peculiar) conjecture moves a step beyond Etearchus's: whereas Etearchus conjectures only about the identity of the Nile, the historian uses the same information to conjecture about broad, geographical symmetries between two continents. Thus, just as Etearchus proves himself more perceptive than the Nasamonian princes in his clever conjecture, so too Herodotus shows himself to be more shrewd even than Etearchus.

Elsewhere historical and kingly exploration tend to diverge from one another more than they converge. Consider, for example, the historian's presentation of Darius as explorer. When Herodotus discusses the geographical situation of Libya, he reports in detail how three kings, each for his own reasons, sent out explorers with orders to circumnavigate the region (4.42–44). Herodotus's third and final tale of the exploration of the Libyan seas involves Darius and his agents (4.44.1–3). He reports that "most of Asia was discovered (ἐξερεύθη) by Darius, who wished to know (ὅπολύθενος . . . εἰλεύθεσι) at what point the Indus River (which of all rivers is second for its number of crocodiles) enters the sea" (4.44.1). Darius, Herodotus continues, sent out boats with crews "whom he trusted to tell him the truth" to carry out this exploration. These boats, the historian relates, not only made their way down the Indus into the sea, but also eventually made their way around Libya. Up to this point, one might suppose that mere curiosity, like the historian's own, prompted Darius to launch this expedition. Herodotus's own interjection about the Indus's

27. Dewald ([1987] 161, n. 31) argues persuasively, contra Hohti (1977), that συμβάλλεσθαι is not a technical term for Herodotus.
29. The first tale (4.42.2–43.1) relates how King Necos sent out Phoenicians to prove that Libya was circumnavigable, the second (4.43.1–7) how Xerxes punished Sataspes with the labor of sailing around Libya.
crocodiles, moreover, encourages one to view Darius's purposes as identical with those of the historian.

The resemblance between Darius's expedition and Herodotean exploration vanishes, however, when Herodotus adds to his account, "after these had sailed round, Darius subdued the Indians and made use of this sea" (4.44.3). As in the story of the Paeonian wonder-woman, what appears initially as innocent curiosity on Darius's part turns out to be a pragmatic interest in gathering intelligence to prepare for a conquest. The historian's abrupt return to his own inquiry into the Libyan Seas — "so it was found out that Asia, except for the parts of it to the east, is in other respects like Libya" (οὕτως καὶ τῆς Ἀσίας, πλὴν τὰ πρὸς ήλιον ἀνάσχοντα, τὰ ἄλλα ἀνεύρηται δύο μα παρεχομένη τῇ Λιβύη, 4.44.3)— draws the reader's attention to the stark contrast between Darius's ultimately imperialistic interest in exploration and the historian's purer interest in gaining knowledge through it.30

Later in the same book, however, Herodotus suggests that Darius's interest in exploration is not always pragmatic. Herodotus reports that Darius, on his march to conquer Scythia, went out of his way simply to view (ἐθέμενο) the Pontus (4.85.1). Although Herodotus tells us nothing of Darius's impressions, the king's sightseeing prompts the historian to digress at length (4.85.2–86.4) on this sea that he labels "worth looking at" (άξιοθέτητον) and the "most wondrous" (θαυμασιώτατος) of all seas (4.85.1–2). By the time Herodotus returns to Darius ("When Darius had viewed the Pontus, he sailed back . . . ," 4.87.1), we have nearly forgotten that it was Darius's tourism and not Herodotus's own that prompted this excursus.

Soon after this episode, Herodotus once more sets in tandem his exploration and Darius's, but this time differentiates between them emphatically. When Darius encamps near the river Tearus in Thrace (4.89.3), Herodotus seizes the opportunity to comment on the Tearus and its unusual properties (4.90.1–2). In this case, however, once Herodotus has completed his own assessment, he proceeds to describe Darius's distinctly regal reaction to this unusual river. The king was so pleased with it, Herodotus reports, that he set up the following inscription:

The headsprings of the Tearus give water that is the best and most beautiful (ἄριστόν τε καὶ καλλυστον) of all rivers. And to these headsprings, in his invasion of Scythia, came the best and most beautiful (ἄριστός τε καὶ καλλυστος) of all men, Darius, the son of Hystaspes, king of the Persians and of all the mainland.

(4.91.1–2)

Although Darius's favorable comparison of the Tearus with other rivers recalls Herodotus's own penchant for ranking natural and other wonders (e.g., 4.82), his

30. Cf. Darius's interest in learning all he can about Greece—so he can invade it (καὶ ἔπεπτα ἐξειποτήμενος ἐπ' αὐτοὺς τρέψομαι, 3.134.6). To gather information, Darius attempts to use Democedes as an observer and recorder (ἐθηεύντω καὶ ἀπεγράφωντο, 3.136.1), a role that overlaps, as Lateiner ([1986] 10) points out, with that of the historian.
linking of the river’s superb qualities to his own betrays the characteristic outlook of an egotistical autocrat.31

Later in the Histories, Herodotus explores another Persian king’s interest in, and peculiar response to, a river, when he describes how Xerxes went out of his way to view the river Peneus in Thessaly (7.128-30).32 Herodotus reports that Xerxes, seeing (δρων) the Thessalian mountains from Therme, learning (πυρβανόμενος) that the Peneus made its way through them by a narrow pass, and hearing (άχοών) that the road that passed nearby was not safe for his immense army, desired to sail and take a look at (ἐπεθύμησε πλώσας θείσασθαι) the river’s mouth (7.128.1). Acting on this desire (δς δε ἐπεθύμησε), Xerxes embarked on the boat he regularly used for such purposes (διως τι έθελον τοιούτο ποησα) and bid the rest of his fleet accompany him (7.128.2). On arriving at his destination and gazing on the river’s mouth, Xerxes was overcome with wonder (γεατί τρεις ένεσχετο) at the Peneus and asked his guides if it was possible to divert it and lead it into the sea at some other point (7.128.2). Xerxes’ query prompts the historian to interrupt his narrative to discuss at length (7.129) the story that Thessaly was once a vast sea, before the Peneus drained into the Aegean. After this excursus, Herodotus resumes his narrative and reports that in response to Xerxes’ question, the guides replied that there was no other outlet. Upon hearing this, Xerxes speculated that Thessaly could easily be placed under water by damming and diverting the river, and inferred that it was because of this possibility that the Thessalians had come to terms with him (7.130).

Like so many episodes involving kingly inquiry, this one teases the reader by identifying king and historian with one another initially only to reject this identification in the end. Initially Xerxes appears as an inquirer not unlike the historian in his gathering and evaluation of information (δρων, πυρβανόμενος, ἄχοών) and in the persistence of his interest in viewing sights (he uses the same ship that he employed “whenever he wished to do such a thing”). There is, however, something distinctly regal about the grand scale of this sightseeing expedition that involves an entire fleet. The form that Xerxes’ wonder at the Peneus takes is, moreover, peculiar: he immediately asks if there is any other outlet through which it might flow to the sea. Because the historian intrudes with his own excursus on the question, one might be lured into supposing that Xerxes, like Herodotus, is intrigued by the geological history of the region. When the narrative resumes, however, it becomes clear that Xerxes’ interests are far more practical: he is interested in the strategic implications of the Peneus’ situation. The form of his initial query veils this interest: whereas he asked his guides about the possibility of diverting the river and leading it out into the sea elsewhere (7.128.2), his real (or ultimate) interest is in the fact that one might dam it up and divert it back on to the Thessalian plain

Xerxes’ speculation about the diversion of the Peneus reveals the peculiar outlook of a despot: if the diversion were executed (and it is only the surrender of the Thessalians that prevents this from happening), it would constitute not only a destructive reversal of the geological history in which the historian is interested (7.129), but also an arrogant interference with nature reminiscent of Xerxes’ digging of the channel through Athos (7.24).

Perhaps the most unusual Herodotean treatment of kingly exploration is found within his narrative of Cambyses’ plan to conquer the Ethiopians. Herodotus reports that before Cambyses launched his expedition, he sent spies (κατόπτας, 3.17.2—the Fish-Eaters, we learn later, 3.19.1)

\[\delta\phi\omicron\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\upsilon\upsilon\upsilon\upsilon\upsilon \tau\epsilon \tau\upsilon \nu\omicron\upsilon \omicron \delta\upsilon \upsilon\upsilon \tau\rho\alpha\pi\epsilon\zeta\alpha\nu\upsilon \epsilon \xi\zeta \upsilon\upsilon \theta\epsilon\omicron\nu \omega\upsilon \upsilon \upsilon, \quad \kappa\alpha\iota \pi\delta\upsilon \tau\alpha\upsilon\theta\nu\gamma \tau\alpha\lambda \lambda \alpha \kappa\alpha\omicron\tau\omicron\omicron\omicron\nu\omicron\upsilon\upsilon\upsilon,\]

(3.17.2)

to see whether the reported Table of the Sun actually existed among them, and besides this, to spy out matters in general in that country, holding forth as pretext that they were bearing gifts to the king of the Ethiopians.

Before the historian proceeds with his tale of this mission, however, he breaks into the narrative to present his own discussion of what is reported (λέγεται) about the Table (3.18).

One notes first that Herodotus’s distinction between the two goals of the mission—observing (\(\delta\phi\omicron\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\upsilon\upsilon\upsilon\upsilon\upsilon\upsilon\)) and spying (κατόπτας)—neatly encapsulates the very diverse goals that kingly exploration can embrace. While the chiastic arrangement of \(\delta\phi\omicron\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\upsilon\upsilon\upsilon\upsilon\upsilon\upsilon\) and κατόπτας within the sentence emphasizes the radically different purposes they express, their very conjunction and the slight difference in form between the two words suggest how easily the two purposes can coalesce in the kingly mind.

Herodotus, however, is not equally interested in each of these two goals: his own strong interest in the Table shapes his presentation of Cambyses’ motives. Although Herodotus has just spoken at 3.17.1 of Cambyses’ intent to conquer the Ethiopians, at 3.17.2 he focuses attention on the quest for information about the Table and mentions only secondarily (προς τα\(\upsilon\)τη) and vaguely (τα δ\(\alpha\)λλα) the gathering of military intelligence.\(^33\) Furthermore, when Herodotus describes Cambyses’ interest in the Table as a desire to learn the truth about the reported Table, he portrays Cambyses’ curiosity in terms that anticipate the historian’s own interest at 3.18 in verifying what is reported to him about the Table. These subtle projections of the historian’s interest onto Cambyses pave the way for Herodotus’s appropriation of the inquiry into the Table as his own (3.18).\(^34\) So complete is this appropriation, in


\(^{34}\) Munson ([1991] 60; cf. Gould [1989] 104) cites this as one of several instances in which the histor’s voice is “fused” with that of Cambyses or his agents.
fact, that once Herodotus has himself treated the question, the Table barely receives a mention—"they saw also the reported Table of the Sun" (ἐθεήσαντο καὶ τὴν τοῦ ἥλιου λεγομένην τράπεζαν, 3.23.4)—in his extensive account of the expedition. Any further discussion of the Table would be redundant, since the historian has reported in propria persona all that (as far as he knows) Cambyses' spies found out about it.

This is one of many episodes in the Histories in which Herodotus appropriates a kingly inquiry for his own purposes. These episodes without doubt serve a "compositional function," since the historian takes advantage of them to insert his own observations. At the same time, however, they help clarify the relation between historical and kingly inquiry. What the historian chooses to amplify through his own excursus reveals his particular interests and preoccupations. In this case, when Herodotus fixes his attention on Cambyses' inquiry into the Table, he indicates that it is this aspect of the king's investigation that most resembles his own investigation and therefore requires comment from him. Herodotus's narrative of the remainder of the episode provides further opportunities for self-definition through the representation of regal inquiry.

What dominates the rest of Herodotus's tale is an account of how Cambyses' spies encounter on the fringe of the known world (cf. 3.25.1-2) an inquiring king who turns out to be just as inquisitive as barbarian kings who dwell in less remote regions. Ironically, the Ethiopian king turns the tables on the Fish-Eaters, who came to spy on him, when he makes them the object of his own inquiry. The reversal is immediate and dramatic. The king, "having learned that they had come as spies" (μάθων δὲ τοῖς κατοίκηται ἠνοιξαν, 3.21.2), rebukes their master, Cambyses, for seeking to acquire others' lands (3.21.2-3) and proceeds to interrogate them. While the Fish-Eaters have an opportunity to question the king after he has completed his interrogation (3.23.1), the queries they make are largely a reflection of those the king initiates: in 3.23.1-3, the Fish-Eaters echo the king's questions about longevity and diet at 3.22.3-4; in 3.23.4, they learn about the use of golden fetters, to which the king alluded at 3.22.2-3. That they are very much under his influence is evident, moreover, from the way he conducts (ὑπὸ τοῦ, 3.23.2, ἄγανεν, 3.23.4) them around.

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 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 (τούτο γάρ ἔσωσι τις ὑπὸ
Περσώτων ἐναποδαι, 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).

In the episode as a whole (3.17–3.24), therefore, Herodotus presents contrasting
images of kingly inquiry. Cambyses sends agents to explore Ethiopia not only
to satisfy his curiosity, but also to prepare for his conquest of this distant land.
The Ethiopian king, in contrast, explicitly condemns this imperialistic intent and
conducts his own investigation into another people not in order to conquer them, but
rather to satisfy his own curiosity. When Herodotus distinguishes his own interests
in exploration from those of Cambyses and playfully identifies with the ethnological
inquiry of the Ethiopian king, he confirms that his inquiry seeks knowledge of distant
lands and peoples for its own sake and not as an instrument of conquest. Indeed,
although Herodotus’s Histories might be consulted by Greeks with imperialistic
designs, its critical attitude toward expansionism and its appreciation for the nomoi
of diverse peoples hardly encourage such a use.

IV. TRIAL, TORTURE, AND TEST

One of the most intriguing areas of contact between the historian and his
inquiring kings is their shared interest in gaining knowledge or information through
“experiments” or “trials” (διέκπεξα). Because Herodotus’s own interest in
experimentation may not be immediately obvious, let us first consider some of
the ways that this manifests itself in the Histories, and then turn to the historian’s
treatment of kingly experimenters.

37. On the Ethiopian king as histor, see Munson (1991) 60. On the “ethnologic satire,” see Romm
38. Note, however, that the historian does not explicitly approve of the Persian use of wine at
1.133, whereas the Ethiopian king manifestly delights in the Persian wine presented to him (3.22.3)—as
well he might since wine’s Homeric epithet is αἰθοὶ. Vernant ([1979] 247) notes the possible pun.
39. On Herodotus’s remove from such purposes, see Hartog (1988) 362–63.
40. In Herodotus, any word based on the root πεξα—can signal the presence of an experiment; in
many narratives of experiments, however, no such word appears.
Flory ([1987] 174, n. 34) notes the existence of a “Herodotean motif of the ‘king’s research.’”
On Greek experimentation, see Lateiner (1986) 8–9.
Herodotus does not portray himself as a conductor of actual experiments within the *Histories*. To be sure, at one point, he characterizes his inquiry into different peoples as a “trial” of them (τῶν ἑγὼ ἐς διάπειραν ἀπικόμην, 2.77.1), but he does so in passing and does not develop the figure. This does not mean, however, that the historian does not think of his enterprise in these terms. On the contrary, at several points he speaks of hypothetical experiments that one might carry out to prove a particular point. At times they are modest and of the sort that anyone—the reader, for example—might perform, as when the historian notes that “if you let down a testing-line” a day’s run from land in Egypt, “you will draw up mud and be at a depth of eleven fathoms” (2.5.2). At other times, however, they are thought-experiments on a grand scale, involving for example the hypothetical diversion of the Nile into the Arabian Gulf (2.11.4) or the reversal of “the constitution of the seasons” (2.26). It is as a curious reporter of others’ experiments, however, that the historian’s fascination with experimentation is most evident. Two examples from outside the sphere of regal inquiry attest to this fascination. Consider first Herodotus’s manifest interest in how a Messenian, Panites, devised an experiment to determine which twin son of Aristodemus, the Spartan king, was the eldest and hence his rightful heir. Since the mother pretended not to know which was the eldest (“she wanted both somehow to become kings,” 6.52.4) and the Lacedaimonians were very much at a loss (ἀπορεοῦσι, 6.52.5; cf. 6.52.4) as to how to discover (εὑρίσκω, 6.52.5) which was the first-born, Panites proposed (προτίθηκε, 6.52.5; cf. προτίθημι, 6.52.7) that they should watch (φωλάξω) the mother for which of the two she washed and fed first. If she manifestly does these acts always in the same order, then the Spartans would have everything they were seeking (σχεδόν θέλετε καὶ, 6.52.6) and wanted to find out (θέλουσι εὑρεῖν); but if she wavered in her order, doing now one of the children first and now the other, then it would be clear to them that she really did not know any more than they; in that case they had better turn to some other method. (6.52.6)

When the Spartiates carried out this trial (the mother “had no knowledge why she was watched,” 6.52.7), they determined that she did consistently favor one of the two and concluded, therefore, that he was the eldest. The fact that Herodotus portrays the

41. Lateiner (1986) rightly notes that Herodotus “tests” others’ reports and observations (10), and that the “concept of independent controls and proofs by which to judge events and reports of them, as well as natural phenomena, is central to Herodotus” (11).

42. For similar involvement of the reader, see 1.139: ἐς τούτῳ διέξημεν τὰς ἑυρήσεις.... For other ways in which Herodotus involves his audience, see Evans (1991) 100–102, and Munson (1993a) 35–36.

43. A. B. Lloyd ([1976] 107) labels these two passages examples of hypotheses κατ’ ἀναλογίαν. For another Herodotean thought-experiment, see 3.38.1–2, discussed below. On Herodotus’s use of “contrary-to-fact suppositions,” see Lateiner (1989) 81–82.

assumptions, methods, and results of this experiment in detail suggests that he views it not only as a clever stratagem, but also as a successful example of rational inquiry: it confirms that if one tests an intelligent hypothesis under controlled circumstances, through careful observation one can discover useful information.

Further evidence of Herodotus's interest in experimental method is found in the unlikely context of his discussion of the phoenix. The Heliopolitans, Herodotus reports, claim that the phoenix, when its father dies, contrives (μηχανάσθαι) to convey him in a ball of myrrh to the shrine of the sun:

First the phoenix forms an egg of myrrh, of a weight that he is able to carry, and after that he tries (πειράσθαι) carrying it; and when the trial of it is over (ἐπιπειράσθη), he hollows out the egg and stows his father into it, and with more myrrh he plasters over the place he had hollowed out and stowed his father within.

(2.73)

The phoenix thus engages in a simple trial—based, one notes, on the assumed equivalence of the density of myrrh and phoenix—to determine if it will be able to convey its father's remains. Although Herodotus expressly states, before relating this anecdote, his disbelief in it, he includes it in his Histories as a wondrous tale of—among other things—the experimental method as practiced in nature.45

Nowhere is the historian's fascination with experimental method more pronounced, however, than in his tales of kings who conduct remarkable and often bizarre experiments. These experiments evoke from the historian a variety of responses—amusement, horror, admiration, and criticism. It is convenient to divide Herodotus's treatment of regal experiments into two groups: those involving human subjects, on the one hand, and divine subjects, on the other. Different issues are prominent in the two groups. In presenting tales of experiments involving humans, Herodotus explores the coercive and intrusive aspect of this branch of kingly research, and shows how easily the exercise of kingly power in this sphere leads to oppression and even cruelty. In his portrayal of kingly experiments involving the divine, by contrast, Herodotus appears to be less concerned with the morality of the experiments depicted than with whether rational method can be productively applied where the divine is involved.46

A. HUMAN EXPERIMENTATION: TRIAL OR TORTURE?

Herodotean kings regularly subject those in their power to trials. These attempts to elicit knowledge take many forms: some are simple tests of loyalty (3.119.1; cf. 3.135.3 and 1.9.1), others more complex and ambitious trials that make greater

45. Herodotus also indicates that the nomoi of some peoples involve controlled testing: see 1.133 (Persian testing of good counsel) and 4.68 (Scythian testing of accusations of perjury: on which see Hartog [1988] 125-33).

46. I am indebted to one of ClAnt's anonymous referees for this formulation of the distinction.
epistemological claims. Regal experiments involve varying degrees of coercion and range from the whimsical and relatively innocent to the manifestly brutal. While participants are sometimes painfully aware that they are subjects of a kingly trial (3.35.1–2), often it does not suit a king’s purposes to inform his subjects that a test is under way. Although Herodotus does not condemn these human trials categorically, he is conscious that in the hands of kings trial and torture are not always easily distinguished from one another.

Near the beginning of his Egyptian logos, Herodotus relates that Psammetichus, because he “wished to know what people were the oldest of mankind” (ὡθελησε εἰδέναι αἵτινες γενολατο πρῶτοι), devised a controlled experiment (2.2.1). He had two randomly selected (ἄνθρωπων τῶν ἐπτυχόντων), newborn children raised in an isolated hut, and ordered that no one speak in their presence, because he wanted to hear what language they would first speak (2.2.2–3). When Psammetichus heard that the children had spoken their first word, Ἐξειδίκευσαν, he ordered them brought before his sight (δήκνυ, 2.2.4). After Psammetichus had confirmed the report in person (ἐσφαλαληκτο... πυνθανόμενος) and discovered (ἐθέρισε) that the Phrygians call bread Ἐξειδίκευσα (2.2.4). “Thus,” Herodotus concludes, “the Egyptians, when they too had given due weight to this outcome, came to acknowledge that the Phrygians were older than they” (οὕτω συνεχώρησαν Ἀγυπτίοι καὶ τοιοῦτω σταθμεσάμενοι πρήγματι τοὺς Φρύγας πρεσβυτέρους εἶναι ἐκείνου, 2.2.5).

Herodotus’s affinity with this inquirer is striking. For example, just as Psammetichus’s curiosity (ἡθελήσε εἰδέναι, 2.2.1) prompts him to conduct an investigation, so too in the very next section the historian’s curiosity (ἐθέλων εἰδέναι, 2.3.1) causes him to set off in search of information. Furthermore, Psammetichus, like the historian, is systematic and persistent in his inquiry and places a premium on autopsy. Finally, Psammetichus’s inquiry resembles the historian’s in its underlying spirit. Just as Herodotus at several points in his Egyptian logos challenges the idea of Hellenic superiority and priority, so too Psammetichus, through his inquiry, challenges the parochial assumptions of his countrymen. Before his reign, the Egyptians considered themselves to be the oldest people (2.2.1); after his experiment, they came to acknowledge that the Phrygians were older than they (2.2.5).

47. Greek tyrants also engage in trials: see Cleisthenes’ extended testing (διατεθέατο, 6.128 bis) of his daughter’s suitors.
48. At 2.15.2 Herodotus labels the experiment a διατεθείμαι and takes its historicity as a given. Cf. Psammeticus’s διατεθείμαι involving a testing-line (2.28.4), discussed above. On the controlled character of the experiment and the peculiar reasoning behind it, see A. B. Lloyd (1976) 5–6.
50. See, e.g., 2.4, 2.43, 2.45, 2.49–51, 2.58; and 2.160.1, with Bloomer (1993) 45–46.
51. The story that Herodotus presents is not, therefore, as Salmon ([1956] 324, 326–27) and A. B. Lloyd ([1976] 11–12) maintain, about Psammeticus’s comeuppance, but rather about the Egyptians’ embarrassment at Psammeticus’s hands. Herodotus, however, stops short of endorsing Psammeticus’s
That Herodotus sees in Psammetichus a kindred spirit is also evident from his sympathetic portrayal of the king’s research. Although Psammetichus, like other autocrats in the *Histories*, enjoys the power to command (ἐντειλάμενος, 2.2.2; ἐνετέλεσε, 2.2.3; κελεύσαντος, 2.2.4) that his whims be carried out, Herodotus suggests that he is moderate in its use. Herodotus plays down, for example, the harshness of the king’s isolation of newborn infants. At the outset, he notes that Psammetichus devised (ἐπιτεχνάται, 2.2.2) this plan only when he had exhausted all other possibilities (ὡς οὐκ ἐδύνατο πυθανόμενος πόρον οὐδένα τούτου ἁναφεδίν, 2.2.2). Furthermore, Herodotus notes that during the course of the trial, the infants were duly fed and otherwise cared for (ταλλα διαπρήσσονται, 2.2.2). After Herodotus relates this sympathetic version of the trial (which he attributes at 2.2.5 to the priests of Hephaestus in Memphis), moreover, he emphatically rejects as nonsense the Hellenic tale that Psammetichus imposed a further control on his experiment by cutting out the tongues of the women who cared for the children (2.2.5). Thus Herodotus defends the reputation of a fellow inquirer from slander: if Psammetichus’s methods are unusual, the historian suggests, they are hardly cruel.

Very different is Herodotus’s critical portrayal of Cambyses as a cruel and coercive experimenter. The mad Cambyses, Herodotus reports, designed a twisted experiment by which to prove his sanity to his subjects. When Cambyses’ trusted servant, Prexaspes, reports to him that the Persians think their king is too much inclined to drink, Cambyses takes this as an attack on his sanity, and sets out to prove to Prexaspes that he is fully in his senses:

Now, you yourself learn (μάθε) whether the Persians are speaking the truth or whether they themselves are out of their wits when they say such things of me. Your son shall stand there in the doorway; if I shoot and hit him in the middle of the heart, the Persians are manifestly talking nonsense. If I miss him, you may say that the Persians speak the truth and I am not in my senses.

(3.35.1–2)

Cambyses proceeds to hit the boy with an arrow and orders others to dissect him and examine (σκέψασθαι) the wound: when this was done, it was discovered (εὑρεθήναι) that the arrow had entered the boy’s heart (3.35.3). While Cambyses

52. ἐπιτεχνάται is unmodified here and appears to be neutral in tone. Contrast 2.119.2–3, where Herodotus condemns Menelaos when he ἐπιτεχνάται τρῆμια ὧν δυσμον, namely, the sacrifice of two Egyptian children.

53. A. B. Lloyd ([1976] 8–9) suggests that Herodotus is attacking a Hecataean version of the tale here. Benardete ([1969] 33) maintains that Herodotus “saw how the children’s imitation of the goats could account for the word ‘bekos’; for he labels the Greek version of this story foolish precisely because, if only women whose tongues Psammetichus had cut out took care of the children, there could be no accounting for the word at all.” If Herodotus is aware of this interpretation of βεκός, however, it is surprising that he does not comment on it explicitly (so Salmon [1956] 325–26).
gleefully boasts of this as clear proof of his sanity, Prexaspes takes it as proof of
the king’s madness (3.35.3–4).54

Herodotus’s portrayal of Cambyses’ vicious experiment lends support to R.
Munson’s suggestion that Cambyses appears in this part of the Histories as a
perverse histor.55 Another example of Cambyses’ mockery of the historian’s role
appears several chapters after the Prexaspes episode, when Herodotus describes
how Cambyses opened the ancient coffins at Memphis and peered at the dead
bodies within them (3.37.1).56 Cambyses’ very un-Herodotean disregard for others’
nomoi in this and other actions prompts the historian to intrude into the narrative
to condemn him. Herodotus’s criticism takes the intriguing form of a presentation of
two experiments concerning nomoi: the first is hypothetical and his own, the second
an actual one that he attributes to Darius.

Herodotus asserts that Cambyses must have been mad to mock the Egyptians’
sacred and customary practices:

For if someone (τις) were to put the proposition (προθέθη) to all mankind,
bidding (κελεύων) each choose the best customs (νόμους) in the world,
each people, upon consideration, would choose its own. To such an extent
does each people consider (νομίζουσι) its own customs (νόμους) by far
the best. It is not likely, therefore, that anyone other than a madman would
make a mockery of such things.

(3.38.1–2)

Although the historian cannot carry out this ambitious experiment,57 he supports
his claim by pointing to the results of Darius’s research in this area:

When Darius was in power, he summoned (καλέσας) some of the Greeks
who were in attendance on him and asked them how much money it would
take for them to agree to eat their deceased fathers. They said that no price
would induce them to do so. After that Darius summoned (καλέσας) those
of the Indians who are called Callatians, who do eat their parents, and in
the presence of the Greeks (who understood the conversation through an
interpreter), asked them what amount of money would make them burn
their dead fathers with fire. They cried out loudly (αμβυσώσαντες μέγας) and
urged him not to mention such horrors.

(3.38.3–4)

54. On Cambyses’ maniacal laughter, see Lateiner (1977) 177–78. On the terms applied to
Cambyses’ madness here, see Munson (1991) 54–55.
3.16, 3.28.1–29.2, and 3.35.5. To Munson’s list, one might add the Prexaspes episode (3.35.1–4) and
Cambyses’ sadistic trial of Psammenitus (διεπιφάνεια οὐτοῦ τῆς φυγῆς, 3.14.1).
56. For another example of Cambyses’ violation of nomoi concerning the dead, see 3.16.2–4,
and cf. 3.35.5. On these passages and 3.37, see Munson (1991) 56 and 59.
57. Aly ([1921] 1969) 289, n. 1, notes the similarity in form of this Herodotean hypothesis with
that at 7.152.2.
From this the historian concludes "Thus, these are matters of settled custom and I think Pindar is right when he says 'nomos is king of all.'"

At first glance, Herodotus appears to identify closely with this kingly experimenter, who, like the historian, is curious about human nomoi and methodically inquires into them. Several features of Herodotus's account suggest, however, that he is interested not only in the way Darius's experiment substantiates his own view, but also in what it reveals about the autocrat who conducts it.\(^{58}\)

Herodotus provides numerous clues that Darius's experiment involves a crass and intimidating display of power. Whereas the historian innocently proposes that one might prove peoples' preferences for their own nomoi by asking them if they would adopt others in their place, Darius tests this general hypothesis in the especially sensitive area of nomoi concerning the dead. Furthermore, he does so in a characteristically regal way: rather than ask his Greek and Indian subjects what their preferences are, he asks them how much money it would take for them to adopt one another's practices.\(^{59}\) The fact that the Indians cry out loudly (\(\alpha \mu \beta \omega \sigma \alpha \tau \varepsilon \mu \varepsilon \gamma \alpha\)) at Darius's question suggests that they are intimidated by his inquiry, as well they might be, since Darius has it in his power not only to summon (\(\kappa \alpha \lambda \varepsilon \sigma \alpha \zeta, \ \text{bis}\)) his interlocutors but also to compel them to do what they deem unthinkable.\(^{60}\)

The extreme response of the Indians recalls that of Gyges in similar circumstances earlier in the Histories: when Candaules bids Gyges hide himself in the king's bedchamber so that he may view Candaules' wife naked, Gyges cries out aloud (\(\mu \varepsilon \gamma \alpha \ \alpha \mu \beta \omega \sigma \alpha \zeta, \ 1.8.3\)) at the suggestion that he violate nomos. If, as it turns out, Darius, unlike Candaules, does not force an actual violation of nomos, the Indians have good reason to fear what might result from a despot's whimsical play with nomoi.\(^{61}\)

Once we appreciate that, while Herodotus is ready to use the results of Darius's inquiry, he is critical of the form of the king's experiment, the gnomic conclusion he attaches to the episode—"nomos is king of all"—takes on a new dimension. Most conspicuously, this conclusion brings us back to the principle of the power of nomos, which prompted the historian to relate Darius's experiment in the first place. At the same time, however, it can be taken as an ironic and punning comment on the intervening tale of regal inquiry: Darius's kingly play with others' nomoi suggests,

\(^{58}\) Cf. Herodotus's treatment of Darius's "ethnological" interest at 5.12.3, discussed above.

\(^{59}\) On the tendency of Persian kings to reify value, see Konstan (1987) 61–69. When Darius opens Nitocris's tomb in hope of discovering money (1.187), his actions suggest that for a price he at least is willing to violate nomoi concerning the dead. On 1.187, see Dillery (1992). Gammie ([1986] 182) compares 1.187 and 3.38, but hesitates to view the two passages as critical of Darius.

\(^{60}\) Contrast the historian's innocuous use of \(\kappa \varepsilon \lambda \varepsilon \upsilon \omega \nu\) in the hypothetical experiment he proposes (3.38.1).

\(^{61}\) Contra Benardete ([1969] 81), who maintains that Herodotus is critical of the Indian response. Note too how Darius stage-manages (Cook [1976] 39) the experiment, perhaps to impress his Greek interlocutors: after he has posed his question to them, he then interrogates the Callatians in their presence. Cf. the dramatic display Cambyses produces for Prexaspe (3.35.1–4).
that he, like so many other Herodotean kings, does not fully appreciate that nomos is king. 62

B. TESTING THE DIVINE: TRIAL AND ERROR

In two prominent and extended episodes, Herodotus depicts kingly experiments concerning the divine: 1) Croesus's test of different oracles before he attacks Persia (1.46–49); and 2) Xerxes' test of the vision that goads him to attack the Greeks (7.12–18). Given Herodotus' own respect for the divine and his reticence on occasion in respect to divulging information in connection with it, one might assume from the outset that the historian views these experiments as prime examples of kingly hubris. 63 As it turns out, however, Herodotus does not condemn them as impious. These experiments raise for the historian not so much moral questions as intellectual ones, concerning how far rational method can be pressed, and what, if any, limits it confronts.

1. Croesus (1.46–49). Herodotus reports that Croesus, alarmed by the expansion of the neighboring Persian empire (1.46.1), designed and executed an experiment (ἀπετείρω, 1.46.2; πειρώμενος, 1.46.3; διάπειρας, 1.47.1) to discover (ἐφεσθείη, 1.46.3) what oracle he could most trust to advise him about whether to attack the Persians. The historian describes with evident interest each of the many controls Croesus introduced to ensure his results would be valid (1.46.2–1.47.1). He sent his agents to consult not one but many oracles. He directed his agents, who all left Sardis on the same day, to count the days from their departure and consult their respective oracles on the hundredth day; 64 to ask the same question, namely, "what is Croesus doing at this moment"; and to write down the oracular responses they received and bring them back to him. Finally, on the designated day, Croesus shrewdly devised (ἐμχαρνάτο ... ἐπινοήσας, 1.48.2) a complex action whose details could not be found out except by a true oracle. When Delphi correctly divined what Croesus was doing, Herodotus relates, he concluded that "it alone was an oracle, because it had found out (ἐξευρήκε) what he had done" (1.48.1). 65 After Croesus had propitiated Apollo with great sacrifices and splendid gifts (1.50–51), Herodotus continues, he finally consulted the oracle and asked if he should attack the Persians (1.53.1–2). When the oracle told Croesus that, if he did so, a great

62. On the Pindaric phrase, see Munson (1991) 62 and Bloomer (1993) 30–31. Bloomer (49) suggests that Herodotus appropriates the Pindaric phrase to criticize kingly behavior, but does not explore its relevance to Darius in 3.38. For the numerous instances in which kings violate nomoi in the Histories, see Lateiner (1989) 170–86.

63. Lateiner (1989) collects examples of Herodotus's "disinclination to probe religious matters" (73–74), and argues—not entirely persuasively in my view—that the historian's reticence is due more to historiographical principle than religious scruple (65–66).

64. Cf. Darius's attention to the measurement of time: he leaves the Ionians a strap with sixty knots, one of which is to be unknotted each day during his absence (4.98).

65. Herodotus later notes, however, that Croesus also approved of the response the oracle of Amphiaraus gave (1.49), sent it gifts (1.52), and then consulted it along with Delphi (1.53.3).
empire would fall (1.53.3), he wrongly concluded that the empire alluded to was the Persian one and therefore, after a further (mis-)consultation of the oracle (1.55–56.1; cf. 1.91.5–6) and a search for Greek allies (1.56.1–1.69.1), launched the assault that precipitated his own empire’s downfall.

In light of this unhappy outcome, it is reasonable to ask whether Herodotus approves of Croesus’s testing of the divine. One might argue, for instance, that this testing is necessarily corrupt, because it is linked with Croesus’s drive to expand his empire. Herodotus, however, downplays the role of imperialism in this part of the Croesus cycle. Although Croesus’s desire to acquire new subjects is prominent in 1.26–28, it is notably Croesus’s concern to defend himself from Persian expansionism (1.46.1) that prompts him to test the oracles. To be sure, Herodotus does state later (1.73.1) that the desire to acquire land was a consideration in Croesus’s decision to launch an expedition, but he mentions this at a great distance from his narration of the test and even then only as a subsidiary interest on Croesus’s part.⁶⁶

One might still argue on other grounds, however, that Herodotus is critical of Croesus’s experiment. Some have suggested, for example, that the historian’s disapproval is implicit here, since in the Histories only barbarians test oracles and Herodotus must therefore disapprove of the practice. Viewed in this way, Croesus suffers (in part at least) because he hubristically challenges the divine through his experiment.⁶⁷ This argument, however, is susceptible to criticism on several levels.

First, the generalization that only barbarians test oracles is questionable. While it may be true that Herodotus’s Greeks, unlike his barbarians, do not test several oracles simultaneously, they consult the same oracle repeatedly on the same question and, so far from angering the oracle’s patron deity, profit by their persistence. The Athenians, for example, after receiving an unfavorable oracle about the imminent Persian invasion, benefit by consulting Delphi for a second time (7.140–42). Furthermore, Aristodikos of Cyme, “distrusting an oracle” (ἀπιστεών τε τῷ θεῷ, 1.158.2) given by the god at Branchidae, reconsults the oracle and successfully goads the god into giving a clear response (1.159). Arguably, therefore, the Greek scrutiny of oracles differs in form, but not in spirit, from the barbarian examination of them.

Second, even if Herodotus means to distinguish between Greek and barbarian practice in regard to oracles, we cannot assume that he condemns the barbarian

⁶⁶ On Croesus’s apparent shift from defensive concerns in 1.46.1 to imperialism in 1.73.1, see Immerwahr (1966) 158 and Stahl (1975) 10.

⁶⁷ Klees ([1965] 46–49, 95–98; followed by Kirchberg [1965] 17, n. 4) argues that the testing of oracles is exclusively a barbarian practice. Dobson (1979) accepts Klees’s conclusions and suggests that “it was considered unethical and certainly undiplomatic by the Greeks to consult more than one Oracle” (350, n. 2; cf. Klees [1965] 64–65). Dobson argues, moreover, on the basis of the imagery used in 1.47–48 (Croesus’s strange stew) that Croesus is playing “a sacrilegious prank on the Pythia” and that this contributes to his downfall (358–59). I am not convinced, however, that Herodotus is conscious of the symbolic nexus to which Dobson points. Cf. Fontenrose ([1978] 113), who argues that the test oracle is not genuine, since the historical Croesus would not “have been so presumptuous and impious.”
nomos. Since Herodotus is tolerant toward, and even expresses approval of, many barbarian nomoi in the Histories, it would be a mistake to assume that he disapproves of this particular nomos. In fact, in the episodes outside the Croesus tale in which barbarians compare different oracles, Herodotus seems quite comfortable with the critical attitude they embrace. The historian reports with amusement, for example, Amasis's retrospective evaluation of oracles: when Amasis becomes king, he refuses to care for the fraudulent oracles that failed to recognize the thievery he practiced as a private citizen (2.174). Furthermore, the historian registers no disapproval of Mardonius's simultaneous consultation of numerous oracles before the battle of Plataea (8.133–36). On the contrary, he reports with interest details of the trial (ἀποφημασθανώς, 8.133), and even speculates that the oracles may have soundly advised Mardonius to make Athens his ally (8.136.3).

Herodotus's tolerant attitude toward the rational scrutiny of oracles—whether by Greeks or barbarians—is readily comprehensible. First, to test oracles is not necessarily to act impiously toward the gods: because humans are intimately involved as the mouthpieces of oracles, fraud is a real possibility.68 Second, the frequently ambiguous nature (χύτατηλος, cf. 1.75.2) of oracular responses (at least in Herodotus) demands shrewdness on the part of the inquirer, both in formulating questions and interpreting them. To apply that same shrewdness to the choice of which oracle one should consult in the first place, as Croesus does, is fully consistent with the gamesmanship required in successful consultation of oracles.69

Despite Herodotus's tolerant attitude toward the scrutiny of oracles by barbarians and Greeks elsewhere in the Histories, it is still possible that Croesus's testing troubles him. One is hard pressed, however, to find evidence of disapproval in Herodotus's presentation of the test itself or of its results. The controls that Croesus imposes, like those Psammetichus introduces in his inquiry into man's original language, are shrewd as far as the historian is concerned. In addition, Croesus's results are plausible: his finding that Delphi ranks among the truest oracles is one that the historian would surely not dispute.70

68. On Herodotus's general interest in religious fraud, see Lateiner (1990) 235–46. On Herodotus's awareness of corrupt or fraudulent oracles, see Legrand (1937), who rightly notes (282–84), however, that this does not mean Herodotus doubts the veracity of oracles per se: see esp. 8.77 and 2.18.


70. On Herodotus's esteem for Delphi, see Immerwahr (1966) 234–36. Shimron (1989) doubts that Herodotus could embrace the miraculous results of the test (49) and maintains that "Herodotus never even hints at his own opinion of the whole story, let alone accept[s] it" (44). Note, however, that Herodotus does not preface the tale with a λέγεται, as he does when presenting other parts of the Croesus cycle (1.87.1, 1.91.1). Although λέγεται does appear twice (1.47.2, 1.49.1) within the narrative of the test, in both cases it is used with a negative, simply to note lack of information on specific points.
So far from condemning Croesus for his test of the oracles, Herodotus emphasizes that he precipitates his downfall by failing to be equally rational in assessing Delphi’s ambiguous responses. The historian remarks on this analytical lapse in his own voice (Κροίος ἐ ἀμαρτών τοῦ χρησιμοῦ, 1.71.1), and later reports Delphi’s similar assessment of Croesus’s mistake: when Croesus complains to Delphi after his defeat that he had been deceived, the oracle faults him not for his test of oracles—after all, it had confirmed Delphi’s primacy—but rather for his failure to comprehend the oracle and to question it again (1.91.4; cf. 1.91.5). In the end Croesus himself accepts this analysis of his error and acknowledges his mistake (1.91.6).

Thus, Croesus suffers not because he has incurred divine nemesis by testing the oracles, but rather because of his own kingly and human foibles: overjoyed at what he regards as favorable oracles, he forms false expectations (ἐλπίδες, cf. 1.54.1, 1.56.1, 1.71.1, 1.75.2) and suffers accordingly. Although the dynasty of Croesus’s family was destined to end in his generation (1.91.1; cf. 1.13), Herodotus leaves no doubt that Croesus is personally responsible for the decisions that precipitate its downfall. As scholars have noted, there is something tragic about Croesus’s combination of positive and negative traits: on the one hand, he can act humanely (see esp. 1.45.2) and rationally (note how he accepts wise advice at 1.27); on the other hand, his position makes him arrogant and therefore susceptible to the false expectations that obstruct his reasoning and cause his fall.

Herodotus therefore presents Croesus as a shrewd researcher who ironically fails to pursue his initial critical principles through to the end. Consistent with this acknowledgment of Croesus’s potential as an investigator is Herodotus’ portrayal of Croesus’s more successful inquiry concerning Greek states. When Croesus consulted Delphi (and Amphiaraurus) about whether he should attack Persia, Herodotus reports, he also asked if he should seek out any allies (1.53.1-2). The response was that he should find out (ἐξευρόντα, 1.53.3) who among the Greeks were

71. Cf. Evans (1991) 49: “Croesus, for all his apparent good sense and diligence in testing the oracles, ultimately succumbed to an irrational desire to expand his boundaries and increase his power.”
72. Contrast 6.86γ2, where the Pythia rebukes Glaucus for making trial (τὸ περίθεναι) of the god by posing an immoral question.
73. Parke ([1984] 212) goes so far as to argue, therefore, that the story of the test is “simply an invention of the Delphic priesthood.”
74. Cf. Dewald (1985) 52, n. 9: “Herodotus suggests that the gods, whoever they are, seem to share his own sense of the usefulness of an alert practical intelligence.”
75. Contrast Xenophon’s very different treatment of the tale (Cyr. 7.2.17): Croesus expresses regret for having put the god to the test (ἐπεῳρώτησε), “since even men, if they are gentlemen—to say nothing of a god—when they find out that they are mistrusted, dislike those who mistrust them” (tr. Miller, adapted).
77. Delphi alludes to the fated fall of Croesus’s dynasty (1.91.1), but indicates that the circumstances and precise time of the fall were not fixed (1.91.3-6).
most powerful and attach them as friends. Croesus therefore launched an inquiry (ἐφρόντιζε ἱστορέων, 1.56.1) from which he discovered (ἱστορέων ... εὐρίσκε, 1.56.2) that the Lacedaimonians and Athenians surpassed the other Greeks. The historian not only accepts this finding as valid, but also uses Croesus’s supposed inquiry as a springboard for his own digression (note the striking shift to the first person at 1.57.1) on the situations of Lacedaimonia and Athens in Croesus’s time (1.56.2–68). Although the historian, in the course of his excursus, periodically reminds his reader of Croesus’s interest in these matters (1.59.1, 1.65.1, 1.69.1), it is clear that he has usurped Croesus’s inquiry for his own purposes. In accepting and building on the results of Croesus’s inquiry, however, the historian confirms what is also evident in his presentation of the king’s test of oracles: Croesus is capable of rational and methodical research. Because Croesus has this capacity to succeed as an investigator, it is all the more poignant and striking when he stumbles in his interpretation of oracles.

2. Xerxes (7.12–18). One of the strangest experiments described in the Histories takes place when Xerxes tests the vision that goads him to attack Greece (7.12–18). Herodotus reports that Xerxes, on the eve of his expedition against the Greeks, took to heart his uncle Artabanus’s admonitions (7.10) and decided to abort the intended invasion (7.12.1). According to the Persians (ὡς λέγεται ὑπὸ Περσέων), however, after Xerxes had changed his mind, a menacing vision (δόφυν) evidently (καὶ δὴ χου) appeared to him in his sleep two nights in a row and exhorted him to proceed with his original plan (7.12, 7.14). Xerxes therefore summoned Artabanus and proposed the following trial:

εἰ δὲν θεὸς ἐστὶ ὃ ἐπιτυπώσαν καὶ οἱ πάντως ἐν ἱδονῇ ἐστὶ γενέσθαι στρατηλασίην ἐπὶ τὴν Ἐλλάδα, ἐπιτήσεται καὶ σοὶ τὸν τοῦτο δήμητον, ὡμοίως [ὡς] καὶ ἔμοι ἐντελλόμενον. εὐρίσκω δὲ ὡδὲ δὴν γινόμενα ταῦτα, εἰ λάβοις τὴν ἐμὴν σκεύην πᾶσαν καὶ ἐνδύσῃς μετὰ τοῦτο Ἰζώυ ἐς τὸν ἔμον βρόνον καὶ ἐπείτα ἐν κοίτῃ τῇ ἐμῇ κατυπνώσεις.

(7.15.3)

If it is a god that sends it, and it is entirely his pleasure that this expedition against Greece should take place, then this same dream will hover about you too and will lay the same charge on you as on me. And I think this would be most likely to happen if you would take all this raiment of mine and put it on and sit upon my throne and then go to sleep in my bed.

79. When Croesus later assumes the role of wise adviser to Cyrus, therefore, he does not undergo a complete reversal of character. On the question of Croesus’s transformation, see Stahl (1975) and S. Shapiro’s response to Stahl, forthcoming in CJ.

Despite its peculiar and ostensibly naive assumptions, Xerxes’ plan of action is readily recognizable as an experiment: it replicates the circumstances of Xerxes’ dreams to determine if an independent observer will see the same apparition.

Artabanus, Herodotus reports, did not deem it right that he should sit on Xerxes’ throne and did not obey the king’s bidding until he had first offered a methodical and extensive critique of the proposition (7.16α1). Artabanus objects first to Xerxes’ assumptions about dreams. Invoking his superior years and experience, he instructs (διδαξεξω) Xerxes that dreams reflect what has occupied one’s thoughts during the day (7.16β2). Even if one assumes these dreams are divinely inspired, Artabanus argues, a divine specter will surely not be so simple-minded as to infer (τεχναιρομενον) from the fact that Artabanus is dressed in Xerxes’ clothing that he is the king (7.16γ2). Despite these objections, Artabanus accedes to Xerxes’ wishes without further prodding, and does what he is bid, expecting to prove (εξετασει) the king wrong (7.17.1). When Artabanus carries out the experiment (7.17–18), however, the same dream vision comes to him, rebukes him for standing in the way of the expedition, and makes “as if to burn out his eyes with hot irons” (7.18.1). Artabanus therefore concedes that the king was right and endorses the expedition. This outcome raises interesting questions about the possibilities of rational investigation.

A preliminary and controversial issue is what Herodotus’s vantage point on the episode is. On the one hand, the historian distances himself somewhat at the beginning of the tale with the expressions καὶ δὴ κοι and ὅς λέγεται ὑπὸ Περσέων (7.12.1). These are, however, not very strong expressions of skepticism. Given Herodotus’s readiness elsewhere to express skepticism openly toward the tales he relates, the absence of such an expression here is noteworthy. One might infer that, although Herodotus is somewhat uncomfortable with his sources’ claims of divine interference in human affairs, he is by no means ready to dismiss the tale on

81. Artabanus may well fear that Xerxes is testing his loyalty (How and Wells [1928] 1991, Vol. 2, 132) and hence that he, not the dream vision, is the subject of an experiment. Cf. Candaules’ reassurances to Gyges that he is not making trial (τεχναιρομενος) of him, when he invites him into his bedroom to observe Candaules’ wife nude (1.9.1).


82. On the reflection of contemporary dream theory among Hippocratic writers, see Frisch (1968) 16–17.

83. Shimron ([1989] 51) and Lateiner ([1989] 284, n. 48) stress the importance of these distancing devices. It is debatable, however, how much distance ὅς λέγεται provides here, and καὶ δὴ κοι is an unemphatic expression of uncertainty elsewhere in Herodotus. In the three instances where καὶ δὴ κοι occurs outside of this passage (6.11.1, 6.128.2, 9.113.1), it suggests an absence of specific details, not doubt concerning the veracity of the information reported. Denniston ([1970] 248) observes that in Herodotus “καὶ δὴ is often merely a lively connective, denoting that something important or interesting is to follow.”

this basis. As it turns out, in fact, the historian is not so much interested in proving or disproving the claim of divine interference as he is in exploring the tale's curious perspective on investigation in the elusive realm of dream.

Herodotus delights in the numerous ironies that the episode presents. First, the historian relishes the fact that Xerxes' naive experiment succeeds after a manner and thereby proves Artabanus's elaborately stated theory of dreams to be empty speculation. When Xerxes' experiment is executed, the vision indeed reappears and, though it is not fooled by Artabanus's regal costume (as Artabanus had rightly anticipated), reiterates its warning. Herodotus provides his reader with clues in advance that Artabanus is being set up for a fall: he presents Artabanus's response to Xerxes' proposed experiment as pedantic and "wortreiche." When the reappearance of the dream vision proves Artabanus's expectations mistaken, therefore, Herodotus suggests that Artabanus, like Croesus, places too much confidence in his own ελπίς and deserves the lesson in humility he receives.

Second, when Artabanus interprets the results of Xerxes' experiment, he ironically proves untrue to his own analytical principles. Whereas Xerxes' experiment was designed only to determine whether a god sent the vision and it was his pleasure that the expedition take place (7.15.3), Artabanus draws the additional and unwarranted conclusion from the experiment's success that "on the Greeks, so it seems, some god-sent destruction seizes" (Ελληνας, ώς οἴκε, φθορή τις καταλαμβανει θείλατος, 7.18.3). As it turns out, however, a divine destruction seizes upon the Persians. Lest his reader miss the significance of Artabanus's error, Herodotus places "Ελληνας emphatically at the beginning of its clause, and immediately qualifies it with the words ὅς οἴκε. Artabanus's false inference bears a close resemblance to Croesus's earlier in the Histories. Just as Croesus mistakenly concluded from the ambiguous oracle he received that his enemy would suffer, so too Artabanus wrongly concludes from the appearance of the dream vision that Xerxes' enemies will suffer. Herodotus's different treatment of these two errors suggests, however, that he does not view the two situations as identical. Whereas he states unequivocally that Croesus should have inquired further into the ambiguous oracle (1.71.1, cf. 1.91), he does not explicitly condemn Artabanus for his mistaken inference. Since Artabanus is

84. Frisch (1968) 15-16.
85. Cf. Solmsen ([1974] 1982) 92: "That Artabanus despite his balanced and superior judgement succumbs to the daemon and accepts his indications as true is the height of irony."
86. Köhnken ([1988] 28) notes that whereas Artabanus infers too much from the dream vision that he sees, the Magi later (7.19) ignore a key element of the dream of the olive crown that Xerxes reports to them.
Solmsen ([1974] 1982, 96; cf. Lateiner [1989] 204) goes too far in asserting that at 7.47.2f ("My lord, may the vision that appeared in sleep have final issue as we both would wish!"), "Artabanus promptly discounts the daemon." Although Artabanus is clearly uneasy, he stops well short of dismissing his encounter with the dream vision.
confronted by a vision that threatens to burn his eyes out (7.18.1), Herodotus does not hold him fully accountable for his error.

The exceptional duress under which Artabanus makes his poor judgment stands out by contrast with the less constrained circumstances under which Sabacus successfully evades a trap set for him by a dream (2.139). Sabacus, an Ethiopian who had invaded Egypt and ruled as its king for fifty years, was visited by a dream vision that urged him "to gather together all the priests in Egypt and saw them all apart in the middle." Sabacus, however, shrewdly interpreted this as an attempt to convince him to commit an act of impiety that would lead to his punishment at the hands of gods or men. He therefore did not carry out the dream's bidding and instead, because he was troubled by the dream and recalled an oracle that he should rule for only fifty years, relinquished his rule over the Egyptians. While Sabacus's experience suggests that one need not follow the bad advice of a dream, his situation is distinct from Artabanus's: Sabacus's dream makes no provision for punishment should he disobey its orders, and thus leaves him considerably more room to maneuver than Artabanus's dream vision does him.

If there is irony both in Artabanus's dream theory's being proven wrong and in his unfortunate (if understandable) abandonment of rational method in interpreting the dream, there is further irony in Xerxes' role in the whole affair. Like so many Herodotean kings, Xerxes exercises his power to compel others to cooperate in his investigations. Although Xerxes couches in polite terms (optatives within a future-less-vivid condition: 7.15.3, quoted above) his proposition to Artabanus that he play king as part of the experiment, Herodotus immediately characterizes this as an order (κελεύσματι, 7.16α1) and prefices Artabanus's speech indicting the experiment with the words, "ultimately, after Artabanus made the following speech, under compulsion he did what he was ordered to do" (τέλος ὡς ἡναγχάζετο εἰπας τάδε ἐποίες τὸ κελευόμενον, 7.16α1). Artabanus too recognizes in the conclusion to his speech that the king's request constitutes an order: "if . . . I must (δεί ἐμέ) sleep in your bed . . ." (7.16γ3). Ironically, however, while Xerxes enjoys the authority to coerce Artabanus to participate in his experiment, his ability to coerce far exceeds his ability to interpret the results of the test. Because Xerxes has no independent ability to judge the outcome of the experiment, he is dependent on Artabanus's erroneous interpretation. Thus, when Xerxes insists that the experiment be carried out, he inadvertently paves the way for his own undoing in the expedition that Artabanus endorses.

Because Herodotus's presentation of this episode is so full of irony, it is difficult to pin down its implications for human inquiry. Although Herodotus is elusive—and appropriately so in the surreal and elusive realm of dream, his perspective on inquiry is largely consistent with what we have seen elsewhere in the Histories.

First, Herodotus’s presentation of Xerxes’ test, like his account of Croesus’s test of the oracles, does not appear to condemn trials involving the divine. Even though Xerxes’ test involves a more direct confrontation with the supernatural than does Croesus’s, there is no suggestion that Xerxes and Artabanus provoke divine nemesis by their skeptical inquiry. On the contrary, the divinity is angry before the experiment is conducted and, when it appears to Artabanus during the test, it expresses indignation not at the test, but rather at Artabanus for attempting to dissuade Xerxes from the expedition. Thus, Xerxes’ experiment is not for Herodotus a cautionary tale that advises categorically against subjecting the divine to human reason.89

Instead, Herodotus explores in this episode the problematic interplay of constraints, internal and external, on human inquiry. As we have noted, Herodotus is ambiguous concerning how much Artabanus is to blame for the careless inference he draws from the dream’s frightening warning to him. The fact that Herodotus draws attention to Artabanus’s mental lapse, however, suggests that even in this setting reason should not be completely abandoned. That Herodotus holds out some possibility that even under these adverse circumstances human reason might prevail is in keeping with his generally optimistic portrayal of the possibilities of rational and self-conscious investigation. Elsewhere in the Histories, where kingly inquiry falls short or fails, human foibles, rather than any inherent limitations of human reasoning, are to blame. This positive view of the power of human reason links Herodotus closely to contemporary thinkers of the Greek enlightenment.

V. HISTORY AND METAHISTORY

Herodotus’s representation of kings as inquirers has important implications for our understanding both of his historiographical principles and of his conception of his role as historian.

A. THE INQUIRING KING AS A HISTORICAL TYPE

What does the resemblance of these episodes to one another say about Herodotus’s historical principles? For Fehling, this type of pattern within the Histories betrays the historian as a fabricator of history, who invents or shapes the information he reports in predictable ways.90 Herodotus, however, surely had no need to invent the tales he relates of kingly inquiry: it is highly plausible that they are derived from oral traditions about regal activities and some must convey real

89. That critical scrutiny of dreams can yield positive results is attested by the Sabacus episode (2.139).
information, for example, about kingly exploration. Nonetheless, if Herodotus has not invented these tales, he has clearly translated them into his own idiom of investigation and deployed them for his own purposes.

One important aspect of Herodotus's portrayal of kingly inquiry is that it allows him to explore different facets of regal character. The form and intent of regal investigations vary considerably and help differentiate one king from another in the *Histories*. Although Herodotus notes the marked tendency of barbarian kings to conduct research cruelly and for corrupt purposes, he does not present all kings in the same negative light (Psammetichus and Etearchus, for example, receive favorable treatment) or even the same king in a consistently negative manner (Croesus, for example, receives a mixed review).

Because Herodotus views inquiry as a common kingly activity, moreover, it serves not only as a means of characterization, but also as an analytical tool for assessing otherwise inexplicable behavior. This is most conspicuous in Herodotus's explanation of why Cyrus, after defeating Croesus, placed him on a pyre:

He had in his mind to offer these firstfruits to some god or other, or perhaps he wished to fulfill some vow he had made, or perhaps, since he had learned (πυθόμενος) that Croesus was a god-fearing (θεοσεβέα) man, he set him on the pyre because he wished to know (βουλήμενος εἰδέναι) whether some daimon would rescue him from being burned alive.

(1.86.2)

The third and most elaborate explanation suggests the possibility that Cyrus was conducting a perverse experiment concerning the divine. While this peculiar explanation may seem far-fetched, it turns out to be consistent with the tale “reported by the Lydians” (1.87.1) that Herodotus proceeds to relate. According to this report, Croesus was saved from the pyre by divine intervention and Cyrus therefore concluded (μαθόντα, 1.87.2) that he was “beloved of the gods and a decent man” (θεοφιλής καὶ ἀνήρ ἀγαθός, 1.87.2). Herodotus’s third explanation of Cyrus’s behavior thus attempts to make sense of these details by viewing them as manifestations of a familiar pattern of kingly behavior.

It is significant, however, that Herodotus stops short of casting Cyrus definitively as a regal investigator. While the historian sees kingly inquiry as a significant pattern

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93. Gammie ([1986] 179; cf. Stahl [1975] 26–29) suggests that “the gods answer Cyrus’s impertinent challenge and spare Croesus so Croesus can do their work when they wish,” i.e., by helping to bring about Cyrus’s death later (1.207). I am not convinced, however, that Herodotus views Croesus as so instrumental in Cyrus’s unhappy end or that he links Cyrus’s death to his perverse experiment at 1.86.
of regal behavior, he nonetheless hesitates to impose it too readily on the material he receives. The historian's manifest restraint here, along with his diverse use of the paradigm elsewhere, argues strongly that it serves him as a flexible rather than a rigid template for exploring kingly character.

B. SELF-PRESENTATION: THE KING AND "I"

If Herodotus's kings reveal a great deal about themselves through the investigations they carry out, the historian, through his portrayal of them, also reveals something of himself and his view of inquiry. Herodotus's exploration of regal investigation helps both to define and to lend authority to the inquiry that he undertakes in the Histories.

That Herodotus should define his historical enterprise in part by reference to kingly investigation is itself significant. While Herodotus's polemic against Hecataeus attests to the importance of Ionian historie as a reference point for defining his activity, his repeated and involved critique of inquiring kings indicates that any earlier investigator—measurer, explorer, or experimenter—is in some sense a potential rival for him.94 This broadly inclusive definition of his intellectual forebears and competitors is an important indication of the expansive view that Herodotus takes of his inquiry. Human investigation has a long history and takes many forms, Herodotus suggests, and it is within this general tradition that he situates himself and his own eclectic inquiry. Significantly, he does not automatically dismiss earlier investigators as mere amateurs or assume the privileged perspective of a professional researcher, whose methods set him apart categorically from hoi polloi. Thucydides, by contrast, has little tolerance for amateurs and suggests that his method of inquiry is anything but common: "thus without exertion and rigor do the multitude of men seek out the truth" (οὔτως ἀταλαίπωρος τοῖς πολλοῖς ἡ ζήτησις τῆς ἀληθείας, 1.20.3).95

If Herodotus is conscious that he is in some sense following in the footsteps of inquiring kings, however, his critique of their techniques and motives suggests that his inquiry is intellectually and ethically superior to theirs. The historian's superiority arises from the fact that he observes rather than spies; asks questions rather than makes demands; draws inferences cautiously and self-consciously, and not simply to confirm his own assumptions; and seeks knowledge as an end in itself rather than as a means to power or self-glorification. While these fundamental precepts of Herodotean inquiry manifest themselves in a variety of ways throughout the Histories, they emerge with particular vividness and clarity through the historian's engaging and thoughtful commentary on kingly inquiry. If, therefore, we perceive the narrator of the Histories as a humane, tolerant, and

94. Cf. Dewald ([1985] 49) who observes that Herodotus and Thucydides adopt "authorial attitudes and procedures that resemble the behavior of the most successful actors they depict."
intelligent inquirer, we must appreciate that his treatment of kingly investigation helps shape and reinforce that persona.

The historian distinguishes himself from kingly inquirers not only through the particular criticisms he levels against them, but also through the privileged position he assumes as an analyzer and arbiter of principles of inquiry whenever he treats regal investigation. This confers a special status on his historie—it is not only an inquiry itself, but also an investigation of inquiry—and lends a certain credibility to the inferences that the historian draws in the course of his investigations: the self-conscious critic of others' inquiries may be thought to be less prone to error himself. To be sure, the critical attitude that Herodotus encourages through his analysis of kingly research is one that readers may in turn apply to his historie. When they do so, however, they pay tribute to the self-conscious inquirer who has inculcated in them a critical awareness of the pitfalls and possibilities of human investigation.

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