Herodotus the Tourist
Author(s): James Redfield
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HERODOTUS THE TOURIST

JAMES REDFIELD

> "Let me think—we don't see the other side of the moon out here, no."
>
> "Come, India's not as bad as all that," said a pleasant voice. "Other side of the earth if you like, but we stick to the same old moon." Neither of them knew the speaker nor did they ever see him again.
>
> —E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India*

HERODOTUS, as we know, is both Father of History and Father of Anthropology. Sir John Myres wrote: "so far as Herodotus presents us . . . with a science of anthropology . . . he is little, if at all, behind the best thought of our own day."[1] Even as of 1908 this seems extravagant. Herodotus lacks a principle which Tylor, in the generation before Myres, had already put at the head of cultural anthropology, namely, that every culture is a "complex whole"—or, as we would say, a system. Herodotus merely notes particular traits; he is not concerned with the functional, structural, or stylistic coherence of the cultures he describes.

Here, for instance, is his account of the Adurmachidae, the people who inhabit the border between Egypt and Libya (4. 168):

> They observe most Egyptian customs, but the clothes they wear are rather those of the rest of the Libyans. Their women wear a bangle on each shin, made of bronze. They let the hair on their head grow long, and when a woman catches lice on herself she bites them in retaliation and then throws them away. These are the only Libyans who do this, and they are the only ones who before setting up a household display their virgins to the king. When the king finds one of them pleasing he himself takes her maidenhood.

Herodotus notes points which distinguish this people from others, and especially points which a Greek finds odd, and therefore repellently interesting. Oddity is an ethnocentric principle; other people, from this point of view, are interesting because they wear odd clothes, eat odd foods, have odd customs and odd ideas of the proper and the shameful—odd, that is, by the standard of one's own culture. Woman bites louse is

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1. "Herodotus and Anthropology," in *Anthropology and the Classics*, ed. R. R. Marett (Oxford, 1908), p. 135.

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news. Herodotus seems thus not so much the precursor of Malinowski and Boas, as of *Strange as It Seems* and *Believe It or Not.*

My inquiry into Herodotus' anthropology thus begins with an antipathy to it. I was raised among ethnographers, for whom such unsystematic travelers' reports were the opposite of science. Nevertheless, the ethnographic perspective does provide an entry to Herodotus, for if every culture is a system, every artifact within the culture is characteristic of it—Herodotus' *Histories* included. The more ethnocentric his interests, the better they define his culture.

To travel and observe is a thing characteristically Greek; the prototype is Odysseus, who "wandered much, . . . who saw the cities of many men and knew their mind." For a Greek there are three great reasons for travel: commerce, war, and seeing the sights (Hdt. 3. 139; cf. Pl. *Resp.* 556C, Isoc. 17. 4); the Greek word for the last is *theoria. Theoria* has a particular meaning of going to see the great spectacles, the international games and festivals of the Greeks, sometimes as a member of an official party—but the word also is used in the general sense of going to see another country. Thus we learn from Thucydides (6. 24) that one of the motives which drew the great Athenian expedition to Sicily was the desire of the young men "for sights and *theoria.*" The love of *theoria* is there presented as a weakness, but in Herodotus it is characteristic of the sage—of the Scythian Anacharsis, who "saw a great part of the earth" (4. 76 γῆν πολλὴν θεωρήσας) and in the process became partly Hellenized, and of Solon, who made *theoria* his reason for leaving Athens (1. 29; Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 11. 1 adds commerce as an additional motive). Herodotus was neither the first nor the last Greek to spend some part of his life improving himself by visiting foreign parts.

Herodotus was interested in natural wonders and imposing monuments, but he had a special interest in the life of the peoples, in what we would call their culture. For this concept he has at least three different words: *diaita, ēthea,* and *nomoi.*

Diaita has to do with material culture, with what people eat and drink (3. 23) and otherwise consume (1. 202), and with their livelihood (1. 157, 4. 109). The word also simply means "residence"—human (1. 36, etc.) or animal (2. 68). *Ēthea* are more subjective, relating culture to personality; according to their *ēthea* people are more or less savage (4. 106 vs. 2. 30). More sophisticated *ēthea* (which may accompany a more luxurious *diaita*) are said to be "deeper" (4. 95); such people are, as we say, "more cultivated." *Ēthea* have to do with the cultural tone or ambiance of a community; one can feel a longing for the *ēthea* of one's home (1. 165). *Ēthea* also simply means the customary dwelling-places or "haunts"—of men (1. 15, etc.) or of animals (2. 93, 7. 125).

Nomos means something more explicit than *ēthea,* something more definite as command or prohibition. Very often a *nomos* is a written law (and that may be the original meaning of the word);[2] when used for a

2. G. P. Shipp, *NOMOΣ "Law"* (Sydney, 1978).

custom it means something which can be put into words and stated as a rule. *Nomoi* are specifically human; the word has no relevance to animals. Furthermore, *nomoi* are the sign of a certain level of culture; every people has its *ēthea,* but the most savage people have no *nomoi* at all (4. 106); they are incapable of stating rules for themselves. In the one place where *diaita* and *nomoi* are contrasted (4. 78), the former refers to clothing, the latter to religious observance.

Diaita, ēthea, and *nomoi* all vary from place to place and change over time. All three concepts carry with them a certain relativism; it is assumed that the *diaita, ēthea,* and *nomoi* of each people seem right to them. *Nomoi,* however, are special in that they are often accompanied by an explanation. The Egyptians ease themselves in their houses but eat in the street "saying that shameful necessities ought to be done in secret, things not shameful, openly" (2. 35). The Persians do not build temples or make images "and they charge with folly those who do such things, because, I think, they do not hold the gods anthropomorphic, as the Greeks (obviously) [κατά περ] do" (1. 131). It is through the discussion and comparison of diverse *nomoi* that the observing traveler becomes explicitly conscious of the relativism of culture; each people has its own *nomoi* and makes sense of them in its own terms.

Often, however, the discussion is over before it has properly begun. We may compare the traveler evoked in Plato's *Laws* (637C) who arrives in Taras during the feast of Dionysus to find the whole population drunk in the street. Initially the traveler is disapproving, but then:

> There is one answer which seems to resolve the question, so that the behavior is not wrong but right. For anyone will say in answer to the wondering stranger who looks upon something contrary to his own habits: "Do not wonder, stranger. This is our *nomos;* perhaps you in such matters have a different one."

Herodotus often appears as just such a "wondering stranger" or, as we would say, *tourist* (one gloss for *theoria* is "tourism"), and his relativism seems just such a tourist's relativism. The tourist, after all, goes abroad to see people different from himself; it is wonderful that they are different, but there is nothing to wonder about in this, since people simply do differ and it is enjoyable that they do.

If *nomoi* are unmotivated, merely different, then they signify mere difference, as different countries have different flags and postage stamps. Such things cannot be studied, except very superficially; they can only be collected. The tourist then becomes a collector of *nomoi* which are the emblems of the various countries he visits in fact or in thought. Holland: wooden shoes and windmills. Paris: cafés and the Eiffel Tower. Similarly Herodotus likes to tell us: "These people all paint themselves red and eat monkeys" (4. 194). Like any collector, Herodotus likes his *nomoi* rare, gaudy, and curious.

The tourist makes no attempt to fit in; he rather accepts a specific social role: that of foreigner. In so doing he shows himself comfortable with his own culture, which is strong enough to sustain him even in his temporary position as an outsider. I am at home elsewhere, he says;

therefore you will accept the fact that I am different, as I enjoy the fact that you are different. The greater the difference, the more the journey is worth the trip and the more worth collecting are the images, memories, and souvenirs that the tourist takes home with him.

The tourist, in fact, travels in order to be a foreigner, which is to say, he travels in order to come home. He discovers his own culture by taking it with him to places where it is out of place, discovers its specific contours by taking it to places where it does not fit. Tourism is thus both a proof and a source of cultural morale. Herodotus is glad to notice that the Egyptians (like the Greeks) "call all those who do not speak their language barbarians" (2. 158). Insofar as this attitude is reasonable in the Egyptians, so also is it reasonable in the Greeks. The tourist comes home with a new knowledge that he is at home, with a new appreciation of the only place where he is not a foreigner. Thus cultural relativism becomes ethnocentric and serves to reinforce the tourist's own norms; since he is Greek it is proper that he continue to be Greek.

I can now make more precise my initial antipathy to Herodotus' anthropology. I was brought up to despise tourists. For the ethnographers who raised me, the tourists were intruders in a world we wished kept inviolate. We classed them with missionaries, capitalists, government administrators—with all those modern intruders who wished to appropriate and transform the natives. The tourists were a special problem in that they were uncomfortably like us; we ethnographers had come to this place to observe, and so had they. We, however, had come to work and respected the native culture; they were on vacation and merely enjoyed it. They deprived the natives of dignity by treating their culture as a spectacle; in the process they themselves became ridiculous. We worked hard to fit in; we were prepared to share the hardships of the natives, learn their language, conform to their customs, value their values. The tourists were cheerfully out of place, taking photographs without asking, demanding the comforts of home, patronizing the natives for being different. They were a blot on the landscape. People we might have liked on their own ground in Omaha or Stuttgart appeared, when met in the field, loud, stupid, and coarse. They made us ashamed of our own culture.

Ethnographers, at least while in the field, characteristically align themselves with the natives against their own people. This is an odd thing to do, and is the practical result of ethnographic relativism, which holds that there are no superior societies. Every culture is worthy of respect as a functioning system; every culture in its own way makes full use of human capacities. It is true that ethnography itself might seem evidence of superiority; we study them, while they do not study us. But this (thinks the ethnographer) is not different from the fact that the tourists visit the natives while the natives do not visit the tourists. The superiority is in power, not real value. The tourist accepts and enjoys this superiority; the ethnographer tries to overcome it by participant

observation, which means abandoning power and throwing oneself on the mercy of the natives. Only in this way can the ethnographer begin to see the culture as the native sees it, from the inside, not as a collection of oddities but as a meaningful, livable, complex whole.

Participant observation does not mean active participation, which would change the culture; ethnographers rather try to efface themselves, to become invisible, in order, as far as possible, to observe the culture in its inviolate condition, as if they were not there. The professional concern of the ethnographer (as opposed to a merely personal response) is not for the natives as people, but as a culture; to the extent that ethnographers make friends and acquire local obligations these in fact become an obstacle to their work.

The ethnography, further, is not for the natives but for us; the native has no need of the relativism which makes ethnography possible. For the native, the local culture is simply "the way"; if others have other ways, that is, so to speak, their problem. That we are interested in the ways of others is characteristically our problem. We may not be superior to them, but we are, in this crucial respect, different.

The ethnographer, driven from home by certain modern concerns, has come into the field in order to think, and he (or she, obviously) thinks about certain problems he has brought with him—even if he often does not know what they are until he gets there. He is not content when the native says to him: "This is our *nomos;* perhaps in such matters you have a different one." The ethnographer seeks to discern the underlying cultural system, and he brings it home with him. Ethnography is in its own way also a form of appropriation, signaled when the ethnographer speaks to his colleagues of "my people."

Ethnography reflects a hunger for cultural system, a hunger which seems to characterize us. It is no accident that we became theoretically interested in these cultures just as we began, practically, to appropriate and destroy them. Modernism is an unprecedented historical experience; for the first time one cultural system is taking over the world. A society of such power must inspire anxiety in its members; are we sure that our culture is so superior that the species benefits by the transformation of mankind in our image? We are not sure that modernism coheres as a culture should cohere; we seem to ourselves sometimes out of control. Our interest in cultural systems may then be interpreted as a search for the sources of cultural coherence, of control. We are interested in *nomoi* because we experience *anomie.* Ethnography, from this point of view, is an effort intellectually to rescue ourselves from our own history, and the ethnographer is never more modern than when he leaves this modern scene to immerse himself in another culture. (The classic meditation on this paradox is Lévi-Strauss' *Tristes tropiques.*)

This concludes my dialectical introduction. My initial antipathy to Herodotus' anthropology, it turns out, was based on my own ethnocentric expectations. The Greeks were great tourists, but not participant observers; it seems that this is a sign of their higher cultural morale.

They had a culture and relied on it; this does not mean that they were unobservant travelers, or without anxieties, or that their principles of observation were trivial. If we are to understand Herodotus' inquiry into culture we must see the problem as it presented itself to him.

It may be relevant that *theoria* was a term adopted by the philosophers for their own activity—the *locus classicus* is the anecdote of Pythagoras and Leon of Phlius (Diog. Laert. *Life of Pythagoras* 8; further citations in A. Delatte, *La vie de Pythagore de Diogène Laërce* [Brussels, 1922], ad loc.). Asked to explain the meaning of *philosophos,* Pythagoras compared life to the great games: some come to compete, some to buy and sell, but the better sort come as spectators. This triad is paralleled in Herodotus 3. 139, already cited, and a link between philosophy and *theoria* is explicit in the story of Solon, who traveled φιλοσοφέων γῆν πολλὴν θεωρίης εἵνεκεν (1. 30). The tourist, it seems, can also travel in order to think.

Solon's moralism is thematic in the *Histories:* Solon transmits it to Croesus, and Croesus, once he has understood it in adversity (1. 86. 3), transmits it to Cyrus (1. 207) and Cambyses (3. 36). Its later heir is Artabanus, counselor to the next two Persian kings (note the verbal echo: 1. 32. 4, 7. 49. 3). It is a moralism founded on experience of the wide world—Croesus, asking Solon to approve his prosperity, expressly links Solon's πλάνη and σοφίη, his "wandering" and "wisdom." It is also a moralism critical of barbarian values—if some barbarians have it, they become the ineffective "warners" of those who lead the barbarians. Solon thus displays the wisdom derived from *theoria* as something peculiarly Greek and something more than mere experience; the thoughtful Greek traveler comes to his experience confident that he can give a definitive interpretation of the non-Greek world he visits. He travels not so much to learn as to teach.

Solon, I would suggest, appears in Herodotus' narrative as a kind of alter ego of the narrator himself. Herodotus did not so much derive his interpretations from his inquiries; rather he brought to his inquiries value and categories wherewith to interpret them. His book does more than tell us what is in the world; it teaches us how to think about it.

The primary categorization is in the first sentence: the distinction between Greeks and barbarians. Although this categorization appears at times to be overcome by a secondary relativism, it remains primary; the *Histories* is a Greek book for Greeks about Greeks and others—and it makes Greek sense of the others. As Herodotus, a culturally self-confident Greek spectator, traveled in fact and in thought among the others, he collected wonders and oddities, and as his collection formed he arranged it in his mind. He has an eye for the exceptional, and also for regularities, patterns. Nowhere does he discuss the principles whereby he arranged and selected his collection. He does not discuss his interests; he pursues them. Nevertheless, there are some principles, characteristic of him and of Greek ways of interpreting experience.

Let us begin with a relatively simple (and frequently observed) point: Herodotus' taste for symmetry. Symmetry is pervasive in Herodotus, most subtly in the narrative, where it often takes the form of τίσις—for which one gloss might be "poetic justice." In the greatest case "of all those we know," τίσις took the form of a retribution with the symmetry of the *lex talionis* (8. 105–6; cf. 6. 72. 1). Often symmetry asserts itself without subtlety, as in Herodotus' assertion (denounced by Eratosthenes ap. Strabo 1. 3. 22) that if there were men at the back of the North Wind there would have to be men at the back of the South Wind, too (4. 36. 1). Herodotus seeks out symmetry in his geography, as when he makes the Danube symmetrical to the Nile (2. 33–34). He finds symmetry in nature, as in the case of the Nile fish: the males swim before the females, dropping their milt which the females swallow; the females swim back before the males, dropping their eggs which the males swallow (2. 93). Such natural symmetry can also be called τίσις, as in the case of the Arabian snakes: the females eat the males, and then the offspring eat the females (3. 109). Herodotus also finds symmetry in cultural arrangements, as in the Babylonian river trade, where the boats carry the donkeys downstream and the donkeys carry the boats upstream (1. 194—"This I find the greatest wonder of all things there, except for the city itself.").

Wonder is the beginning of wisdom when it leads to further thought. In Herodotus' case this takes the form of a taste for system, which is a philosophical tendency. Herodotus' thoughtful love of wonders leads him to prefer those wonders which because of their inner structure, the symmetry of their elements, are "good to think." (We shall see more examples below.)

A related tendency leads him to arrange the oddities he has collected in a frame of systematic oppositions. The most striking example occurs in the account of Egypt; just as the Egyptian sky and river are different from those elsewhere, so also the Egyptians are opposite (ἔμπαλιν) in their ἤθεά τε καὶ νόμοι.

He then develops the point in no fewer than eighteen oppositions (2. 35–36), of which I quote only the first four:

> Among them the women shop and sell in the markets; the men stay home and weave. Others weave pushing the woof upward; the Egyptians downward. Men carry burdens on their heads, women on their shoulders. The women urinate standing, the men, sitting down.

In Egypt both nature and culture are upside down—that is, opposite to what a Greek would expect. I am reminded of Lévi-Strauss' description in *Tristes tropiques* of Fire Island, where, according to him, the inversion of sea and land is echoed by the sexual inversion of the inhabitants; the sterile male couples push their groceries about in baby carriages. Both descriptions are systematic, in that a pattern of difference is found to pervade more than one realm; both are somewhat comic—because, I

think, of their excessive lucidity; such elegant mirror-oppositions must seem partly the work of the observer, by a sort of verbal sleight-of-hand.

This brings us to the most famous of all the Herodotean passages on *nomos;* it is in the form of a comment on the madness of Cambyses, whose most dangerous symptom was that he laughed at the *nomoi* of the Egyptians (3. 38):

> If one should make the offer to all mankind and tell them to select the finest *nomoi* from all *nomoi,* after review each would take his own. Nor is it likely that anyone but a madman would think this ridiculous. There is plenty of evidence that all men have this relation to their *nomoi,* in particular this: Darius, calling the Greeks who were at his court, asked them how much money they would take to eat their dead fathers. They said they wouldn't do it at any price. Darius then called some Indians, the so-called Callatiae, who eat their parents, and asked them, while the Greeks were present and informed by interpreters of what was said, how much money they would take to burn their fathers with fire. They gave a great cry and asked him not to blaspheme. That is the way it is with *nomos,* and Pindar seems to me to have put it right, saying that *nomos* is king of all.

I wish to set this passage next to another superb example of Herodotus' taste for system (3. 108. 2–4):

> Somehow divine forethought is, as you might expect, wise, and has made those creatures that are cowardly in spirit and edible also numerous in their progeny, so that some may be left over when they are eaten, whereas all that are harsh and dangerous have few progeny. Take the hare: it is hunted by every beast and bird and by mankind; so also it is numerous in progeny. It alone of all beasts becomes pregnant while pregnant; some of the young in its belly have hair, some are hairless, some are just being formed by the mother, some are being conceived. That's the sort of thing it is, while the lioness, the strongest and boldest, conceives once in her life. When she gives birth she ejects the womb along with her offspring. The cause is as follows. When the cub in the mother first quickens, having by far the sharpest claws of any animal, it scrabbles at the womb, and the more it grows the more it moves about scratching. Then delivery is near and there is nothing left of the womb that's sound.

The part about the hares is of course (as stated) wrong;[3] five minutes' reflection would have shown Herodotus that the part about the lions is worse than wrong; it is obvious nonsense. If lions bred in this way, there would be no lions. Herodotus is not uncritical; if we ask why this point got by him, we are compelled, I think, to reply that it answered his hunger for symmetry. Having made an extravagant statement about rabbits, he felt the need to balance it with an equally extravagant statement about lions. The passage, I would argue, is in its very absurdity a key to Herodotus' *mentalité.*

Similarly with the Callatiae. I am myself doubtful that any Indians or other people have ever piously eaten their dead (except in a highly

3. The hare, my zoological friends tell me, can be pregnant by several sires at once, since its period of fertility is unusually long. The implantation of all eggs, however, takes place at the same time, and all the young develop and are born together.

reduced, largely symbolic sense), even though such customs are reported a number of times in Herodotus (cf. 1. 216, 3. 99. 1, 4. 26) and have been reported many times from various parts of the world;[4] the reports never seem to come accompanied by very much in the way of evidence. However, the reality of the custom is not at issue here; I am suggesting a different point: the custom, whether actual or mythical, interests Herodotus (and us) because it fills out a systematic opposition.

Cremation, the heroic funeral, was never the universal Greek custom, but the epics wrote it into Greek consciousness as the ideal type. By cremation the dead body, the natural man, was annihilated, leaving nothing behind but *kleos* and *sema,* memory and monument—that is, the dead person was converted into a meaning, a culturally preserved identity. The dead were thus purified by being completely acculturated. From the *Iliad* onward the eating of the dead appears as the ultimate impurity.

From the point of view of the Callatiae, however, their own solution is equally a purification—working in the opposite direction. To treat the dead person as meat is to return the natural man to nature, classified as mere matter appropriate to cultural exploitation—and this may also be thought of as an honorable disposal of the remains. The modern equivalent, I suppose, is to give one's body to science. In any case the symmetry of the two solutions draws our attention to the fact that each succeeds only partially, by asserting half of the paradox of death—which is that when life ceases, cultural existence continues, so that a corpse both is and is not a person. *In comparison with each other,* therefore, both solutions are revealed as arbitrary.

At this point I enter in evidence another meditation on cannibalism, that in *Tristes tropiques:*[5]

> Confining ourselves to the forms of anthropophagy which rely on mysticism, magic, or religion . . . we can recognize . . . that the moral condemnation of such customs implies either a belief in the bodily resurrection of the dead which will be compromised by the material destruction of the corpse, or else affirms a link between body and soul; . . . that is to say, implies beliefs which are of the same nature as those in the name of which the ritual feeding is practiced; we have no particular reason to prefer one to the other. Furthermore, the disengagement from the memory of the deceased, of which we complain in cannibalism, is certainly no greater . . . than that which we tolerate in the display of dissection.
>
> In any case we ought to understand that certain of our own customs, from the point of view of an observer from another society, would seem to him to be of the same nature as that anthropophagy which seems to us alien to the notion of civilization. I am thinking of . . . our penitentiaries. Taking an overview, one would be tempted to oppose two types of societies: those which practice anthropophagy, that is, who when confronted by certain individuals possessing potent forces see in their absorption of them the sole means of neutralizing them, and even of profiting from them, and those societies which, like ours, practice *anthropoemy* (from the Greek

4. See "Affectionate Cannibalism," chap. 5 of E. Sagan, *Cannibalism* (New York, 1974).
5. (Paris, 1955), pp. 348–49.

> *emein,* vomit); confronted by the same problem, they have chosen the opposite solution, which consists of expelling these potent beings from the social body, holding them temporarily or permanently isolated, without human contact, in establishments designed for the purpose. For the greater part of the societies which we call primitive, such a custom would inspire profound horror; it would display to their eyes the same barbarism which we are inclined to impute to them owing to their symmetrical customs.

The parallel with Herodotus is so good that I am inclined at this point to acknowledge that my initial distaste for Herodotus' ethnography was based on a misunderstanding, and on my own intellectual provincialism. I should have understood that Herodotus' interests are not micro-systemic, in the internal coherence of particular cultures, but macro-systemic, in the patterned display provided by the range of cultures. Those two great tourists, Herodotus and Lévi-Strauss, have made their science by setting culture against culture in a pattern of symmetrical oppositions.

The parallel should not, however, be pushed too far. Lévi-Strauss is characteristically modern. He is attempting (if I understand him) to give a general account of man, of human nature as expressed in the general categories of culture—and intends thereby to bring before us a vision of that Golden Age which (as Rousseau had told him) is neither behind us nor before us, but within us. Lévi-Strauss, in fact, aims to achieve a kind of scientific consciousness proper to the universal man. Herodotus remains a Greek, and a historian. His oppositions are firmly located in time and space; he is attempting to describe, not all possible worlds, but the particular world he found before him. That is why Herodotus does not write about his categories, but simply employs them—because he is not trying to state the a priori conditions of all experience, but rather to bring some order into the chaos of his actual experience. In his cultural geography he employs categorical oppositions in an attempt to discern the ordered structure of the inhabited world.

The central opposition, from this point of view, is that between Egypt and Scythia. The Egyptians and the Scythians are the two peoples most thoroughly described by Herodotus; they are alike, also, in that neither people borrows from the customs of others (2. 79. 1, 2. 91. 1, 4. 76.1). Placed toward the northern and the southern edges of Herodotus' world, these two peoples display self-contained, self-created—and contrasted—cultural systems.

Nature is wonderful (that is, different from Greece) in both places, but differently. In Egypt the sky is wonderful because it never rains (2. 14. 1), while the river is wonderful because it varies inversely from rivers in other places, rising when others fall (2. 19. 3). In Scythia the sky is wonderful because it rains inversely from other places, in summer, not in winter (4. 28. 2); the great river, the Danube, is wonderful because it never varies. The core of the comparison is the rivers; the Dneiper is called the most productive river except for the Nile (4. 53. 2). The Nile, however, holds the country together; it is a means of communication

(2. 96), while the Scythian rivers divide Scythia into districts, and serve as barriers to travel and invasion (4. 47).

The Scythian rivers are plural, and this plurality of rivers is the most notable fact about the country (4. 82). The Nile is single, although broken up into channels—which are explicitly compared to the Scythian rivers (4. 47. 1). The Scythian rivers, however, are natural, while the Nile channels are artificial; the latter were cut by King Sesostris (2. 108. 2)—and the result is a country in a crucial respect opposite to Scythia: whereas the Scythians ride horses and live in wagons, Egypt is a country where horses and chariots are useless (2. 108. 3).[6]

Sesostris divided the country into equal lots (2. 109. 1) and invented geometry in order to take account of changes produced by shifts in the river (2. 109. 2). In Egypt nature is under cultural control. Egyptian history begins before Sesostris with King Minas, who first directed and controlled the Nile (2. 99). Before him lower Egypt was marsh (2. 4. 3); by controlling the river the people brought into existence the greater part of usable Egyptian territory (2. 15). In Scythia, by contrast, the territory was there before the people; all three origin stories (4. 5–11) specify that before the Scythians the land was empty (ἐρήμη). Scythia is a natural landscape which came to be inhabited; Egypt is a landscape radically reconstructed by habitation. The relation between man and nature in Egypt is also reciprocal, since their soil and water made them a people; the oracle proclaimed that all those watered by the Nile are Egyptians (2. 18. 3). The Scythians have no proper soil, and wander; on one occasion, pursuing the Cimmerians, they missed their way and ended in Media (4. 12), where they spent twenty-eight years (4. 1).

The Egyptians stay put while their power expands and contracts; at the point of their furthest advance they got as far as Scythia (2. 103). The Scythians, at the furthest limit of their wandering, were induced by the Egyptian pharaoh to turn back (1. 105). Each people marks the limit of the other's history.

The Egyptians excel all others in their memory of the past (2. 77. 1, 145. 3) and believe themselves the eldest of the peoples (2. 2. 1—but experiment proved them wrong). The Scythians claim to be the youngest of the peoples (4. 5. 1—but the stories told about this are various and doubtful). The history of Egypt is told in terms of the succession of their kings; stories are told of them, and their monuments are admired. Power is centralized in Egypt; the attempt of the Egyptians to have many kings was a failure, "since they were not able to manage their lives for any length of time without a king" (2. 147. 2). The Scythians also have kings, but these are plural; there is a foundation-legend of Scythian kingship (4. 5) but no continuous history of their kings. The funerals of the Scythian kings are elaborate and characteristically involve the wandering of the funeral cortege through all the peoples of the district (2. 71–72),

6. On this and other points of contrast between Egypt and Scythia, see F. Hartog, "Les Scythes imaginaires: Espace et nomadism," *Annales (ESC)* 34 (1979): 1137–54.

but the royal tombs, so far from being famous monuments, cannot be located by outsiders (4. 127). The death of a Scythian king is a collective experience which is intense, extensive—and ephemeral.

Egypt is fullest of wonders (2. 35. 1), whereas in Scythia there is (besides the rivers) only one wonder: the footprint of Heracles (4. 82). Similarly the Egyptians have invented more things than any other people—including altars, divine images, and temples (2. 4. 2), which are unknown in Scythia (4. 59. 2— except in the cult of Ares). The Scythians by contrast have invented only ἓν τὸ μέγιστον, the one great art of not being conquered (4. 46. 2). In terms of Archilochus' fable, to which Herodotus surely alludes, the Egyptians are cultural foxes, the Scythians cultural hedgehogs.

Egypt is politically and economically unified, but culturally diverse; different gods are worshipped differently in different places (2. 42. 2). The Scythians differ in their livelihood (4. 17–19) and are loosely organized politically, but all worship the same gods (except that the Royal Scythians have a special cult of Ares) and these few in number (4. 59. 1). Scythia is characteristically simple. In Egypt, for instance, the pig is unclean and swineherds are outcasts, but once a year the Egyptians eat pork (2. 47. 2) and explain this by a story which is not suitable for circulation. (Pigs also work their fields: 2. 14. 2.) In Scythia, where pigs are also unclean, no pigs are raised at all (4. 63). The Scythians refused to accept the Dionysiac rites, originated by the Egyptians (2. 49. 1), on the ground that "it makes no sense to seek out a god who sends men mad" (4. 79. 3). The idea was, as it were, too fancy for them. Egyptian manners are delicate; the Egyptians, especially the priests, bathe and change their clothes constantly and "carry out, so to speak, myriads of ceremonies" (2. 37. 3). There is no mention of Scythian priests (although they have numerous soothsayers, 4. 67. 1); the Scythians in general never wash their bodies with water at all (4. 75. 2).

Egypt is tightly held together as a tense synthesis of diverse elements; Scythia is an open field of cultural tendencies. The Scythians are surrounded by other peoples, whose customs sometimes appear to be more extreme versions of their own. These include the Anthropophagi, who wear Scythian clothes but are cannibals (4. 106). The Scythians themselves do not eat human flesh, although they taste human blood in their oath-taking (4. 70) and drink the blood of their enemies (4. 64. 1). They also rejoice in human sacrifice (4. 62. 3, 73)—which is absolutely unknown in Egypt (2. 45. 2). Such customs may be thought of as modified cannibalism.

A more distant people in the same district are the Issedones. These (like the Indians) piously eat the flesh of their dead relations, and also gild their skulls (4. 26). The Scythians gild the skulls of their enemies and use them as drinking cups; they also make garments of their skins (4. 64–65). The similarity between the two sets of customs lies in the use of the dead body as a natural resource, capable of transformation into food or an implement. The opposite solution is Egyptian embalming,

whereby the body is fully acculturated into a monument. Since there are three grades of embalming, according to price (2. 86. 2), the class structure continues to classify even corpses, who remain in this sense members of society.

These contrasts also play a role in the historical narrative, since Egypt and Scythia are the scenes of the two great Persian projects which come between Cyrus' creation of the Persian empire and Xerxes' invasion of Greece: the expeditions of Cambyses and Darius. Egypt is vulnerable only at one point, through the Arabian desert (3. 5. 1), yet once entered it is easily conquered. It has, so to speak, a hard shell, but is soft at the core. Once inside, however, Cambyses runs mad and kills himself. Scythia, by contrast, is wide open; one needs only to cross the rivers. Yet Darius, while himself unharmed, never makes contact with the Scythians. Scythia withdraws like a mirage; Egypt (to shift the metaphor) is a quicksand which swallows the invader. You cannot get into Scythia; you cannot get out of Egypt.

These contrasts, however, are not explicit in Herodotus' text; only rarely does he explicitly compare cultures. I believe that they nevertheless latently shape his understanding of the world and of the events which take place in it. The contrast between Egypt and Scythia, after all, is not peculiar to Herodotus. For the Hippocratic *Airs, Waters, Places* (18) the Scythians and the Egyptians are the extreme types of mankind: "they are *sui generis* and not at all like others" because they are subject to the extremes, respectively, of cold and of heat. A century later Plato has adapted this contrast to his tripartite division of the soul (including the Greeks as a mediating term):

> It would be absurd to think that the spirited part could exist in cities except by derivation from individuals who possess this principle, as, for example, in Thrace and Scythia and generally up that way, or the love of learning, which is chiefly attributed to our part of the world, or the love of money, which one might say has a particular existence among the Phoenicians and down in Egypt.
>
> [*Republic* 435E–36A]

Egypt and Scythia are here classed with other peoples; the contrast between them is a specific case of a generic contrast, of great importance in Herodotus: the contrast between soft peoples and hard peoples. (These are my terms, not Herodotus', but cf. 9. 122.) Soft peoples are characterized by luxury, the division of labor, and complexity of *nomoi,* especially in the sphere of religion; hard peoples are simple, harsh, and fierce. Among soft peoples market-exchange proliferates; hard peoples rely on gift and theft, the heroic modes of exchange. Soft peoples centralize resources through taxation, build monuments, are literate and organized; their politics tend toward tyranny. Hard peoples have relatively weak political organizations and tend toward anarchy. Soft peoples tend to acculturate their dead, hard peoples to naturalize them; among hard peoples women are treated as an abundant natural resource, more or less freely available, whereas among soft peoples women tend to

become a commodity, disposed of by sale, through prostitution, or otherwise.[7] Hard cultures fall short of civility; they are unwelcoming and difficult to visit. Soft cultures are confusing and seductive, difficult to leave once visited. The contrast is already partially realized in the wanderings of Odysseus, in the contrast between the cannibalistic giants, Laestrygonians and Cyclopes, who fail to treat the traveler as a guest, and the seductive charmers, Calypso and Circe, who entertain the traveler so successfully that they threaten to transform him and make it impossible for him to leave.[8]

In Herodotus the hard and soft peoples of the world are located on a real map, and carefully differentiated within each category. The Scythians and the Egyptians are the prototypical cases, partly because they lie at the edges of the historical world. Beyond them is the mythical: beyond the Scythians, the Issedones, who tell of the one-eyed Arimaspoi and the griffins (4. 16. 1); beyond the Egyptians, empty space, crossable only by the Ichthyphagoi, and then the Ethiopians "of long life" (3. 17. 1), like the Arimaspoi known only by hearsay. These mythical outer neighbors remind us of the mythical sources of the contrast: the Ethiopians, with their Table of the Sun (3. 18), live in a world which appears to be, like the houses of Circe and Calypso, one of magical abundance; the one-eyed Arimaspoi remind us of the Cyclopes.

Herodotus says (3. 116):

> I do not believe this notion that there are one-eyed people in nature, having the rest of their nature like that of other people. But the ends of the earth, as they surround the rest of the world, are likely to have in them those things which seem to us finest and most rare.

We place the fabulous beyond the edges of the known world, he suggests, not only because they are beyond our knowledge, but because, as we move toward the edges, we encounter more extreme conditions and therefore atypical forms, both natural and cultural. The ends of the earth, for Herodotus, are districts full of oddities, monsters, and rare valuable substances. The center, by contrast, is a sphere of mixtures. "The ends of the earth must have got as their share all that is finest, in precisely the way [κατά περ] Greece got as its share the most finely blended seasons" (3. 106. 1). The edges, as they are extreme, are also stable. The mythical peoples are unchanging, and being unreachable are immune to outside influence. The Egyptians and the Scythians also borrow nothing from their neighbors. The center, by contrast, as it is a sphere of natural mixture, is also a sphere of cultural mixture, where the peoples are transformed by contact with each other. (Note that the verb used in 3. 106. 1 for the mixture of the seasons is elsewhere used for the relations of friendship [4. 152. 5, 7. 151] or enmity [5. 124. 1, conjectured

7. See M. Rosellini and S. Said, "Usages de femmes et autres nomoi chez les 'sauvages' d'Hérodote," *ASNP* ser. 3, 8 (1978): 949–1005.

8. For a fuller discussion of this categorical contrast in the *Odyssey*, see my "Odysseus: The Economic Man," in *Approaches to Homer*, ed. C. Rubino and C. Shelmerdine (Austin, 1983), pp. 218–47.

at 7. 145. 1, 9. 37. 4] arising from contact between states.) The center of Herodotus' historical map is Ionia, where the natural mixture is most delicately balanced (1. 141. 1); the Ionians are also mixed with other peoples (1. 146. 1). Ionia is also the zone of contact between the two central peoples whose enmity is the theme of the *Histories:* the Greeks and the Persians.

The Persians "most of mankind adopt foreign *nomaia*" (1. 135). In this they are like the Greeks, and like Herodotus, who is always alert, not only for what *nomoi* have been borrowed by his people, but for others which might be worth borrowing. Herodotus also notes Persian borrowings, and displays the Persians to us as a people in the process of cultural change. The Persians begin as a hard people, but their conquest of the Medes brings them, in Cyrus' metaphor, from the thistle to the feast (1. 126. 3). They change further by conquering the Lydians; previously they had nothing ἁβρόν or ἀγαθόν, luxurious or good (1. 74. 1). The Lydians in turn are reduced to insignificance and evicted from history when they are induced to give up arms in favor of womanish clothes, "lyre-playing, and retail trade" (1. 155. 4 καπηλεύειν). (Herodotus elsewhere records that the Lydians themselves invented [along with games] coined money and retail traders, κάπηλοι [1. 94].) Trade is a "soft" institution, since it requires bargaining, which is devious, as opposed to the forceful courage required in war. Cyrus is contemptuous of trade (1. 153), but the Persians are moving in that direction, as is seen in the contrast between Father Cyrus and Trader (κάπηλος) Darius (3. 89. 3). In the process their *nomoi* are changing: "when they find out about any sort of enjoyment they take it up; most notably they have learned from the Greeks to copulate with boys" (1. 135). Having become more sexual, they break their own rule against anthropomorphic gods by borrowing Aphrodite "from the Assyrians and the Arabs" (1. 131). Their religious institutions are becoming more complex.

At the center the relation between hard and soft becomes dynamic. The contrast is in play in the four generations of the Persian monarchy, which provide the *Histories* with an integrating chronology. Cyrus led a hard people against soft peoples, and transformed the Persians in the process. Cambyses then invaded the prototypical soft people, the Egyptians; the invasion was a success, but the result was the internal collapse of the Persian monarchy. The monarchy was then reconstituted by Darius on a new basis; Persians were traditionally taught before all else to tell the truth (1. 136. 2; cf. 138. 1), but Darius is a partisan of the convenient lie (3. 72. 4). Darius in his turn attacked the prototypical hard peoples, the Scythians and their neighbors; the expedition was a failure and had as its main practical result the further entanglement of the Ionians with the Persians: the Ionians showed themselves, according to the Scythians, the worst and most cowardly of free men, but the best and most faithful of slaves (4. 142). The softening of the Ionians, however, had not affected all the Greeks; when Xerxes invaded Greece he led a soft people against a hard people, and was doomed to failure.

The contrast between hard and soft thus provides a way of reading the dynamic of history, of interpreting the general character of events. The pattern is foreshadowed in the personal history of Cyrus. After Cyrus has fulfilled his historical role (in relation to the Greeks) by establishing Persian power over Asia Minor, Herodotus completes his account of the conquerer by telling of two further expeditions—only two out of many (1. 177): against Babylon and the Massagetae. These two anticipate the contrast between Egypt and Scythia.

Babylon has some points in common with Egypt. The god is said to sleep in the temple there "just as in Egyptian Thebes" (1. 182. 1). Most of the arts of civilization originated in Egypt, but a few important items originate in Babylon (2. 109. 3). Babylonian lamentations are also "pretty much like those in Egypt" (1. 198). In both places married couples bathe after intercourse. More significant: Babylon, like Egypt, is extremely fertile, watered not by rain but by irrigation; neither country raises grapes or olives, the two crops which, as Homer and Hesiod tell us, require the greatest κομιδή, close care and attention. In both countries, then, the acculturation of nature is relatively complete and effortless. Babylon, like Egypt, has one weak point (where the river enters the city, 1. 191), and once entered is easily conquered.

The Massagetae, says Herodotus, are much like the Scythians (1. 215. 1), and some people think they actually are Scythians (1. 201). One of their customs is wrongly attributed to the Scythians (1. 216. 1). Like the Scythians, they intoxicate themselves on vapor (1. 202. 2). Some of them eat wild food and raw fish; their copulation is impersonal or even open, like that of cattle (1. 202). They are loose in unacculturated nature. Their country is easily entered, but like the Scythians they turn out to be unconquerable.

The counselor Croesus, made wise by misfortune, provides Cyrus with a strategy, which is exactly that of Odysseus with the Cyclops. Cyrus is to allow the Massagetae to defeat him, and then provide them with a feast and unmixed wine to make them drunk (1. 207). The strategy is successful (1. 221). Cyrus, however, fails to imitate Odysseus completely; he does not take his opportunity for retreat, and is killed. The Queen of the Massagetae then puts Cyrus' head in a bag of blood, carrying out her threat: "although you can never have enough of it, I shall glut you [κορέσω] with blood" (1. 212. 3).

The savage queen, by employing the concept of κόρος, invokes the Greek tragic vocabulary. Κόρος is the appetite which gains increase by what it feeds on; those who prosper too much, or in the wrong way, become insatiable, ἀκόρητος. Κόρος is linked with ὕβρις, violence which overrides proper limits, and also with ἄτη, a confusion of the mind evidenced by moral and practical error. All this is familiar, and told in a hundred Greek stories. The story of Cyrus is in Herodotus another such. He no sooner conquers Babylon than he is filled with a passion (ἐπεθύμησε) to subdue the Massagetae (1. 201). "Many and weighty the forces that excited him and urged him on: his birth, which seemed to have

something more than human about it, and the good fortune he had had in the wars" (1. 204. 2). Unbroken success is here linked to the illusion of godlike powers, and to the neglect of the lesson Solon taught Croesus: that all mortals are thrall to circumstance (cf. 1. 207. 2). Cyrus' attack on the Massagetae is an act of ὕβρις (1. 213. 3). Any Greek would recognize him as ripe for destruction.

Herodotus' particular contribution seems to be the link between this tragic scenario and the (also traditional) contrast between cultures I have here labeled "soft" and "hard." This link is not explicit, but evidently underlies patterned repetitions in the narrative. There are in the *Histories* no conquests of hard peoples by soft peoples; evidently such conquests have occurred, but Herodotus does not tell their stories. The hard, simple peoples cannot be conquered (although they can be temporarily fuddled by the arts of complex culture). The best one can do is to inflict some damage on them and withdraw (cf. also the Libyan expedition, 4. 203). In any case the simple peoples are not worth conquering, since they have nothing. Those who invade them do so out of sheer love of invasion—which is irrational. Cyrus makes the same mistake with respect to the Massagetae that Croesus had made with respect to Cyrus (cf. 1. 71. 2–4).

The soft, complex peoples, on the other hand, can be conquered, but in defeat they take their revenge by transforming the conquerer. They soften him, and at the same time fill him with just that irrational insatiability which will lead him into destruction. Cambyses' successful invasion of Egypt leads him to attempt the invasion of Ethiopia. This appears to break the pattern, since the Ethiopians are properly classed as soft, like the Egyptians—but Cambyses never reaches them. He is defeated by the ultimate hard environment, the open space between Egypt and Ethiopia. He does not encounter cannibals; instead his soldiers become cannibals to one another (3. 25. 4–7).

There is thus in the *Histories* an alternation between corruption through excessive assimilation and destruction through irrational expansion into the void. Κόρος leads to ἄτη and ὕβρις on a world-historical scale. The first six books establish the pattern; in the last three Herodotus interprets the Great Persian War within the frame of this pattern. He has Artabanus tell Xerxes that those who advise the invasion are "letting ὕβρις develop"; it is wrong "to teach the soul to seek always to have more than is before it" (7. 16. 2). The Delphic oracle spoke of the Persian army as the embodiment of "Κόρος, child of Ὕβρις, dreadfully raging" (8. 77. 1). Xerxes, in fact, is portrayed as one who goes beyond a neglect of limits and aspires to the *abolition* of limits, who dreams of an empire "bounded by the αἰθήρ of Zeus," where "the sun shall see no country bounding ours, but I will put them all with you in one country" (7. 8. 1–2).

The rule of Xerxes (like all Oriental monarchies) is a τυραννίς, and ὕβρις is characteristic of the τύραννος, the tyrant, who becomes "sated with crimes" (ὕβρι κεκορημένος) and does "reckless wrong" (3. 80. 3

ἀτασθάλα; cf. 81. 2). Herodotus never portrays the Near Eastern monarchies as fully legitimate; from tyrant Gyges (1. 14. 1) onward they are haunted by tragic moral instability. Artabanus would prefer caution, "remembering the expedition of Cyrus against the Massagetae and how it fared, remembering that of Cambyses against the Ethiopians, and myself having joined the army of Darius against the Scythians" (7. 18. 2). But even Artabanus has to give in; the expedition is evidently urged on by a higher power. Thus at Salamis and Plataea the Persian army met its destiny, and evolving national character became fate; softened by their success, the Persians were led to attack those hard people the Greeks.

With this moral Herodotus actually concluded his *Histories*. The very last paragraph (9. 122) looks at first glance to be one more free-associative digression. Herodotus has just been telling of the punishment of Artauctes, an *atasthalos* who had been guilty of sacrilege against the hero Protesilaus:

> The ancestor of the Artauctes who was thus crucified was the Atembares who suggested to the Persians the position which they adopted in their application to Cyrus, saying as follows: "Since Zeus gives the Persians the leadership, and to you among men, Cyrus, by your conquest of Astyages, come, let us leave this land we hold, which is after all small and a rough one, and let us take a better. There are many near us, and many yet further off; if we take one we shall be impressive in a variety of ways. It is fitting that men who rule should do this. And what moment could be finer than this, when we rule many men and all Asia?"
>
> Cyrus listened and was unimpressed; he told them to go ahead, but while he told them to do it also advised them to get ready to be no longer rulers but rather among the ruled—since from soft countries soft men generally spring. It does not belong to the same soil to produce impressive fruits and also men who are good at war. The result was that the Persians took their leave, yielding to the judgment of Cyrus; they chose to rule living in difficult country, rather than to sow the plain and be slaves to others.

This bit of Persian wisdom is in fact an ironic criticism of the Persians: if the Persians had been true to this judgment, the Great Persian War would not have happened; if Cyrus himself had been true to it, he would not have attacked Babylon and then the Massagetae.

While this irony is Herodotus' last word, it is not the moral of the *Histories*. His book, after all, is not written for the Persians, but for the Greeks, and its meaning must be applicable to them. It is true that at the time of the Great Persian War the Greeks are a relatively hard people, the Persians relatively soft; but this is a somewhat superficial reading. The Greeks are unlike the Massagetae, Ethiopians, and Scythians; they are a historical people, and are changing. The *Histories* is indirectly about that change, and is a contribution to it.

The Greeks in important respects are like the Persians. The Persians are "ὑβρισταί by nature" (1. 89. 2), but ὕβρις is also endemic in Greece (cf. 2. 152. 3, 3. 48. 1, 3. 137. 2, 4. 159. 4, 5. 74. 1, 6. 85. 2, 6. 87, 6. 91. 2). The inherited *nomos* of the Persians is a constant restlessness (7. 8. 1),

but the Greeks are equally restless (7. 11. 2). The Great Persian War is the end of a story for the Persians, but for the Greeks it is the middle phase: as their moment of greatest success, it is also a moment of danger. They also may become soft and reckless. After all, we know from Thucydides (1. 128–34) that Pausanias, the victorious commander at Plataea, was transformed by his success, that he was led into luxury and folly, into an attempt to collaborate with Xerxes, and eventually into madness and literal self-destruction. Herodotus does not tell this story, but he probably expects his audience to know it, and he certainly knows it himself; at one point he rather casually remarks that "the ὕβρις of Pausanias gave [the Athenians] their excuse to seize the leadership from the Lacedaemonians" (8. 3. 2). It seems that when Herodotus tells how Pausanias, on the battlefield after Plataea, laughingly mocked the luxurious Persians for being so foolish as to attack a poor people like the Greeks (9. 82), he tells the story in ironic criticism of Pausanias, and as a warning to the Greeks. (Laughter is always a bad sign in Herodotus.)[9]

It is tempting to go beyond this point, and to think that for Herodotus and his audience in the mid-fifth century the tyrannical Athenian empire was the moral heir of the Persians, threatened with the same moral collapse. In any case the *Histories* must propose to its Greek audience the question: Is the tragic story ineluctable, or can the outcome be altered by human choice? Is there anything about the Greeks which might make it possible for them to escape from the cycle of κόρος, ὕβρις, ἄτη?

At this point it becomes appropriate to consider one more passage on *nomos:* the conversation between Xerxes and Demaratus in Book 7 (101–5). Xerxes asks if the Greeks will resist the huge army he is bringing against them; Demaratus asks in response if Xerxes wants a pleasant answer or a true one. Reassured, Demaratus goes on to say that the Greeks will resist:

> "In Greece poverty is a constant companion from infancy, excellence is a thing acquired, crafted by wisdom and a powerful *nomos.* That is the instrument whereby Greece defends itself against poverty—and slavery as well. . . . I speak about . . . the Lacedaemonians in particular, and tell you that they will never come to terms with you while you are bringing slavery to Greece, and further that they will meet you in battle even if all the other Greeks give way to you. Don't ask me with what numbers they will be able to do this. If a thousand are in the field, these will fight you, and if they are less, and if they are more."

Xerxes (like Cambyses and Pausanias) laughs and mocks Demaratus:

> "How could a thousand or ten thousand or fifty thousand, free men as they are, all on a level and not ruled by any single individual, stand up against such an army? . . . If they were ruled by an individual in our way they might through their fear of him become better than their nature; they might under the compulsion of the whip go

9. Cf. D. Lateiner, "No Laughing Matter: A Literary Tactic in Herodotus," *TAPA* 107 (1977): 173–82.

against those who outnumber them. But since they have been let go into freedom they could not do either of these things."

Demaratus says in his reply:

"The Lacedaemonians . . . although they are free are not entirely free. They have a master, their *nomos*, and they fear it far more than your subjects fear you. And so they do whatever it commands. And it always gives the same command: it does not allow them to flee from any mass of people in battle; they must stay in the ranks and conquer or perish."

These proud words of Demaratus were proved on the field of Thermopylae (cf. 7. 234. 1); they were proved in a more interesting way at Plataea. That battle broke out while Pausanias was arguing with a subordinate who had refused to obey an order—refused, not out of cowardice, but because the order seemed to him dishonorable (9. 55–57). The Greeks were thus initially in disarray; nevertheless they fought well. The Persians also fought well until their commander was killed; then they ran away (9. 63). The Greeks thus displayed the danger and also the power of their characteristic *nomos*. They are sometimes bad subordinates because each thinks himself entitled to his own ideas; they are not loyal to an overlord, but to an idea. But since each has made this idea his own, each is ready to die for it; they do not require an overlord to keep them in the ranks.

The hereditary *nomos* of the Persians is monarchy (3. 82. 5), whereas the Greeks enjoy free institutions; these have "the fairest of names, ἰσονομίη" (3. 80. 6). Ἰσονομίη, equality before the law, is the opposite of tyranny (5. 37. 2), as is ἰσοκρατίη, equal distribution of power (5. 92. 1). Both imply open debate, ἰσηγορίη (5. 78). Matters to be determined are referred ἐς τὸ κοινόν (3. 80. 6) or ἐς μέσον (3. 142. 3)—that is, to the community at large. A tyrant cannot be talked to (3. 80. 5); free institutions, by contrast, proceed by talking. As a result, everyone has a personal stake in the community and becomes bold in its defense (5. 78).

The Great Persian War was fought between an empire and an alliance. The unexpected victory of the alliance demonstrated the power of free institutions. The Greek alliance barely held together; at every step their common strategy was debated, and their continual disagreements threatened their unity. But when brought to the proof, they had the courage which belongs only to the consenting citizen, in contrast to the fearful subject.

Everywhere "*nomos* is king," but only among the Greeks is *nomos* political rather than cultural. The barbarians merely have their *nomoi* ("use" them, in the Greek expression)—and since political power among them is typically in the hands of tyrants, power is typically a threat to their *nomoi*. It is characteristic of the tyrant to "interfere with inherited *nomaia*" (3. 80. 5). The mad Persian Cambyses, for instance, burned Egyptian Amasis' body; in so doing he (accidentally) conformed to the *nomos* of the Greeks, but succeeded in violating the *nomoi* of both Egyptians and Persians. The Persians worship fire (1. 131. 2) and therefore consider corpses improper to it (3. 16. 3); they rather give their

corpses to predatory animals (1. 140). The Egyptians, by contrast, think that fire *is* an animal; they do not allow their corpses to be eaten by animals or by fire either (3. 16. 4). Persians and Egyptians therefore do (or rather refrain from doing) the same thing for opposite reasons. This may stand as a last example of Herodotus' taste for symmetry.

To return to Cambyses (who, we remember, proved his madness by scoffing at *nomoi*): he went so far as to conceive a desire to marry his sister. His jurisconsults told him that they found no *nomos* which told a man to marry his sister, but they did find a *nomos* which said that the King of the Persians could do whatever he liked (3. 31). By this sophistic answer they set royal authority against *nomos;* the tyrant may even be said to *prove* his authority by defying the *nomoi.*

In the free Greek cities, however, authority is legitimate, that is, constituted by *nomoi.* Lycurgus brought the Lacedaemonians to *eunomie,* stable lawfulness, by instituting the ephors and the *gerousia;* he "changed around all the *nomima* and took precautions that they not be transgressed" (1. 65. 5). Among the Greeks a change in *nomoi* can strengthen *nomos;* this is because *nomoi* are not merely traditional but are a matter of conscious design, just as they are founded on debate and consent.

Before Lycurgus the Lacedaemonians were *kakonomotatoi*—most lacking in stable lawfulness—and also "incapable of mixing with strangers" (1. 65. 2). Some said Lycurgus got his laws from Apollo, but the Lacedaemonians themselves said that he borrowed them from Crete (1. 65. 4). He thus made his people capable of mixing with strangers by himself mixing with strangers.

The separation of the warriors from the rest of the people is something the Lacedaemonians learned from Egypt (2. 167. 2). Similarly Solon borrowed a *nomos* from Amasis of Egypt and enacted it in Athens—"and they use it still, for no fault is found with it" (1. 177. 2). Solon was both tourist and lawgiver; the two roles are evidently not unconnected.

The Persians, as we have seen, borrowed *nomoi* in their quest for enjoyment; Greek eclecticism was more critical. When Herodotus recommends a foreign *nomos,* as is the case with the Egyptian calendar, it is because it is more intelligent (2. 4. 1; cf. 1. 196). In this he is typically Greek, since intelligence (what Plato called "love of learning") is the special cultural trait of the Greeks (1. 60. 3). From this point of view the Great Persian War is to be seen not so much as a conflict between soft and hard, as a contest between a relatively weak, thoughtless solution to the problem of the center, and a relatively strong, thoughtful solution. This is not good ethnography; Herodotus does not get inside the Persian mind enough to see that their policies were, from their own point of view, thoughtful. But it is good Greek patriotism, and it gives the Greeks good advice. Herodotus calls upon the Greeks to be critical assimilators, to experience cultural change not as mere diffusion but as a thoughtful choice between options.

It follows that Herodotus presents the critical comparison of cultures as itself a crucial element of Greek culture. Herodotus toured the world in fact and in thought in order to explore the system of the world; this,

as we have seen, is a way of thinking about being Greek, and is also (for him) a peculiarly Greek way of being in the world. If, further, the tragic cycle is to be broken, if Greece, having secured her frontier and having reassimilated the softened and partly barbarized Ionians, is not to become soft at the center, the solution must be found in this peculiarity of the Greeks. To be aware of the system of mankind, of the laws which govern the transformations of *nomoi,* is in some degree to be free of systematic necessity. Herodotus, in the mid-fifth century, still holds to the hope that the Greeks can take charge of their culture and make it work, not only culturally, but politically. Herodotus thus does more than exemplify the Greek form of civilization; he makes a practical contribution to it. His book is a contribution to the continuing cultural debate of the Greeks—and, implicitly, a praise of the civilization which made that debate possible. Hitherto (to paraphrase Marx) the peoples had only attempted to change the world; the Greeks, however, also found it necessary to interpret it.

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