Grudging Gods
Theology and Characterization in Herodotus, and Interpretation from Plutarch to the Present

Anthony Ellis
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Abstract

This thesis is an investigation into Herodotus’ views about the gods and how they relate to human life and history, and particularly how narrative and theology interact. It is divided into four chapters:

Chapter one (The History of Herodotean Theology) falls into two parts. In the first I outline the reception of Herodotus’ theological views from antiquity to the present, focusing on the warners’ statements that ‘the divinity is $\phi\theta\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron$’, the subject of controversy since Plutarch. I explore the role of contemporary rhetorical and religious pressures in forging various interpretative traditions, and trace their evolution over the last five centuries of scholarship. The second part examines the assumptions and approaches of more recent scholarship to the problems that arise in Herodotean theology.

Chapter two (Religious Discourses in the Histories) develops our understanding of Herodotus’ theological inconsistencies, which have increasingly come to dominate discussion of Herodotean religion. I make the case that Herodotus uses various theological discourses or registers, which are (literally interpreted) quite incompatible. I explore the influence of narrative style, narratorial persona, and context upon Herodotus’ theological assumptions and vocabulary, before considering the question of his own ‘belief’.

Chapter three (The Phthonos of Gods and Men) offers my own analysis of the much-disputed concepts of ‘divine $\phi\theta\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron$’ and ‘$\nu\epsilon\mu\epsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$’ in the Histories and classical Greek more widely. I begin by examining the use of $\phi\theta\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron$ in the context of humans from Homer to the fourth century. I then offer a close analysis of the meaning and significance of the five speeches that assert that ‘the divinity is $\phi\theta\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron$’ (or $\phi\theta\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\epsilon\epsilon\epsilon\epsilon\epsilon$), which precede or refer back to the most dramatic reversals of fortune in the work.

Chapter four (Theology in the Croesus Logos) analyses the treatment of theology in the Croesus logos. It explores how Herodotus crafts a coherent narrative while negotiating the numerous theological principles of his contemporary world and
narrative tradition. I argue that Croesus’ character and the deceptive oracles that force him to campaign are commonly misread, largely due to attempts to interpret the story on a quite different narrative patterning that is compatible with anachronistic principles of divine ‘benevolence’ or ‘divine justice’.

The Epilogue draws together the themes discussed in the previous chapters, with some comments on the relationship between literature and theology more generally.
Prologue

This thesis was conceived three and a half years ago as a general investigation into Herodotus’ ideas about ‘gods’. The reader will quickly observe that, in my desperation to understand what I had undertaken to explain in detail in the near future, I cast around in every direction for anything that might help in the task, and have borrowed from anthropologists, philosophers, linguists, sociologists, theologians, literary theorists, psychologists, historians—in short, any thinker whose views seemed relevant to the topic at hand. It occurs to me that I probably picked up this habit from Herodotus.

Initially panicked by my lack of certainty about what Herodotus ‘thought about the gods’, I have, after long effort, managed to console myself with the thought that it is a fool’s task to take a jumble of ancient symbols and to claim with any confidence that one has used them to reconstruct a detailed and accurate representation of their maker’s mind, especially his beliefs about that most abstract concept, ‘gods’ (particularly when the author claims expressly to have avoided the subject). But whatever the inevitable difficulties, I should explain why I think this task is worthwhile. To interpret ancient texts as best we can is the only way of satisfying our curiosity about the mental life of our intellectual forebears, a curiosity which needs no defence. In the case of Herodotus, it seems particularly worthwhile for several reasons. These will appeal in differing degrees to different people. The Histories is the first major extant work of Greek prose, and is written in a variety of styles, using theological formulae and motifs that can be found all the way from Homer to Plutarch: it thus affords us an excellent opportunity to explore how an individual Greek's conception of divinity (to use this catch-all term for now) changed as he moved between different stylistic and generic norms. Moreover, it was written by an author familiar with many forms of allegorical and metaphorical exegesis who, by his own profession, was sceptical about the ultimate validity of any theological system, including that which he sometimes names ‘what the Greeks

1 Throughout this thesis, references in the form ‘3.5’ or ‘3.5.2’ are to Herodotus' Histories while those in the form ‘§3.5’ or ‘§3.5.2’ are to other parts of this thesis. References to ancient works will be made according to the conventions in LSJ, 9th ed.
believe’ (which, he tells us, was invented by Hesiod and Homer four centuries earlier). Herodotus, in fact, offers us a radical euhemerist and diffusionist theory of the origin of the Greek theological and mythological system. This makes it all the more intriguing that he often appears to talk and think ‘within’ the parameters of the theological world which he elsewhere describes from an external perspective as ‘Greek’. Exploring these apparently contradictory attitudes towards gods will be the subject of the second chapter, which looks for patterns, and explores the relationship between ‘theology’ or ‘religion’ and ‘narrative’ in Herodotus and Greek culture more widely. Herodotus’ text stands just before the point where, from our point of view, systematic philosophy and theology take off. It reflects the theological tradition of the late fifth century and plays an important part in our understanding of Greek thought about ‘god’—thoughts which would, of course, have a powerful effect on the religious thought of subsequent millennia.

While that chapter is the most likely to interest the scholar of anthropology, religion, or metaphor, Herodotus holds much interest for the student of the older subject of theology. Herodotus wrote in the late fifth century, at the same time or not long before some thinkers—most likely Socrates—formulated ideas about god that would, after their adoption and modification by Christianity, dominate the intellectual and religious life of Europe. We can see some of the earliest traces of such theological attitudes in the Histories: Herodotus, as narrator, makes the first surviving statement about the ‘foresight’ of a ‘wise’ divinity who created animals so as to make life ‘liveable’ for humans (3.108). The idea recurs in a more expansive form in Plato, Xenophon, Proclus, and later theologians, and becomes a central tenet of Christianity. Yet Herodotus’ sage ‘warners’, often identified as his spokespersons, repeatedly stress the phthoneros (‘grudging’) and troubling nature of god and the consequent ephemerality of human happiness, even the inevitability of human suffering caused by the gods. In this Herodotus followed a venerable literary and theological tradition that can be traced to Homer, one that Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, and Plotinus would denounce as erroneous blasphemy, even if some of these authors, too, would use similar literary motifs (often reformulated so as to avoid attributing negative characteristics to ‘god’). Numerous other theological principles familiar
from the ancient world can be traced through the *Histories*, occurring in various contexts and combinations, sometimes explicitly rationalized, more often coexisting in a somewhat bewildering harmony. These will be the topic of my third and fourth chapters. The third looks at the idea that ‘god is *phthoneros*’—the most prominent theological idea in the *Histories*, and perhaps the most frequently misunderstood aspect of Herodotus' writing—and the fourth explores the relationship between these and other theological ideas present within the Croesus *logos* of Book one.

But I begin, in chapter one, by exploring the reception of Herodotean theology from the Renaissance to the present, with some brief forays into the reception of Herodotean ideas about god by Plato and Neoplatonists. In 1976 Jutta Krause concluded her study of Herodotean religion by noting that inevitable frustration awaits any reader who seeks a unifying principle behind all Herodotus’ ideas about divinity and causation, to which all other ideas in the text are subordinated neatly and without contradiction.² Krause's conclusion is, of course, right. But it is instructive to ask what point Krause sought to make by this statement. Is there any literary, religious, or philosophical author of sufficient consistency, systematization, and dogmatism that their every metaphysical statement is brought into explicit and neat conformity with a single overarching principle? I know of none. Yet we generally do not feel the need to make any such statement when it comes to discussing the views of, say, Aeschylus, Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Gibbon, Schiller, Einstein, Russell, Wittgenstein, Kissinger, Eliot, or, really, any other philosophical thinker, historical work, or literary text. It is an interesting quirk of the history of Greek religion that Krause, like so many recent Herodotean scholars, should feel it necessary—in the course of an exemplary study—to conclude with such a banal statement. One aim of the first chapter will be to examine the roots of this idea in the reception of the *Histories*, and how the attitude that underlies it continues to influence the modern study of Herodotus.

² Krause (1976), 223: 'Nach diesem übergreifendem Prinzip, dem sich alle Einzelkomponenten widerspruchslos unterordnen, suchen wir bei Herodot m. E. vergeblich.'
Herodotus' reception is important for several other reasons. The theology of the *Histories* has long been one of many battle-grounds for the debate amongst European Christians on the value and nature of ancient pagan theology and literature, and subsequently amongst European anthropologists on the evolution and nature of religion. Ideas conceived in these contexts continue to dominate the established commentaries and thus influence how modern scholars approach both Herodotus and ancient religion, often causing them to ask questions which do not give useful answers. The evidence discussed in chapter one suggests that the study of Herodotean theology and religion has never been divorced from the question whether, crudely speaking, the *Histories* contain a series of 'tragedies' or a string of 'morality plays', questions which cut to the heart of much more dramatic or literary problems. Does the characterization of Croesus, Polycrates, and Xerxes direct our sympathy towards characters who suffer an unmerited or excessively harsh misfortune, or do their crimes and vices instead create a sense that justice was served and that each got his due? This ‘literary’ question, which divides scholars no less today than it has over the last five centuries, cannot be separated from a ‘theological’ question: is the world governed by callous, capricious, or even hostile celestial powers, or by a benevolent or fair divinity who punishes the bad and rewards the good proportionately? (When it comes to answering this question, in chapters three and four, we will, of course, have to look beyond such stark generalizations.) Those who offer a literary interpretation of Herodotus’ narrative and characterization mostly try to justify their reading by providing a corresponding interpretation of Herodotean theology. Conversely, in discussing the intellectualized question of theology Herodotus’ interpreters often lay bare their visceral responses to Herodotean narratives.

Chapter one attempts to arm the reader with a host of interpretative approaches, and to evaluate their merits and shortcomings. Chapters two, three, and four offer detailed studies of Herodotean theology, narrative, and characterization. Throughout the thesis footnotes will refer to observations, interpretations, and trends from all periods of scholarship where relevant or illuminating and this will, I hope, help to open up a large, linguistically inaccessible, and little-studied body of scholarship,
and contribute to our understanding of the role of Herodotus and Greek historiography in the intellectual and literary history of Europe.
Chapter One
The History of Herodotean Theology

The judgement of history covers a paradox here. The more an influential thinker can be shown to have been repeating the favourite slogans of his times, the more scathingly he will be denounced for that very cause in the next generation...He was a mere reed, a passive instrument on which the spirit of the age blew its tune...it was not to his credit to supinely join the latest shift of opinion on slavery, insanity, eugenics, or colonial empire. This is the easiest posture of moral superiority to adopt because the critic of past institutions is helping the nascent institutional structures of his day to mount their own defence against the past.

Mary Douglas.

For over five hundred years scholars, theologians, and writers have debated Herodotus’ religious, theological, and philosophical beliefs. The views advanced before the nineteenth century now lie in deep obscurity but, to use the old trope, examining them provides both interest and instruction. As we shall see, certain traditions of Herodotean exegesis created in the Renaissance, re-shaped in the Querelle, and reinforced by the domineering erudition of the nineteenth-century classical establishment survive to the present, despite clear textual difficulties.

Rather than discussing the reception of Herodotean theology as a whole—a huge and unwieldy topic—this chapter tenaciously traces scholarly interpretations of and responses to one crucial Herodotean idea: that the divinity is ‘phthoneros’, an adjective conventionally translated as ‘jealous’, ‘envious’, or ‘grudging’. Five times Herodotus’ characters assert that ‘god is phthoneros’, in anticipation of three of the

2 I am not aware of any scholarship on this topic other than the brief outline of previous scholarship on divine phthonos in Greek literature by Rakoczy (1996), 247-53, who begins with Lehrs (1838), and Lanzillotta (2010), who divides earlier scholars into four (non-exclusive) groups, with minimal discussion.
3 Phthoneros is the adjective, phthonos the noun, phthoneô the verb. The meaning of this expression will be discussed in ch. 3. Although Herodotus only uses the adjective and the verb when talking of the gods (i.e. gods ‘is phthoneros’ or ‘phthoneei’) and he only connects the noun with any divinity in compound form (4.205: epiphthonos), I allow myself the freedom to use the noun, adjective, or verb, and talk of, e.g. ‘divine phthonos’. Where significant, distinctions will be made clear.
most significant events in the *Histories*: before the fall of Croesus of Lydia, before the fall of Polycrates of Samos, and both before and after Xerxes’ disastrous invasion of Greece.\(^4\) Herodotus puts statements about the ‘*phthoneros* divinity’ in the mouths of the most authoritative characters in the *Histories* (the ‘warners’: Solon, Amasis, and Artabanus, as well as Themistocles, a more ambiguous character), and the idea is couched in some of the most elevated and poetic diction of the work (further §3.5). For all these reasons, then, it has, in most periods of scholarship, been considered the central expression of Herodotus’ historical and theological vision. Its meaning has consequently been the most contested, and many debates about Herodotus’ theological, philosophical, and historical beliefs have focused on the interpretation of the word *phthoneros*, and the way these speeches function in the context of the narrative. Simply ignoring the idea of divine *phthonos* without comment is, as we shall see, a significant (and often intentional) interpretative move.

The debate over ‘the *phthoneros* divinity’ cuts to the heart not only of Herodotus’ theology, but also his characterization. At its crudest the question may be put thus: is *phthonos* an arbitrary and non-moral ‘divine envy/hostility’ that strikes mortals indiscriminately or is it a moral and punitive ‘divine justice’ that responds to human crimes? It is as well to say at once that, although often treated as if they were, these two concepts are by no means mutually exclusive. (As chapter three will argue, at its most basic *phthonos* indicates the divinity’s ‘resentment’ of humans, and *phthonos*—like English ‘resentment’—can be imagined to focus on crimes, arrogance, as well as on success and happiness.) Two further questions are inextricably linked to the last. First, whatever the warners’ speeches on divine *phthonos* literally mean, does this meaning change as a result of the dramatic context in which they are set? Second, what is the nature of the wider narrative in which they occur: what is the ‘moral’ (if there is *one*), and how are its characters portrayed? I move through the history of reception in an order that compromises between being thematic and chronological, jumping from one school of interpretation to another, but attempting to stick roughly to the order in which they first arise.\(^5\) The reception of several other areas of

\(^{4}\) 1.32.2; 3.40.2-3; 7.10.ε; 7.46.3-4; 8.109.3. See also the narrator’s statements at 4.205.

\(^{5}\) In response to the valid objections that may be raised against some of my choices in grouping I should say that they are intended to guide the reader through this large, uncharted field and to
Herodotean theology is treated in more detail in the second chapter. My purpose in this chapter is neither to present my own view on divine *phthonos* (for which see chapter three) nor to flog dead horses by criticizing the many views of earlier scholars that diverge from my own. It is to trace the establishment and development of various traditions in the study of Greek and Herodotean theology so as to bring out the merits and problems within each position.

The chapter falls into two parts. Sections 1-6 provide a survey of interpretations of divine *phthonos* in Herodotus’ *Histories* from Plutarch to the present. Sections 7-10 look critically at interpretations of Herodotean theology that dominate current scholarship including, but not strictly limited to, divine *phthonos*. In the earlier sections I concentrate on description and contextualization; in the latter, I look at the linguistic, religious, and philosophical assumptions that underlie the methods of much modern scholarship.

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emphasize trends in Herodotean interpretation which I consider particularly important. They are certainly not definitive.

* For scholarly views on the relationship between ‘fate’ and ‘the gods’ see §2.9; for the debate over Herodotus’ status as a ‘monotheist’ or a ‘polytheist’ see §2.4, 2.9, appendix 4; for debate over whether Herodotus is ‘elite’ or ‘popular’ see §2.1-4, appendix 6.

* One omission should be highlighted: I have only the scantest acquaintance with the Byzantine reception of Herodotus. Although there is certainly much relevant material to be found there, my analysis skips a large chronological period from late antiquity to the Renaissance.
1.1. Syncretism and Rejection:
Herodotus, Paganism, and Christianity

The rejection of all pagan literature as morally and theologically errant is one of the vital forces in the European reception of Greek religion in the Christian era, both as a response in itself, and because of the ‘defence’ that it elicited from those who studied, praised, and imitated the works of antiquity. From the church fathers onwards, censorious voices urged that pagan texts promote a dangerous theology, utterly alien to Christianity, which should neither be assimilated to Christian thought nor imitated in art, least of all idealized in its own right. Augustine had directly denied the value of non-Christian wisdom and philosophy (in contrast to statements he made elsewhere):\(^8\)

Christ died in vain if men without the faith of Christ through other means or power of reasoning may arrive at true faith, at true virtue, at true justice, at true wisdom. As the Apostle most truly says about the Law: ‘If justice is by the law, then Christ died in vain’.

The admonitions of Savonarola, in his sermons on Exodus, are similarly unfavourable to the detection of spiritual or theological value in pagan writings:\(^9\)

si vuol fare che Platone sia Platone, Aristotile Aristotile, e non che siano cristiani, perché non sono, perché tanta differenza è da Platone ad un Cristiano, quanta è dal peccato alla virtù, e tanta differenza è dalla dottrina di Platone alla dottrina di Cristo, quanta è dalle tenebre alla luce. E e’ si vuole che e’ filosofi sieno filosofi, e li cristiani sieno cristiani.

In England, the thirteenth of the ‘39 Articles’ (1563) of the newly formed protestant church—entitled ‘Of Works Before Justification’—reads:\(^10\)

Works done before the grace of Christ, and the Inspiration of his Spirit, are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ, neither do they

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\(^8\) *Contra Jul. Pel.* 4.17, (citing Galat. 2.21), following a reference to the ‘philosophy’ of Pythagoras and Plato; cf. 4.30 in the same work. In a similar vain is Chrysostom’s statement οὐδὲν ἐστὶν ἐξω πίστεως ἄγαθον (‘nothing outside faith is good’; cited from Beveridge (1830), 335 n.h).


\(^10\) Text from the ed. of Beveridge (1830), 330, with discussion 330-5.
make men meet to receive Grace, or (as the school authors say) deserve Grace of congruity: yea rather for that they were not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they have the nature of sin.

A more positive attitude towards pagan literature and theology was, unsurprisingly, common amongst scholars who devoted their lives to the study and interpretation of classical texts. Indeed, in the course of their proselytizing efforts the early Christian apologists and Patriarchs had often stressed the continuity between certain pagan philosophical traditions and the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures. They were not, in fact, the first to do so, for they followed several earlier attempts to trace Greek philosophy to Jewish sources.

From the fifteenth to the nineteenth century countless scholars and theologians considered works by classical authors—from Homer to Aristotle—to accord to some degree with the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures, to prophesy the coming of Christ, to illustrate pious moral lessons that might benefit a Christian audience, or to bear witness in other ways to the historical, theological, or moral veracity of the bible. But the claims of the Judaeo-Christian tradition to exclusivity and difference from other religions mean that explicit and self-conscious syncretism tends to be accompanied by justification and explanation.

There were two main ways of explaining the presence of theological ideas considered to be distinctively ‘Christian’ in pagan classical texts, though in practice

11 Ps.-Justin (Cohort. ad Gent., 19-29) argues that Pythagoras and Plato learnt in Egypt of ‘the one single god (ἐνός καὶ μονός θεός) of Moses and the prophets’, but that Pythagoras cloaked his words in allegory (δι’ ἄλληγορίας), and Plato was afraid to speak openly because of the example of Socrates; Lactantius considers Hermes Trismegistus to possess true prophecies of Christ (Div. Inst. 1.6, 4.6, 4.11, 8.18), and to be much older than Pythagoras and Plato (De ira Dei, 11); Eusebius (Præp. Evang. 12, 1-11) argues the Plato is in harmony with the Hebrew logoi ‘like a well-tuned lyre’, arguing, amongst other things, that the account of creation in the Symposium can be interpreted as an allegorical translation of the Mosaic Genesis; this last parallel is also made by Ambrose (De Bono Mortis 5); Augustine (Conf. 7.9) describes himself reading some ‘Platonic books’ (quosdam Platonicorum libros) in Latin translation, and lists numerous Christian doctrines that he found there; cf. Cyril Alex. Contra Jul. 1.
12 Apparently by both Jews and Greeks. The Jews are Aristobulos (2nd century BC) and Philo of Alexandria (20BC-50AD), and the Greek is Hermippos of Smyrna (3rd century BC). The claims of Aristobulos and Hermippos are preserved in Christian and Jewish authors stressing the antiquity of the Mosaic tradition, see Gruen (2006), 303-6.
13 We can, of course, see analogous approaches to ancient literature in the classical period. On the reinterpretation of Homer see §2.2 & §2.1§. The Stoics, too, had theoretical justifications for seeing their own metaphysical beliefs in Homer, see Boys-Stones (2003b).
they were usually used in concert. The first was a purely intellectual process of enlightenment (natural theology\textsuperscript{14} or direct revelation to pagans),\textsuperscript{15} while the second posited chains of oral or literary transmission between Jew and Gentile. This surfaces in many forms, the most intriguing being the ‘ancient theology’ (or \textit{prisca theologia}), a term used to indicate the many theories that constructed continuous didactic genealogies from Moses to Plato, usually via the imaginary ancient sage ‘Hermes Trismegistus’, as well as Zoroaster, Pythagoras, and Orpheus.\textsuperscript{16} Until Hermetism was thoroughly discredited by Casaubon in 1614,\textsuperscript{17} Trismegistus’ authority grew in the eyes of many until he became a figure of comparable importance to Moses, inaugurator of a parallel theological tradition (represented by the writings of Plato, Hermes, and the Chaldean and Sibylline prophecies) that was an essential confirmation of or supplement to the Bible. The ancient theology survived Casaubon’s attacks in a modified form,\textsuperscript{18} and would resurface in the \textit{Querelle}, in Mme. Dacier’s defence of Homer.\textsuperscript{19} A quite different view that enjoyed particular vogue in the nineteenth century—partly due to the high-profile advocacy of Gladstone while Chancellor of the Exchequer—was that pagan practices and beliefs reminiscent of Judaism or Christianity were the vestigial traces of the religion practiced by Noah, and taken around the globe by his sons, Ham, Shem, and

\begin{footnotes}
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\item[14] The attainment of those theological truths that are accessible to reason alone, and can therefore be discovered by any reflective individual, Christian or pagan. For ‘\textit{theologia naturalis}’ see Augustine \textit{Civ. Dei}. 6.5, Cf. Jaeger (1947), 1-5 (esp. n.11), Herbert’s ‘common notions’, (1633), 210-20, and, e.g., Bellarmine (1862.1), 158.

\item[15] More daring Renaissance syncretists followed the hints of Augustine (as understood by Francisco De Maronis) that pagans like Plato had also benefited from some sort of divine revelation. See Aug. \textit{Civ. Dei}. 2.7, with De Maronis (c.1475): ‘Ex quo accipitur documentum quod philosophi attingunt ad aliquas veritates divino auxilio quae excedunt facultatem luminis naturalis quia divinitus sunt adiuti’, cited from Walker (1972), 71.

\item[16] See, e.g., Ficino (1576), 386, 400, 1537, 1836; ‘Pico’ in the dialogue recorded by Crinito (1532), 80-1; Champier (1516); Servetus (1553), 137; Parsons (1585), 141, 157, 170-4; Bessarion (1927 = [1649]), 245. These authors often cited the authoritative writings of early Christians: no less an authority than Augustine had suggested that ‘Mercurius Trismegistus’ was the great-grandson of a contemporary of Moses (\textit{Civ. Dei} 18.39). For discussion see Walker (1971), 118-19, 144, and Yates (1964), 12-18.

\item[17] Casaubon (1614), 70-87; cf. Yates (1964), 21 n.3, 398-403, 429.

\item[18] Henry More (1662 = 1653), 3, sent Pythagoras and Plato directly to Egypt, where they encountered Mosaic teachings, as did Cudworth (1734 = 1678), 319-33, and Huet (1690), 77. Horsley (1816), 26-33, accepts the errors of early Hermetists, but argues that the testimony of Cicero and Horace alone demonstrates that ‘the Gentile world in the darkest ages was in possession, not of vague and traditional, but of explicit written prophecies of Christ.’ Cf. Yates (1964), 403-7; Walker (1972), 16, 215.

\item[19] Dacier (1714); cf. Patey (2005), 54.
\end{footnotes}
Preserved in pure form only by the Jews, the ancestral religion common to all in the early days of creation formed a kernel around which erroneous accretions accumulated in the Greek and other pagan religions.

The reading of Greek texts with a view to illuminating, confirming, or illustrating the word of God was no isolated eccentricity, nor was it confined to the comparatively brief flowering of Renaissance Hermetism. It formed the life project of many influential scholars and commentators in the five centuries that followed the Renaissance, it concerned the interpretation of a diverse range of authors, and in many periods it served an important function in the legitimization of the study of the pagan classics.

As we shall see, many scholars have claimed that Herodotus foreshadows, agrees with, or provides independent confirmation of truths—both historical and theological—also proclaimed in the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures, guided (most often) by divine providence, natural reason, or an inborn knowledge of God. Of the scholars who have insisted that the Histories contain Judaeo-Christian messages, only a few state explicitly how this similarity is to be explained—the views of those who do not, however, must be seen in the context just outlined where such views were common, if contested.

Some Herodotean scholars may themselves have been proponents of the *prisca theologia*. In the year that Henri Estienne prefaced his Greek edition of the Histories with his *Apologia Pro Herodoto* (1566) he also published an edition of Orphic hymns, and seven years later a large collection of Orphic fragments and texts by

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20 See his 1865 address to the University of Edinburgh ‘On the Place of Ancient Greece in the Providential Order of the World’ (esp. 7 & 17-18). This idea had also been favoured by Jesuits seeking to link Confucian wisdom with Jewish authority, e.g. Couplet (1687), Le Comte (1696), on whom Walker (1972), 203. Hettinger (1836/7), 50-3, sees Greek elites making progress towards a knowledge of the forgotten god by means of philosophy (in search of which Plato travelled Greece and Egypt).

21 Despite Herodotus’ familiarity with Egyptian priests, and the speeches he reports by Amasis and Solon (of whom one was Egyptian, and the other visited Egypt, 1.30.1, 3.40), Herodotus was not—to my knowledge—ever counted in the list of figures who had access to the *prisca theologia*, despite the presence of strongly Christianizing interpretations of his text.
other ‘ancient theologians’.\textsuperscript{22} Philipp Melanchthon was one of the first post-Renaissance scholars to use Greek historiography as a companion to biblical scholarship, and we shall examine his syncretist interpretations in the next section.\textsuperscript{23} Much nineteenth-century Herodotean scholarship from Germany, Holland, and England, too, has an unmistakably syncretist flavour,\textsuperscript{24} although few classicists write from an overtly Christian or Platonic perspective.\textsuperscript{25} It will become clear that explicit syncretism—alongside the desire to bring Herodotus’ beliefs into a form that is acceptable to contemporary religious thought—has been one of the greatest influences on the interpretation of Herodotean theology between the sixteenth and the mid-twentieth century.

But the story of Herodotean syncretism is not straightforward, above all due to the diversity and size of Herodotus’ work, which confounds all but the most careful generalizations. Although some ideas within the \textit{Histories} seem compatible with some forms of Christian and Platonic thought, others are flagrantly at odds with it. Those who wish to stress the similarities between Herodotean and Judaeo-Christian or Platonic thought have focused upon the narrator’s statements of the certainty of divine punishment for injustice (e.g. 2.120.5), his reference to divine \textit{nemesis} (which, interpreted as Aristotle or Homer had used \textit{nemesis}, seems a moral and punitive response to unmerited success or transgressive behaviour, cf. §3.5.2), a tendency to talk of ‘the divinity’ or ‘god’ in a way that lends itself to monotheistic interpretation (cf. §2.3, §2.8), and the first surviving reference to divine providence (\textit{pronoia}, 3.108, cf. §2.12). Other ideas within the \textit{Histories} have horrified Platonists and Christians alike, including inherited guilt,\textsuperscript{26} and the deception of humans by gods (through oracles and dreams, e.g. 1.53, 66.3, 7.12-18). A particularly troublesome

\textsuperscript{22} Estienne (1566b), (1588); cf. Estienne & Scaliger (1573).
\textsuperscript{23} For his Christianizing readings of Greek tragedy, see Lurie (2012), 442-4.
\textsuperscript{24} See particularly De Jongh (1833), Hoffmann (1860), Runge (1856), Schuler (1869), Meuss (1888), discussed below §1.5.
\textsuperscript{25} Exceptions being Andreas Schuler (1869), who cites contemporary Catholic theologians throughout—Döllinger (1857) and Hettinger (1863/7)—and Schömann (1844), who defends ancient literature against the criticisms of the Protestant theologian Julius Müller (cf. §1.5, 1.6.1).
\textsuperscript{26} Larcher (1829), \textit{ad} 1.91, for example, notes that at the time of Herodotus’ writing ‘correct’ notions were restricted to the Jews, citing the explicit denial of inherited guilt in Deuteronomy 24.16 and Ezekiel 18.20. Plutarch, too, had complained of this in his \textit{De sera numinis vindicta} (\textit{Mor.}:548a).
issue—also the subject of much ancient polemic—is the prominent idea that god is *phthoneros*.

Divine *phthonos* was problematic on two counts. First, it suggested an anthropomorphic conception of divinity in contrast to the belief in divine *apatheia* (freedom from passions and emotions) cultivated by many philosophical and religious schools, including the Epicurians, Stoics, and some forms of Christianity and Judaism. Second, *phthonos* was typically considered a highly disreputable emotion in antiquity. Yet divine *phthonos*, too, could be interpreted in several ways: those who considered the *Histories* a collection of narratives about divine justice have based their analysis of *phthonos* on those passages in which it appears to be a response to transgressive arrogance or 'thinking big' (*mega phronein*, e.g. the first speech of Artabanus, 7.10.ε), although scholars only alighted on this more palatable interpretation of *phthonos* in the late eighteenth century. Those who view the *Histories* as a collection of narratives about a malign and oppressive ‘divine hostility’ towards mortals tend to base their interpretation of *phthonos* on the passage where the adjective *phthoneros* describes a continuous and indiscriminately grudging attitude of the gods, that causes all mortals such suffering that they wish repeatedly for death as the ‘sweet respite from wretched life’ (i.e. 7.46).

The *Histories*, then, holds material to lend at least superficial support to the early Christian syncretist and his opponent. Making sense of these diverse ideas—which would have struck, say, a sixteenth-century humanist as radically incompatible with one another—has been a much-contested struggle in scholarship over the last five centuries. Many scholars have chosen to emphasize the distance between Herodotus’ beliefs and their own, whether Neoplatonists (e.g. Plutarch), Protestants (e.g. Julius Müller) or Catholics (e.g. François Geinoz, Pierre-Henri Larcher). It is only

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27 We can trace the idea back to Xenophanes’ statement that the one greatest god is like mortals in neither form nor thought (νόηµα, fr.23 DK); Others had developed this thought, including Democritus (B 217 DK; cf. §4.3 n.38), Euripides (ὄργανος πρέπει θεοίς συνέχεται ἀποθνησκεῖν, *Bacch.* 1346), Epicurus (Τὸ μακάριον καὶ ἀθαναστὸν...οὔτε ὑπεράνων οὔτε χάρις συνεχείται, *Sent.* 1), Cicero (*At hoc quidem commune est omnium philosophorum...numquam nec irasci deum nec nocere*, *de off.* 3.102), Sextus Empiricus (opposing ‘the poets’ representation of the gods as feeling emotion to the δόγµα... φιλοσόφων ἧς ἀπαθεῖς εἶναι τὸ θεῖον, *Pyrrh.* 1.162), Seneca (*De ira* 2.27.1), and Plutarch (*Mor.* 458b-c). See discussion in Harris (2001), 88-128.
relatively recently that scholars have started to integrate these quite different interpretative traditions, and the impetus of each tradition is clearly visible in modern attempts to mediate between them, which have sought reconciliation by ‘admitting’ inconsistencies, often without examining the nature of the inconsistency in question.

The basic claim of Platonic and Christian syncretism—that Herodotus shares certain theological notions with Platonic and Christian thinkers—is, of course, not to be dismissed *ad hominem* on the basis that it originates in a soil of pious humanist syncretism. Many ideas that seem to come to fruition, as it were, in Platonic thought and would have struck the Renaissance reader as reminiscent of Christianity can be traced to long before Herodotus’ time: critiques of anthropomorphism and divine immorality are found in the work of Xenophanes in the sixth century.\(^\text{28}\) The doctrine of divine ‘goodness’ (and denial that god can be the cause of bad things) is first formulated (in extant literature) by Plato, but has also been attributed to Socrates, Democritus, and Xenophanes, and snatches of similar-sounding ideas can be heard from Euripidean characters.\(^\text{29}\) The notion that an abstracted divinity has disposed the world in the interests of humanity is first attested in Herodotus, but was clearly abroad in philosophical circles in the late fifth century.\(^\text{30}\) That Herodotus should be heir to Xenophanes’ non-anthropomorphic, somewhat ‘moralized’ conception of divinity, or the monism of Thales and his successors, is not implausible on chronological or geographical grounds. Later chapters will examine the validity of the claim that Herodotus believed in a divinity which is abstract, just, or benevolent, which punishes the unjust and arrogant and helps the righteous, or which does not feel human emotions—each of which are important aspects of syncretist

\(^{28}\) Cf. Xenophanes fr. 10 DK (Homer attributed to the gods what is παρ’ ἀνθρώπους ὀνείδεα καὶ ψόγος), echoed by Augustine *civ. Dei.* 6.5 (‘ut dii furati sint, ut adulterarint, ut seruiernit homini’). The chorus of E. *Hipp.* protest that ‘gods must be wiser than mortals’ (σοφωτέρους γὰρ χρή βροτον έίναι θεούς, 120). Significant is E. fr.286b.7 Kannicht: εἰ θεοί τι δρόσην αἰσχρόν, οὐκ εἰσίν θεοί. In the Jewish tradition, Philo committed to the divine *apatheia* of Greek philosophy (see his *Quod deus sit immutabilis* 51-52) in contradiction of Jewish textual authority (e.g. Genesis 6:7). Christian commentators were also divided: on divine *orgē* in late Judaism and early Christianity see Harris (2001), 394-6.

\(^{29}\) What Thomas Gould—following Vlastos (1989) & (1991)—calls ‘Socratism’, (1990), esp. 4-7. Michael Bordt (2006), *passim* (with conclusions at 144), considers this ‘revolutionary’ doctrine to originate with Plato. What is certain is that Plato’s ideas were highly contentious when he expressed them, as Bordt makes clear (2006), 95-8, *contra* Solmsen (1942), 68 (who claims that the notion that ‘god is good’ was an unquestioned assumption in ancient Greece).

\(^{30}\) Further §2.12.
interpretation that dominated classical scholarship from the sixteenth to the early-twentieth century. The remainder of this introduction does not attempt to answer these questions, but rather to outline the history of Herodotean theological interpretation from Plutarch to the present, with necessary forays into Aristotelian and Platonic thought.
1.2. Herodotus and The Ancient Quarrel: Blasphemy and Impiety

While the controversy—or what survives of it—over Herodotus’ theology began later in antiquity, its roots lie in Platonic attacks on ‘poetic theology’. In the *Timaeus* Plato has Socrates insist that the notion that god feels *phthonos*—an idea found in Pindar, Aeschylus, and Herodotus—is false, because god is good, and the cause of good things only.\(^{31}\)

The idea that god is *phthononeros* is also indirectly criticized in Plato’s attacks on ‘poetic’ theology in the second book of the *Republic*. Plato objects to the notion of a divinity who distributes both good and evil, criticizing the Homeric Achilles’ speech on the Jars of Zeus (a passage upon which Herodotus’ seems to model some of his *phthonos* speeches).\(^{32}\) He insists that if the gods cause suffering, then this suffering is only inflicted upon those who are in need of punishment and so benefit from it because, again, the gods are the cause only of good things (380a5-c3).

In the works of Plato, then, divine *phthonos* is part of a world-view that is ‘poetic’, incorrect, and dangerous, because it suggests that the gods visit those who are innocent of wrongdoing with pointless suffering. Plato is not the first author whose explicit criticisms of divine *phthonos* survive for, as so often, Euripidean characters voice similar critiques: Heracles asks in disgust who would worship a goddess who destroyed the guiltless (*anaitioi*) benefactors of Greece merely on account of sexual envy (\(λέκτρων \ φθόνοις, \ Her. \ 1307-10\)). Aristotle would follow Plato in disavowing the notion of divine *phthonos*, and advocating divine nemesis in its place,\(^{33}\) and seems to have had Herodotus in mind in his own criticism of divine

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\(^{31}\) *Tim*. 29e (cited by Plut. *Mor.* 1102d7-8). Divine *phthonos* is also denied by Socrates at *Phaedr.* 247a7: ‘*phthonos* stands outside the chorus of the gods’ (φθόνοις γάρ ἔξω θείου χοροῦ ἵσταται), cited by Plut. *Mor.* 1086f3.

\(^{32}\) *Il*. 24.527-33; on the Herodotean echoes see §3.5-6.

\(^{33}\) See §3.5.2 n.83.
phthonos, despite the fact that he follows the long tradition of ascribing this view to ‘the poets’.34

The first surviving attempt to link these criticisms of the ‘poetic’ notion of divine phthonos with Herodotus’ Histories is not found until six hundred years after Plato. In his short treatise On the Malice of Herodotus Plutarch labels Solon’s speech to Croesus (1.32) and its mention of divine phthonos ‘blasphemous abuse’, apparently judging Herodotus against this Platonic stricture which had found fairly wide-spread acceptance: over a century later Plotinus asserts that the notion of divine phthonos is not themis.35 In this context it is initially surprising that Plutarch himself employs the motif of the necessary alternation of fortune, although in Plutarch’s formulation it is Tukhê (‘Chance’) rather than ‘the divine’ or ‘god’ that is described as savage, disloyal, or untrustworthy.36 We might wonder whether Plutarch’s apparent hypocrisy is a cynical tactic (Plutarch certainly throws all he can at Herodotus in the hope that something will stick), or whether it reflects a genuine distinction important to Plutarch’s Platonic piety. Plutarch was certainly in an awkward position. He was a Platonist, but the narrative tradition on which many of his stories drew was steeped in the theological world that Plato had attacked: the notion of the necessary and arbitrary alternation of human good fortune was a commonplace in Greek literature, and was often attributed to the gods.37

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34 Met. 983a: ἀλλ’ οὐκέ τὸ θείον φθονερόν ἐνδέχεται εἶναι, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὴν παρομίαν πολλὰ γεοδονεῖ ἄνθρωποι. This may be an oblique reference to Herodotus: outside this passage the description of to theion as phthoneros (‘grudging’) is only found Herodotus (ascribing the noun phthonos to the gods is much more common); cf. Rhet. 1386b. For the tension in Aristotle between the doctrine of divine goodness and his appreciation of tragedy on its own terms see T. Gould (1990), xx-xxiii.

35 Plut. 857f-858a: ‘abusing the gods in the character of Solon he says...[Hdt. 1.32.1]...attributing what he himself thinks about the gods to Solon Herodotus adds malice to blasphemy’ (τοῖς δὲ θεοῖς λοιποθομένος ἐν τῷ Σόλωνε προσπεία ταυτ’ ἐφήκεν...[Hdt. 1.32.1]... ἄ γὰρ αὐτὸς ἐφήκεν περὶ τῶν θεῶν τῷ Σόλωνι προσπείματος κακοθείς τῇ βλασφημίᾳ προστίθησι.) See above n.36 for Plutarch’s citation of Plato’s comments on divine phthonos in his Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum. But elsewhere in the same treatise Plutarch’s Theon cites Artabanus’ comment about the phthoneros nature of god from the Histories (Mor. 1106f5-6, citing 7.10.c) apparently with some approval, as a statement that life is pleasurable and its privation causes grief (almost the opposite point to that which Artabanus is making). Plotinus more straightforwardly echoes Platonic views: ‘it is not holy for phthonos to be among the gods’ (ὅτι μὴ θέμις φθόνον ἐν τοῖς θεοῖς εἶναι), Ennead 2.9.17.

36 Tukhê (unquestionably a ‘divine’ force) is presented as ὀμοτές, poikilos, and apistos (Plut. Aem. 35.3, 36.3). Plutarch’s conversation between Solon and Croesus likewise makes the same point about humanity without mentioning ‘god’: τύχας ὀρθά παντοδαπὰς χρῶμεν ἑωὶ τὸν βιόν (Plut. Sol. 27.7). On the later history of divine phthonos cf. Aalders (1979).

Regardless of this, Plutarch’s comments on the blasphemy of divine *phthonos* highlight it as one of the greatest problems in Platonizing and Christianizing syncretism of the *Histories* for subsequent readers, and in doing so made the issue virtually impossible to ignore. This is, of course, just one of the ways in which Plutarch’s treatise acted as the starting point for most scholars between the Renaissance and the late nineteenth century, as attested by the tendency of scholars to style their own works on Herodotus as ‘defences’ against Plutarch’s attacks.\(^{38}\)

Although their stance towards Plutarch may have been one of opposition, Plutarch’s objections defined the terms that the ensuing debate took, and his objection that Herodotus held an impious view of divinity was no easier to stomach for a Christian than a Neoplatonist.

\(^{38}\) Estienne (1566a), Geinoz (1744/6), (1747/8), (1749/51); this pose is explicitly adopted by Larcher (1786), *ad* 1.32, and implicitly taken by Camerarius (1541), De Jongh (1833), Schuler (1869), Meuss (1888). On Plutarch’s popularity in the 16\(^{th}\) and 17\(^{th}\) centuries, see Hartog (1988), 300.
1.3. Divine Φθόνος and Just Divine Punishment

In 1541 Joachim Camerarius’ *Defence of Herodotus* disputed the main points of Plutarch’s treatise, arguing for Herodotus’ factual reliability and good intentions, and stressing the usefulness and pleasure (*utilitas et voluptas*) to be derived from reading the *Histories*. Camerarius, pupil and friend of Melanchthon, does not present a detailed vision of Herodotus’ theology, but confines himself to criticizing Plutarch’s objections: he declares Solon’s discourse on the instability of human fortune an ’excellent opinion’ (*praecclara sententia*), and characterizes Plutarch’s attack on divine *phthonos* as an overreaction resulting from Plutarch’s belief in divine *apatheia*, which, Camerarius implies, is also opposed to the Christian tradition of describing God in human terms.\(^{39}\) To some degree the defence is relativistic, according to the standards of Herodotus contemporaries: Camerarius stresses that Xenophon, a pinnacle of Greek piety, makes statements with similar implications—‘god, it seems, *delights* in making the small big, and the big small’.\(^{40}\) Unfortunately, Camerarius does not make clear exactly what he understands by ‘divine *phthonos*’, but his approbation seems directed at the sense of the instability of the human condition, and the dependence of humanity upon God. It may not simply be an educated flourish that causes him to cite the word *phthoneros* in Greek and not translate it into Latin, for the term *invidus* (‘envy’) would have done nothing to aid his defence. In his *Summa Theologica* Aquinas, for example, had categorized *invidia* as a mortal sin (and his citation of Aristotle makes it clear that *invidia* corresponded to Greek *phthonos*).\(^{41}\)

Herodotus’ theology is praised in quite different terms in a foundational work of Protestant historiography, the *Chronicon Carionis*, which narrates the history of the world from *Genesis* to the sixteenth century, structured around the four monarchies

\(^{39}\) Camerarius presents Plutarch’s objection, before dismissing it: ‘Haec igitur sacriligia est in Herodoto sententia, quia secundum hominum intelligentiam φθονερὸν dixit esse τὸ θεῖον. Sed haec quam sint futilia quis non videt?’ (cited from Estienne (1570), 13).

\(^{40}\) Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.23, on which Camerarius writes ‘Quid Xenophon? quo nemo fuit numinis colentior, nemo observantior, nemo impietatis erga Deum acrior hostis? Nonne eandem sententiam ponere non dubitavit in praeclaro illo opera suo historiae rerum Graecarum? Sic enim ait, καὶ ὁ θεὸς, ὡς οἴκε, πολλάκις χαίρει, τοὺς μὲν μικροῦς μεγάλους ποιῶν, τοὺς δὲ μεγάλους μικροὺς.’

schema borrowed from the Book of Daniel. The *Chronicon* was a collaborative effort, though its final form is attributed mostly to Melanchthon, under whose name it appears in the *Corpus Reformatorum*.\(^{42}\) Published by Johannes Carion as the *Chronik des Weltzeitalters* in 1532, it was then edited and republished in a greatly expanded form by Melanchthon and Caspar Peucer (amongst others), as the *Chronicon Carionis* in 1572.\(^{43}\)

In the introduction to the *Chronicon*, as elsewhere in Melanchthon’s writings, Greek historiography is presented as part of a divine plan for the continuous documentation of world history, and a providential confirmation of biblical veracity. Herodotus’ *Histories* are said—along with all works of history, in fact—to bear witness to the universal rule that ‘awful crimes are punished by awful punishments’. These crimes include blasphemy, perjury, the cruelty of tyrants, insurrection, and dissolute pleasures, and their punishments attest ‘divine judgement and providence’.\(^{44}\) The incredible speed with which Xerxes’ army was defeated in the Persian Wars attests to the fact that ‘God does not want unnecessary wars to be fought out of a desire for glory, and trust in human power’.\(^{45}\) By highlighting these motives for Xerxes’ decision to campaign against Greece, the *Chronicon* inaugurates a tradition that survives to the present of passing without comment over Herodotus’ story that Xerxes changes his mind about the invasion and is then (along with his sage uncle) unwillingly *forced* to fight the campaign by a *divine* dream (further §3.7).

From the mid fifteenth century until François Geinoz (on whom §1.4), the ‘impious’ doctrine of divine *phthonos* attacked by Plato, Aristotle, and Plutarch, and defended by Camerarius effectively disappears from discussions of Herodotean theology—with a few exceptions to be discussed—and the emphasis was placed instead upon God’s righteous vengeance and just punishment of the wicked. Plato’s criticism of

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\(^{42}\) I cite the *Chronicon* from Melanchthon (1834/60).


\(^{44}\) Melanchthon (1834/60.12), 712: ‘...cum regula universalis sit: Atrocia delicta puniuntur atrocibus poenis in hac vita. Recitant historiae omnium temporum exempla, de poenis blasphemiarum, periorum, tyrannicae crudelitatis, seditionum, flagitiosarum libidinum, et rapinarum, quae poenae testimonia sunt providentiae et iudicii divini’.

\(^{45}\) Melanchthon (1834/60.12), 796: ‘Vult enim Deus, non suscrip bella non necessaria cupiditate gloriae et fiducia humanae potentiae.’
‘the poets’ for their claim that god inflicts sufferings upon the guiltless resonated with humanist scholars, and Melanchthon and his successors systematically reinterpreted Greek tragedy and historiography as a series of morality plays, compatible with a Platonic world-view of a just divinity who inflicts suffering only as a palliative, that is as punishment in response to crimes. This approach led sixteenth-century scholars—like many today—to lay a correspondingly greater emphasis on the crimes, sins, mad imperialism and insufferable arrogance of any character who might be thought to suffer excessive or unmerited misfortune.

That the interpretation of the Histories should have changed so dramatically from Plutarch’s reading is unsurprising. To the sixteenth-century eye the Histories afforded an opportunity independently to confirm the historical narrative of the Old Testament, and in this it had an importance to both humanist and theologian that no other ancient historian could rival. As Ernst Regius wrote in 1555 (in an advertisement for a course of lectures on Herodotus in Wittenberg): ‘Herodotus says many things which illustrate the Prophetic books, which attest that the history of the Prophetic Church was earlier, and which are harmonious with it.’46 Herodotus was the first classical historian in the continuous revelation of God’s will connecting the Hebrew account of Genesis to the present, and it was often observed that the Histories report events predicted in the old Testament: in his account of Egypt Herodotus mentions the death of Apries47 (2.161), which had been predicted in Jeremiah (44:29-30).48

In his Declamatio de lingua Hebraica Melanchthon argues that these overlaps are no accident, but part of a divine plan for the continuous documentation of history,

46 Regius (1555), 71: ‘[Herodotus] Multa narrat, quae illustrant Propheticos libros et testantur historiam Ecclesiae Propheticae priorem esse et cum ea congruant.’ On Regius: Clemen (1911), 68. Stephanus (1570), 5, stresses the importance of Herodotus in reconciling the chronology of ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ history.
47 Known as Hophra to Jeremiah, and as Waphres to Menetho.
48 Melanchthon (1834/60.9 = Letter to Archbishop Sigismundo, Apr. 1558), 533: ‘Apryi praedicit exitium Ieremias, quod describit Herodotus’; (1834/60.11 = Decl. de Ambrosio), 580-1: ‘Herodotus, quasi inchoans historiam in eo ipso articulo, ubi nostri [sc. prophetici libri] desinunt’. The same point is made by, e.g. Regius (1555), 70-1, and David Chytraeus (1601), 211-12, 217, cf. Momigliano (1966), 140.)
because historical knowledge is an essential part of a developed religious understanding.\textsuperscript{49}


The knowledge of history—like the knowledge of rhetoric and philology\textsuperscript{50}—brought by a familiarity with pagan texts was necessary for a full understanding of the Bible. The immense authority commanded by both Melanchthon and the \textit{Chronicon} in subsequent centuries seems to have given an important impetus to this new interpretation of Greek historical narratives, Herodotus’ included, which were now to be considered records of true events preserved by divine providence.\textsuperscript{51} The introduction of the study of Greek language and literature was one of the aims of Melanchthon’s educational reform, and the subject of his inaugural speech as Chair of Greek in Wittenberg.\textsuperscript{52}

There is, however, a crucial difference between Melanchthon’s open attitude towards pagan literature and the forms of syncretism reviewed above (§1.1). Melanchthon’s claims imply not a hidden ancient wisdom that Herodotus preserves (the contention of the Hermetist \textit{prisca theologia}), but rather the providential guidance of Herodotus and other ancient authors by the plan of God himself. Melanchthon’s interest is in Herodotus’ facts (as a platform for Melanchthon's own theological/historical claims), and he shows little interest in Herodotus’ own theological beliefs: I have found no hint that the divine inspiration which roused Herodotus to write his \textit{Histories} also

\textsuperscript{49} Melanchthon (1834/60.11), 713.
\textsuperscript{50} On Melanchthon’s novel use of Greek and Roman rhetoric for biblical interpretation, Classen (2002), 99-177 (esp. 103 & 176-8).
\textsuperscript{51} For the renewed trust in Herodotus at the beginning of the sixteenth century, and an outline of the fortunes of Herodotus’ reputation as ‘father of history’ and ‘father of lies’, see Momigliano (1966); Schmid (1934), 670-1.
\textsuperscript{52} \textit{De corrigendis adolescentiae studiis} on August 29, 1518.
imparted a true understanding of God. In this Melanchthon’s understanding of Herodotus may differ from his early work on Greek tragedy, for in these admittedly fictional works Melanchthon claims to find rules of retributive divine justice, intentionally woven into the stories by the authors.\(^{53}\)

Yet, although it was the *events* Herodotus described that interested Melanchthon and others, it was the mental dispositions of the great men of history and the minutiae of their motivation and behaviour—in short the characterization that often seems the most ‘dramatic’ and least source-based aspect of Herodotus’ writing—that formed the basis for moralizing conclusions about ‘divine punishment’. This may be why Melanchthon and his contemporaries do not urge any discrepancy between *historical facts* (which could be found in Herodotus) and *theological opinions* (which could not). The re-presentation of narratives from ancient Greek historians would be fatally undermined if its only witnesses were attacked. To my knowledge no theoretical justifications were urged to surmount these difficulties.

But Melanchthon’s readings of Greek literature do occasionally take a quite different perspective. In a Christmas-day speech Melanchthon reflects on ancient complaints about the nature of the human condition, and argues that Christianity has provided the palliative to this pessimistic vision:\(^{54}\)

> The heathens say that man is the most miserable of all living things because they see that he is most unfortunate in this life, and wretched. ‘A man’, says Xenophon ‘ought

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53 On Melanchthon’s readings of tragedy see Lurie (2004), 94-107, and (2012).
to expect everything’. And Herodotus says ἄνθρωπος πᾶν συμφορά: ‘the whole entity that is man, is calamity’. We see that men are crushed and extinguished like violets. Nothing is more beautiful than a violet, its colour is most pleasing to the eye: and its juice is useful in the curing of many illnesses. Yet it perishes so easily; it is crushed under foot. The same thing happens to man. The heathens felt wonder that the nature of man—which is preeminent among things born from the earth—should share this condition, or rather that man should even be more subject to calamities than any other animal. They were not able to see the real causes, nor could they see the real remedies for their great miseries, even if the poets and orators consumed the greater part of their eloquence in deploring these facts. But these things are revealed in the Gospels. Had there been no revelation about the restitution of eternal life, of the presence and help of the son of God... then we too would truly be most miserable. But we have the consolation from that voice brought forth by the son of God...

Melanchthon does not touch in any detail on the theological ideas that underlay the pessimistic heathen worldview he mentions. In Herodotus’ case the statement that ‘man is entirely chance’ (1.32.4) immediately follows and is closely linked with his statement that ‘the divine is phthoneros and troubling’ (1.32.1), and divine phthonos is repeatedly mentioned in speeches before the great misfortunes (sumphorai) that Melanchthon and his contemporaries interpreted so differently elsewhere. This uncharacteristic evaluation of Greek literature, as largely concerned with deploring the arbitrary sufferings of human life is elicited by a context that requires that the blessings of Christianity be enumerated and favourably compared with the misery of heathenism. But sentiments similar to those cited above recur in much later Christian consideration of the classics, which would directly oppose the reading of Herodotean narratives and theology implied by the Chronicon.56

By the end of the sixteenth century, however, Plutarch’s Platonic indignation at the impiety Herodotean divine phthonos had been firmly replaced by Humanist approbation of the law of divine justice observable in his narratives: that moderate behaviour leads to good outcomes, while ambition and desire lead to disaster.57 Thus for Regius, what is notable in the Histories is that Herodotus:58

56 See, e.g. Hettinger (1863/7.2), 201-5, who like Melanchthon seems to paraphrase Hdt. 1.32 (man is ‘ein Spiel der Götter’), alongside numerous other citations of ancient pessimism. Compare also J. Müller (1844), 325, discussed below (§1.6.1)
57 See the Declamatio de Studio Linguae Ebraeae (1834/60.11), 868: ‘An quisquam tam agresti animo est, ut non malit legere Herodoti historiam perpetuam, de maximis rebus gestis inde usque a Croeso ad
saepe repetit Regulam, quae monet atrocia scelera atrocibus poenis in hac vita puniri, ut cum ait: \(\text{εγάλων} \ \text{ἀδικημάτων} \ \text{μεγάλαι} \ \text{εἰσὶ} \ \text{καὶ} \ \text{τιμωρίᾳ.} \) Item: \(\text{οὐδεὶς} \ \text{ἀνθρώπον} \ \text{ἀδικοῦν} \ \text{τίσιν} \ \text{οὐκ} \ \text{ἀποτίσει.}

The view that we have seen emerge in opposition to Plutarch’s criticisms—that the Histories are principally concerned with divine justice—would, in various forms, dominate four centuries of scholarship, from Melanchthon in the sixteenth century to Lloyd-Jones and others in the twentieth.

In his 1570 introduction to the Histories, Melanchthon’s younger contemporary Henri Estienne offers a similar vision of Herodotean theology. His emphasis, likewise, is entirely on divine punishment: Herodotus provides many splendid examples of ‘divine providence’ which suppresses the arrogant (\textit{superbos deprimit}), and of the horrifying destructions of those kings whose ‘arrogance and madness Herodotus has placed before our eyes’.\(^59\)

A decade and a half later B.R.’s English translation\(^60\) of Croesus’ response to the deceptive oracles embellishes Herodotus’ narrative along similar lines, presenting the narrative as one of arrogance and ambition that meets with divine punishment:

\begin{quote}
Crœsus was \textit{so puffed up and exalted} in courage,\(^61\) \textit{that already} he \textit{swallowed and devoured} in hope the whole government and empyre of Cyrus. (B.R., my italics)
\end{quote}

\(\text{ὁ} \ \text{Κροῖσος}, \ \text{ὑπερήσθη} \ \text{τε} \ \text{τοῖς} \ \text{χρηστηρίοισι}, \ \text{πάγχυ} \ \text{τε} \ \text{ἐλπίσας} \ \text{καταλύσειν} \ \text{τὴν} \ \text{Κύρου} \ \text{βασιλείην}…\textit{.}\)\(^{62}\) (Herodotus 1.54.1)

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\(^{58}\) Regius (1555), 72, citing 2.120.5 (narrator’s words) and 5.56.1 (Hipparchus’ dream in hexameters).

\(^{59}\) Estienne (1570), 5: ‘\textit{regum, potentissimorum alioqui quorum…} \textit{superbiam ac vesaniam nobis ante oculos saepe ponit}; \textit{'Addo etiam (quod vel maxime commendare nobis hunc scriptorem debet) qui religiosius de divina providentia & quidem valde similibus verbis, interdum etiam iisdem loquatur’}."

\(^{60}\) On the identity of Herodotus’ mysterious first English translator: Whibley (1924), xix-xxiv.

\(^{61}\) For the biblical overtones compare, e.g. Matthew 23:12, (‘For whosoever will exalt himself, shall be brought low…’), 1 Corinthians 13 (‘love envieth not; love doth not boast itself, it is not puffed up’), citations from the Geneva Bible.

\(^{62}\) Elpizô in Herodotus, as usually, indicates both hoped for (e.g. 3.143.2) and feared events (1.77.4, 8.12.2); it does not suggest exultation. Nor did Valla’s Latin, from which B.R. translated, have the
At several other points in the build up to the war between Lydia and Persia B.R.’s fondness for embellishment manifests itself by introducing new imagery of swollen pride, gluttony, self-glorification, and venality into the Histories. The total assimilation of Croesus’ campaign against Persia to patterns of transgressive arrogance and imperialistic ambition followed by divine punishment is first clearly articulated in these texts and has become one of the most influential ways of reading Croesus’ story. B.R.’s translation, significantly, omits the sole reference to divine phthonos that occurs in the two books he translates. We might explain the absence of divine phthonos as B.R.’s discomfort with attributing the mortal sin of invidia to God, or an attempt to faithfully translate the ‘underlying thought’ in non-theological terms (or, of course, both).

It is interesting that no steps seem to have been made in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries towards reconciling the predominant interpretation of the great personal misfortunes of Croesus and Xerxes with the warners' repeated statement that god is ‘troubling and phthoneros’. The primary approach to these speeches seems to have been to ignore them outright and to focus, by contrast, on the arrogance, injustice, and madness of the kings upon whom divine destruction fell—thereby 'demonstrating' that they were instances of justified divine punishment.

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same overtones of gluttony and greed: ‘Croesus ita elatus animo est ut omneo conceperet spem se eversurum esse imperium Cyri’ (cited from Estienne (1566a), ad loc).

63 E.g. B.R.’s translation of 1.34: ‘After whose departure the heavy anger of the gods fel upon Croesus, for that he was so puffed up and exalted in the vain and inestimable confidence of his own felicity’ (cf. §4.2).

64 Solon’s famous admonition to Croesus on divine phthonos is translated: ‘Certes, O king (sayd he) you daemand of me a question as one not altogether ignorant that the highest clymers have the heaviest falls [= ἐπιστάμενον με τὸ θεῖον πᾶν ἐόν φθονερόν τε καὶ ταραχῶδες]’; Printed in Whibley (1924), 24 (my italics).
1.4. The Indefensibly Phthoneros Divinity

After a seventeenth century seemingly quite void of interest in Herodotean theology, we jump to mid-eighteenth-century Paris, where we encounter an eminent Swiss scholar, canon, one-time head of the Swiss Guard, and member of the Académie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, notable for his apostasy from the tradition of ‘defending’ Herodotus from Plutarch’s charges of blasphemy. The Abbé François Geinoz, author of a ‘Defence of Herodotus Against the Attacks of Plutarch’ in three parts, refuses to defend Herodotus’ theological views, in particular his view of divine phthonos, which he considered (in concurrence with Plutarch) ‘impious’ (impie). Geinoz stresses the distance between his own notion of Dieu—the Supreme and perfect Being, Author of Nature—and the Greek conception, which Herodotus shared, of to theion. For the Greeks to theion was a ‘superior intelligence’ that visited mortals with both good and bad things. It was the invisible cause of unforeseen and inevitable events, to be equated with the ‘destiny’ that presides over the fates of mortals, and the Greeks conceived of divinity in such terms because of their inability to discover the causes of the misfortunes that befell them.

Geinoz’s decision to stress the arbitrary and unjust nature of the gods—particularly divine phthonos—rather than divine justice as the governing principle of Herodotean theology is quite unremarkable when contextualized. Geinoz considers Herodotus’ notion of the divine thoroughly typical of his day, especially amongst the tragedians: Greek tragedy, far from being the morally purifying spectacle of just divine punishment, unfolded in a world governed by capricious divinities.

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65 In the first (1744/6), 549, Geinoz says on divine phthonos: ‘je n’entreprendrai pas de justifier les sentiments d’Hérodot sur la divinité: il paroit par le discours qu’il a mis dans la bouche de Solon, qu’il s’en étoit formé une idée fort étrange’.

66 Geinoz (1744/6), 553: ‘Transportons-nous au temps d’Hérodote, et examinons quelle idée on attachoit au mot θεῖον: ce terme n’avoit pas une signification aussi entendue que celle que nous donnons aujourd’hui au mot Dieu. Il ne signifioit pas l’Être Suprême, l’Être souverainement parfait, l’Auteur de la Nature: τὸ θεῖον n’étoit autre chose, dans le langage des Païens, qu’une intelligence supérieure, tout aussi portée à faire le mal physique des creatures, qu’à procurer leur bien; c’étoit une cause invisible des événemens imprévus et inévitables; c’étoit le destin qui préside au sort des mortels.’

67 Geinoz (1744/6), 553. Plutarch’s complaints against Herodotus’ typically Greek notion of divinity are considered to make Plutarch exceptional for his time and said to be motivated by bitterness—those of Plato and Aristotle are ignored: ‘Le théâtre des Grecs ne retentissoit que des cris de ces infortunes,
Geinoz thus aligned himself with the ‘Modernes’ in the ongoing *Querelle* that had blown up in the 1690s. The ‘Modernes’68 considered the Greek conception of the divine impious, inferior, and morally problematic (often on the basis that divine action was portrayed as arbitrary and immoral), while the defenders of antiquity—the ‘Anciens’—argued that the moral worldview of tragedy was commensurable with Christianity, usually by claiming that tragedy, properly understood, depicted justified divine punishments rather than cruel and arbitrary misfortunes.69 This was, in other words, a defence of Greek literature on Platonic terms. Geinoz joins those who viewed Greek tragedy as morally and theologically alien and inferior, and it is this widespread view of ancient literature that he extends to Herodotus. Although he makes little reference to earlier scholars, Geinoz’s argument is a radical reinterpretation of Herodotean theology and the narratives themselves.

This might seem a far cry from Geinoz’s professed aim—defending Herodotus from Plutarch. But Geinoz does, in fact, keep this goal in sight, despite his disapproval of Herodotus’ very alien conception of god, by appealing to the paganism of Herodotus’ contemporary world as a mitigating factor. ‘Mais la maxime que Plutaque a regardée comme impie, soit par humeur, soit par superstition, et que nous jugeons telle aujourd’hui par de meilleurs principes, est-elle en effet si condemnable dans la bouche d’un Sage du paganisme?’70 This was, in fact, a last-resort defensive tactic that had been increasingly adopted by the Ancients in the course of the eighteenth century, since Pierre Brumoy’s *Théâtre des Grecs* (1730),71 but its origins can already be seen in Camerarius’ defence of Herodotus by reference to similar comments made by the ‘pious’ Xenophon. Geinoz insists that Herodotus’ decision to

68 I use the French terms to refer to the positions taken in the Querelle (both inside and outside France), leaving the English ‘moderns’ and ‘ancients’ free to apply to whatever context requires.
70 Geinoz (1744/6), 552.
71 See Patey (2005), 56-7, discusses this tactic in Anne Dacier, Boivin, Du Bois, Montisquieu; cf. Lurie (2012), 450-1.
place a speech on divine *phthonos* in Solon’s mouth is not *malicious*, as Plutarch would have it, but made in good faith.\(^{72}\)

Geinoz devoted his second ‘Defence’ to demonstrating that the *Histories* is an ‘ouvrage morale’, based around the exposition of a ‘moral philosophy’, rather than the partisan, nationalistic history that Plutarch would have liked. Herodotus introduces this moral in the mouth of Solon in the first book, Geinoz argues, and continues to do so throughout the *Histories* by means of digressions.\(^{73}\) It is important that Geinoz makes no distinction between what later scholars will consider quite different types of divine action (for example: human impiety -> divine punishment; or human success -> divine *phthonos* -> divine destruction; or human success -> human pride (or perhaps ‘hubris’) -> divine *phthonos* -> divine destruction) nor does he separate these from destiny, chance, and divine providence. In the story of Cypselus, for example, Geinoz sees the moral that ‘tout est accident dans la vie’, as well as the ‘ordres du Destin’, the ‘caprices d’une Divinité jalouse de leur félicite’, and ‘la Providence divine’.\(^{74}\) It is in the works of Geinoz that the arguments of Modernes seem first to enter Herodotean scholarship, but there is doubtless much more material to be considered, if we are to fully appreciate Herodotus’ role within the *Querelle*.

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\(^{72}\) Geinoz (1744/6), 552.
\(^{73}\) Geinoz (1747/8), 571-9 (esp. 578-9).
\(^{74}\) Geinoz (1747/8), 593.
1.5. Defending the Phthoneros Divinity

Διάβολος δὲ [ἐκλήθη] ἐπειδὴ θεόν μὲν ἀνθρώπῳ διέβαλεν ὡς φθονερόν, ἀνθρώπον δὲ θεῷ ὡς μισθῷ τὴν ἁρετὴν ἐργαζόμενον.

Dionysios, Catena Graeca in Job.75

It is no exaggeration to say that the meaning of divine phthonos (and therefore divine nemesis at 1.34) has historically been the central interpretative problem in the study of Herodotean theology. It was divine phthonos that Geinoz stressed when he admitted, despite his defensive inclinations, that Plutarch had been right to accuse Herodotus of blasphemous impiety, and, as we have seen, it was also at the centre of Camerarius’ attempts to ‘defend’ Herodotean theology. But the substance of Plutarch’s original accusation remained largely unchallenged until the eighteenth century: Camerarius had dismissed Plutarch’s objections as the consequence of an irrelevant and un-Christian belief in divine apatheia, but he seems not to have recognized (or admitted) that they were part of the wider Platonic criticism of a vision of divinity as immoral and hostile to humanity. The authors of the Chronicon Carionis had simply ignored the speeches on divine phthonos, as had Regius and Estienne.

It was only in the late eighteenth century that attempts were made to accommodate the Histories’ speeches on divine phthonos within the framework of righteous divine punishment and the full Platonic force of Plutarch’s criticisms was openly appreciated. At this point a new interpretation is formulated, which entails the rejection of the ancient Platonic claim that divine phthonos is incompatible with the notion of God as ‘good’, just, and thus the cause only of ‘good’ things. The debate would last over a hundred years, and dominate scholarship on ancient Greek and Herodotean theology in and outside the new German Altertumswissenschaft—being

75 Cited from Denis Pétau (1745), 90.
fought not only over Herodotus but also over Aeschylus and Pindar,\(^76\) and it would establish an interpretative tradition that survives to the present.

The defence of divine *phthonos* seems to have been initiated by the Dutch scholar Lodweijk Valckenaer in his notes to Peter Wesseling’s 1763 edition of the *Histories*, barely a decade after the publication of Geinoz’s last *Defence*. Valckenaer argues that in Amasis’ warning to Polycrates (3.40) the word *phthonos* (*invidia*) indicates god's retributive ‘divine justice’ (*vindictam divinam*), in which god is presented as the ‘punisher of arrogance’ (*arrogantiae vindex*).\(^77\) This force of punitive justice has, Valckenaer argues, various names in Greek thought (*Nemesis, Adrasteia, Phthonos, Tyche, Dikê, ho theos, or to theion*), but the term *phthoneros*, he argues, is focalized through the arrogant people whom the punishing divinity castigates.\(^78\) For the equivalence of *phthonos* and *nemesis* Valckenaer cites two phrases which have, he claims, identical meanings: οὐ νέμεσις and οὐ φθόνος (roughly: ‘it is no cause for resentment’).\(^79\)

The century that follows Wesseling’s 1763 edition overflows with attempts to harmonize Valckenaer’s equation of divine *phthonos* and divine justice with the text. While the definition of *phthonos* as retributive anger at transgressive arrogance fits well enough in some contexts (e.g. 1.32.1, when read in the light of 1.34, 4.205), it is clearly impossible in others (e.g. 7.46). Although the early reception of Valckenaer’s argument was enthusiastic, its application was not always straightforward, as we can see in the works of his French contemporary, the great Herodotean scholar Pierre-

\(^{76}\) On the meaning of divine *phthonos* in Aeschylus and Pindar see §3.4.2.

\(^{77}\) Valckenaer’s notes, of 1763, are reported in numerous editions (I cite from Schweighaeuser (1816)). That *ad* 3.40 runs: ‘Istius modi Historicorum dicta minus etiam videbuntur invidiosa cogitanti, τὸ θεὸν Deum esse ultorem, φθόνον vindictam divinam, vulgo dictam νέμεσιν. Quos Deus sequitur ultor, superbis videtur diciturque φθονηρός. Tali Croeso videri poterat, quando hunc ἐξαβεί ἐκ θεοῦ νέμεσις μεγάλη lib. 1. C.34. vid. Finis libri IV.’ Herodotus never, in fact, talks of ‘divine phthonos’, only of a ‘phthoneros divinity’ (but the adjective, which implies a grudging disposition, is less amenable to Valckenaer’s point).

\(^{78}\) *Superbiae atque arrogantiae vindex* in talibus vocatur non tantum ἡ Νέμεσις, ἡ Ἀδράστεια, ὁ Φθόνος, ἡ Τύχη, ἡ Δίκη, ὁ θεὸς, sive τὸ θεῖον.’

\(^{79}\) For discussion of the relationship between the terms *phthonos* and *nemesis* in Greek culture more generally see §3.1-3. Valckenaer (*ad* 3.40) suggests that the expressions οὐ νέμεσις and οὐ φθόνος were synonymous (with no particular period of Greek in mind, it seems). For οὐ νέμεσις / οὐ νεμέσητον / ἄνεμεσητον: *II.* 3.410; *Theog.* 1.280; *Pl. Crat.* 401a5; Aeschin. 3.66.1-3. I know of no example of οὐ φθόνος as such, but we might compare *A.* Ag. 904: φθόνος δ’ ἀπέστη (though the case must still be made that this is identical in meaning to the former).
Henri Larcher, whose vacillating opinions on divine phthonos and Herodotean religion are examined (in more detail than would be possible here) in appendix one.

Two contemporary scholars, the Jesuit Royalist L’Abbé Gabriel Brotier (aka. ‘Brottier’) and his nephew L’Abbé André-Charles Brotier, who worked successively on a translation of Plutarch’s De Herodoti Malignitate, also reject Plutarch’s attacks on Herodotus. The Abbés—whichever it happens to be at this point—see neither impiety nor blasphemy in Solon’s words on divine phthonos, but rather an assertion of God’s punishment of proud mortals. Their conclusion, interestingly, is that Herodotus had ideas about divinity that were even sounder (‘plus saines’) than Plutarch’s, and they charge Plutarch directly with the slight hypocrisy noted above (§1.2): for Plutarch himself says, when talking of Timotheus, that ‘la Fortune se montra jalouse’.80

The assimilation of the ‘phthoneros divinity’ of the Histories to a just, punishing, benevolent, and merciful divinity seems to have become the focus of most nineteenth-century academics who discuss Herodotean theology.81 Although there are many examples, I shall focus on four only:82 an 1833 monograph on Herodotean philosophy by Valckenaer’s compatriot Alfred De Jongh, an influential commentary by the German scholar Johann Baehr (1830-5), and two monographs on divine phthonos in Herodotus which attempt—in completely different ways—to reconcile Herodotean references to divine phthonos with Christian notions of divine justice and benevolence, published by Andreas Schuler (1869) and Heinrich Meuss (1888).

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80 The comments and Amyot’s translation can be found in Larcher (1802.6), 461-2, n.30. The Brotiers’ reference seems to be to Sull. 6 (454c-d), where Plutarch says that ‘the divinity’ (to daimonion) ‘is said to have’ turned against (antimeirakieuomai, hapax) Timotheus after his boasts. In discussing Artabanus’ characterization of divine phthonos in the War Council (7.10ε), the Brotiers see an idea which I cannot find in Herodotus, but which clearly recalls Isaiah 10:12: ‘D’autres, oubliant dans la prospérité qu’ils sont des hommes foibles et semblables aux autres hommes, s’imaginent follement qu’ils ne sont parvenus à un haut degré de puissance que par leurs talents et leurs propres forces.’ (my italics; cited from Larcher (1802.6), 461-2 n.30).

81 In addition to those discussed below, see the works cited at §3.4.1 n.42.

82 Particularly important, however, is Lehrs (1838) (discussed by Rakoczy (1996), 247), who seems to be the first to link divine phthonos and nemesis with the Greek word hybris, fostering a long-standing misinterpretation of the Greek word hybris, on which Fisher (1992).
De Jongh’s *De Herodoti philosophia* opens by criticizing the long tradition of polemical scholarship that attacks or defends Herodotus, but immediately turns to the question whether Herodotus should be thought impious (*impius*) and inferior to Plato. His most significant interpretative move is to argue that the doctrine of divine *phthonos* must be analysed not as theology but rather as anthropology: ‘in locis… in quibus Deorum invidia memoratur, non agitur de divina natura, sed de humanarum rerum conditione’. Plato’s attacks are neutralized at a stroke. He continues: ‘Quodsi ipsum Herodotum, si fieri posset, rogares, quare Deos invidos et turbulentos vocasset, rerum humanarum inconstantiam et infelicitatem commemoraret, nec, quamvis urgeres, res divinas attingeret’. This thought, however, is taken no further, and seems to be restricted to divine *phthonos*—no comparable claim is made that Herodotus’ statements on divine providence or divine punishment are simply theological metaphors for the way that the world happens to be, and describe humanity but not divinity. De Jongh’s point is important, but its haphazard application reveals his apologetic intentions.

De Jongh states his preference for Valckenaer’s interpretation of divine *phthonos*, viewing *invidia divina* as a response to ‘arrogance’ (*superbia*) and the ‘pride of mortals’ (*fastus mortalium*) in Herodotus as in Aeschylus’ *Persae*. He constructs a cycle of divine action: human arrogance leads to human crime, which in turn leads to divine punishment. His stress is on Croesus’ self-satisfaction and forgetfulness of the human condition, Apries’ pride (*fastus*), Xerxes’ arrogance (*superbia*) and his stupid obstinacy in sticking to the expedition (*stulte permanens*). Like Melanchthon, De Jongh breathes not a word about the divine dreams that force the king into war. He links divine *invidia* to a divine disapproval of crimes: ‘the gods feel *invidia* of

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83 De Jongh (1833), 34 & n.4.
84 De Jongh (1833), 35.
85 De Jongh (1833), 35.
86 By the 20th century Valckenaer’s role in this interpretative revolution is largely forgotten, but before he is the standard reference: Besenbeck (1787), 11-12; Schweighauser (1816), *ad* 1.32; Baehr (1830/5), *ad* 1.32; De Jongh (1833), 34 n.4 (‘Valckenarium potissimum sequor’); Edwards (1840), *ad* 1.32; Rawlinson (1880), *ad* 1.32.
87 De Jongh (1833), 36-8; cf. A. *Pers.* 361-3 & 822-30 (cf. §3.4.1).
arrogance, and arrogance is accustomed to drive men to all sorts of impiety and all wicked deeds’. 89 These ideas are finally linked with divine providence (providentia)—defined as the good and benevolent divine government of mortal affairs—by noting that the gods are the protectors of suppliants, and Herodotus’ reference to divine pronoia at 3.108. 90 De Jongh’s full syncretism of all the theological principles in Herodotus is, in essence, a defence against Plutarch on Platonist terms that renders Herodotean theology palatable to Christian thought: behind these ‘human affairs’—which are described by reference to the phthoneros divinity—Herodotus sees a providential deity who disposes the world in the interests of humanity, and inflicts suffering (only) in response to arrogance and criminal wickedness.

Baehr strikes out in a different direction, arguing that the Herodotean divinity is a providential and regulating principle of balance, ultimately derived from pre-Socratic philosophy. Baehr’s comments on Solon’s speech echo and cite Valckenaer, equating phthonos and nemesis, and interpreting them as punishment (vindicta). The purpose of divine phthonos is, again, primarily to teach the arrogant moderation (modestia), and the vocabulary used remains that of ‘punishment’ (castigare solet deus).

Baehr extends this interpretation of divine phthonos to Greek literature as a whole, referencing other authors: Plutarch (Alc. 33; Philopoem. 17, 18), 91 Pindar (P. 10.31; O. 8.114), and Pausanias (2.33.3, where we find not phthoneros but baskanos). 92 Baehr, like de Jongh, links divine phthonos to Herodotus’ discussion of the ‘pronoia of the divine’ (3.108), arguing that the punitive phthonos of the gods is but one

89 De Jongh (1833), 40: ‘Quae vero Herodothi sit de vindicta divina sententia, conjicere jam e praecedentibus licet, quum superbiam mortalium Diis invisam esse viderimus, superbia autem ad omnem impietatem et omnia sclera homines impellere solet.’ This would seem to be a quite different interpretation of divine phthonos to that first offered by De Jongh (above).
90 De Jongh (1833), 49-51; See also Baehr (1832), ad 3.108, and Hoffmeister (1832), 16-17.
91 At Plut. Alc. 33 Alcibiades, in a speech to the ekklêsia, ascribes his personal misfortunes (pathē) to ‘a certain mean fortune and a phthoneros daimōn’ (τινι τύχῃ πονηρᾷ καὶ φθονερῷ δαίμον). In the Philopoemen it is Νέμεσις τῆς that throws Philopoimen down ‘like an athlete running well towards the end of his life’.
92 Pausanias sees the afflictions of Homer and Demosthenes as evidence that ‘the divine is malicious (baskanos)’. Baehr’s argument is thus difficult to make out, but it is presumably not that phthoneros has a positive sense, but rather that statements of divine hostility and malevolence should be interpreted as statements of divine punishment of mortals who get above themselves.
aspect of the providential divine government of the world, punishing those who transgress the established limits. 'Nam deus ipse vindex quasi est huius rerum ordinis divinitus in natura constitutí (φθονερὸς ὁ θεός, vid. Nott. Ad 1.32, 3.40) in quo omnia ab initio ita sunt ordinata, ut invicem sibi respondeant secumque conveniant ac iusto moderamine se mutuo conservent'.

Herodotus is not considered a theological innovator, but rather to have repeated an idea from early Greek philosophers (particularly Anaxagoras) that Plato would later introduce to philosophy, and which represents the beginnings of a true religious sense, raising its proponents above the beliefs of ordinary people and their own age.

Baehr, like most scholars discussed here, interprets divine phthonos as a punitive response to injustice or arrogance, and consequently offers no interpretation of Artabanus’ speech on divine phthonos at Abydos (7.46, cf. §3.5.5), which most plainly contradicts his reading. He does, however, draw an interesting conclusion from this passage, in which Artabanus describes death as the ‘much longed-for escape from wretched life’: that Herodotus believed in an immortal soul. Baehr, like Melanchthon, suggests that Artabanus’ pessimistic view of life is the natural state of affairs before Christianity.

There is no more eloquent demonstration of the close relationship between interpretations of the theology and the characterization of the Histories than Andreas Schuler’s 1869 study Über Herodots Vorstellung vom Neide der Götter. Schuler’s reading of Herodotus’ theology is, in itself, quite unremarkable for the day: Herodotus believes in a divine power, whose will is fate, and which suffers neither the wanton and haughty transgression of the established limits, nor human arrogance, and seeks to keep everything within the eternal divine world-order. This divine power acts neither arbitrarily nor unjustly, for arrogance (Uebermuth) and crime (Frevel) always precede punishment (Strafe) and ruin (Verderben). Herodotus, like

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93 Baehr (1830/5,2), ad 3.108, cf. (1830/5,4), 410-12.
94 Baehr (1830/5,2), ad 3.108: ‘Quare hoc unum modo teneri velim, initia illius doctrinae de divina mente rebus humanis prospiciente, quam philosophi Graeci tantopere celebrarunt, ab Herodoto repeti posse, qui ab aliis prioris aetatis viris ipso Anaxagora... primus discedens, ad ea quae et veriora et humana mente digniora sunt, viam quasi aperuissae censendus est pro eo, qui in ipso inerat, vero religionis sensu et ingeni supra vulgus et omnino supra suam ipsius aetatem eminenti.’
95 Baehr (1830/5), 414, citing 2.123, 4.93; Meuss (1888), 20, concurs with Baehr on this point.
Sophocles and Aeschylus, thereby approaches Christian notions, even if he does not fully reach them. References to Catholic theologians abound.

But Schuler defends this fairly conventional view of Herodotean theology by a completely different interpretative strategy from any seen thus far: by stripping away the layers of ‘traditional religion’ found in the Histories—which Herodotus’ commitment to historical fidelity requires him to repeat, but which he does not believe—Schuler discovers underneath them Herodotus’ own underlying beliefs. Traditional Greek religion thus forms the background to many Herodotean stories, and displays the older anthropomorphic conception of the gods: similar to incredibly powerful humans, the gods are the creators, helpers, and destroyers of mankind, capricious beings who feel passions such as envy and anger, destroy the guiltless, and are subject to fate. The theory that divine phthonos is equivalent to divine nemesis is rejected, and divine phthonos is taken to be part of this traditional belief system to which Herodotus does not subscribe. Given the prominence of divine phthonos in many important speeches, Schuler is compelled to argue that Herodotus’ speeches are entirely ‘historical’ in both content and form—dissenting from previous commentators such as Grote and Baehr who considered the speeches an invention that represented Herodotus’ own views—and to claim that Herodotus presents his own views in the narrator’s voice.

Herodotus is said to derive his conception of divinity, so unusual for his day, from an innate knowledge of the one true God, and his rejection of anthropomorphic

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96 Schuler (1869), 7-9, esp. 9: ‘Diese höchste göttliche Macht... handelt mich willkürlich und darum ungerecht, sondern der Strafe und dem Verderben geht immer Uebermuth und Frevel voraus. Durch diesen Glauben an eine Gottesmacht, welche die Welt erhält und regiert, nähert sich Herodot dem christlichen Begriffe der göttlichen Vorsehung, wie wir das ähnlich bei Aeschylos und Sophokles finden’.

97 Particularly to Döllinger (1857) and Hettinger (1863/7).

98 Schuler (1869), 5-8.

99 Döllinger (1857), 255 & 257-8, too insists on the distinction between phthonos and nemesis in Herodotus (they are Neid and Rache). Döllinger puts his analysis of Herodotus in the context of the battle between ‘the philosophers and some orators and statesmen’ and the ‘popular poetic-mythology’, as well as the attack on divine phthonos mounted by Plato and Plutarch. Herodotus, due to his belief that the gods are imperfect, constrained by fate, and characterized by the notion of divine phthonos (against which Plato and others had fought), remains firmly in the camp of popular and poetic mythology (‘so gläubig, als nur immer einer aus dem Volke...’). Schuler’s analysis reads like an attempt to respond to Döllinger on Döllinger’s terms.

100 Schuler (1869), 49.
conception of god implies his rejection of the idea that the gods have human desires and passions.\textsuperscript{101} For Schuler, these facts prove that knowledge of God could be found by the best Greeks, even in the darkness of heathenism,\textsuperscript{102} and Herodotus thus attempts to temper the traditional beliefs he reports by (tacitly) inserting moralizing comments and patterns of ‘guilt and retribution’.\textsuperscript{103}

By his division between ‘dominant’ (\textit{herrschend}), traditional religion and Herodotus’ own theology, Schuler defends Herodotus but crucially neither the actual narratives of the \textit{Histories} nor divine \textit{phthonos}. Released from the necessity that bound his colleagues who took a different route to theodicy, Schuler differs dramatically in his reading of many scenes, for they represent the amoral and traditional worldview against which Herodotus’ proto-Christianity is to be viewed. Schuler paints this background in stark terms, emphasizing divine deception, the destruction of the guiltless, and the immoral nature of god, who is arbitrary (‘willkürlich’, 20), capricious (‘launenhafte’, 18), and hostile (‘feindselig’, 22). The relationship between human and god is likened to that between slave and callous master (23-4). Guiltless but extremely successful mortals incur divine \textit{phthonos} and hostility in the form of divine deception and destruction. Xerxes, like Croesus, cannot be considered ‘responsible’ for his disasters, for he was constrained to go to war by the divine dream.\textsuperscript{104} Schuler argues that prophecies of forthcoming disasters sent by the gods are not helpful, but merely cause \textit{increased} suffering in advance (34 n.3).

For Schuler, Herodotus’ innovation in dealing with this body of traditional religious material is to turn these stories into patterns of crime and justified punishment:\textsuperscript{105}

\begin{quote}
Wir dürfen nicht vergessen, dass Herodot eine solch’ verkehrte Auffassung von dem Göttlichen nach Kräften zu modificiren strebt. Durch Frevel, vor Allem durch die
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{101} Schuler (1869), 43-4, 44-6.

\textsuperscript{102} Schuler (1869), 3-4, 51-2 (‘auch in die Finsterniss des Heidenthums hinein leuchetete das göttliche Licht mit seiner Wahrheit und Gnade’), 54; the imagery is strongly Christian, compare, e.g. Hettinger (1863-7), 57-8, on the insight provided to heathens by natural religion: ‘einzelne Lichtfunken in dunkler Nacht, kurze, flüchtige Erkenntnissblike in dichter Finsternis’.

\textsuperscript{103} Schuler (1869), 24, 43, 52; cf. 18-19, 61-2.

\textsuperscript{104} See Schuler’s discussion of Croesus (34-5, esp. 40-1) where he argues that in many Herodotean stories there is no question of ‘responsibility’ in the Christian sense of the word.

\textsuperscript{105} Schuler (1869), 23-4.
Schuler draws our attention to various modifications by which Herodotus ‘moralizes’ the stories. He notes Candaules’ opinions about his wife, the criminal question put to the oracle by the Cymians, the haughty reply of Xerxes to Artabanus (24), alongside a host of other crimes (listed at 27-30). In numerous stories Schuler sees elements of sin and hubris, which Herodotus inserts into the traditional tale: Xerxes in his overconfidence (Uebermuth) ignores the warning signs and takes the Persians to war (52-3). He lists Croesus’ culpable avarice (33, citing 1.73), the crimes of Gyges, Croesus’ injustice to Greeks, his belief that he is the most fortunate of men, and the murder of Pantaleon (53). The self-exculpation of Delphi against Croesus’s accusations (1.91) expresses Herodotus’ ‘better notion’ of God (54). Cyrus, Apries, and Polycrates receive similar treatments, whereby Herodotus transforms the arbitrary ‘misfortunes’ they had previously suffered into ‘punishments’ by introducing this negative characterization and guilt (53-4). Returning to Plutarch’s Platonic criticisms, Schuler argues that Herodotus repeats the notion of divine phthonos only out of his love of historical truth, and that Plutarch’s criticisms are invalid: 106

Darum musste aber auch Herodot, wollte er seinen Lesern ein möglichst treues Bild vom Leben und Treiben der beschriebenen Völker geben, dieser Vorstellung vom Neide der Götter gebührende Rechnung tragen. Was ihm demnach Plutarch vorwirft, ist nur Folge von Herodot’s grosser Wahrheitsliebe und historischen Treue, während der aufmerksame Leser eine edlere, des Göttlichen würdigere Vorstellung nicht verkennen kann.

Schuler’s most ‘aufmerksam’ examination reveals that Herodotus corrects the traditional idea of divine phthonos (which survives in his ‘historical’ speeches) to divine nemesis (35, citing 1.34, 1.91). 107

106 Schuler (1869), 43.
107 Schuler does, however, recognize (and seem to support) a quite different interpretation of divine phthonos in other texts. Schuler insists (26) on a distinction between nemesis (which strikes only the guilty) and phthonos (which also strikes those who are fortunate and guiltless), and sees the latter as more unmoral (unsittlich) than the German word ‘Neid’ (‘envy’). This is the view of phthonos upon which he relies in the analysis of Herodotus just quoted. But he also acknowledges (26 n.2) the common alternative view that phthonos sometimes carries the significance he gives to nemesis.
Schuler’s vision of a composite and inconsistent text—in which all ‘perverted’ theological ideas are attributed to the ‘traditional’ story (reported by the truth-loving Herodotus), while all nobler and more praiseworthy notions of God are attributed to the innovations of Herodotus the nascent-Christian—did not catch on, although his sense that these conceptions of god are wholly exclusive of one another has proved abiding. The unity of Herodotus’ vision of divine justice and benevolence was again the theme of Heinrich Meuss’s 1888 study, ‘Der sogenannte Neid der Götter bei Herodot’, a piece of singularly perceptive scholarship whose bizarre conclusions belie the author’s remarkable erudition, wide reading, and sound treatment of many topics, which would (in many respect) remain unsurpassed for the next century. Meuss, however, attempted to reconcile the still-infamous dialogues on divine phthonos with his vision of Herodotean divinity characterized by justice (Gerechtigkeit), benevolence (Wohlmeinde), and mercy (Gnade), returning to the older assumption that Herodotus’ warners were the mouthpieces for Herodotus’ own views. Meuss is not alone among his contemporaries in searching for more overtly Christian virtues than just divine punishment in the god of the Histories. Georg Friedrich Schömann, for example, would find billigkeit (‘equitableness’) and Liebe (‘love’) in Greek divinities in response to the criticisms of ancient heathen theology by the Protestant theologian Julius Müller (on which §1.6.1).

Meuss argues that, in Herodotus’ view, the source of human misfortune is, in every instance, human guilt (an approach borrowed off Schömann, amongst others).[^109]

Demgemäß lautet seine Antwort auf die Frage nach dem Grunde menschlichen Unglücks, ohne Rücksicht auf ein Jenseits: es ist menschliche Schuld, die von den gerechten, strengen Göttern unfehlbar gestraft wird. Natürlich findet er diesen Satz fast immer bestätigt, zumal ihm auch die Schuld der Vorfahren als strafbar an den

Schuler cites Schömann’s statement that phthonos can sometimes be ‘a moral disapproval (sittliche Missbilligung) like nemesis’, that responds to hybris, Schömann (1844), 132-3. See also Hoffmann (1846), 228 & 247, who argues that phthonos in Aeschylus resembles nemesis and indicates ‘punishing justice or justified dislike’ (‘Strafende Gerechtigkeit oder gerechten Unwillen’).

[^108]: Schömann (1844), 133-4, cf. Müller (1844), 325. Schömann plainly states his desire to reconcile Müller’s book (‘weil mir das Buch lieb ist’) with his own view of the ancients (‘die mir auch lieb sind’).

[^109]: Meuss (1888), 21 (answering a question posed at 12).
Enkeln gilt. Doch lässt es sich wohl denken, obwohl er das selbst nirgends ausspricht, dass in manchem vereinzelten Falle die bestimmte veranlassende Schuld zu einer bestimmten Strafe ihm nicht erfindlich war. Dass hierdurch sein Glaube an die göttliche Gerechtigkeit nicht erschüttert werden konnte, ist mehr als erklälich.

Meuss defends the *Histories* in precisely the terms in which Plato had criticized 'poetic' theology: that mortals get what they deserve, and divinely caused misfortune is always punishment.\(^{110}\)

\[\text{nach demselben Grundsatz der Vergeltung richtet sich nun auch das Walten der Götter: dem Guten, Gerechten ergeht es gut, dem Frevler schlimm. Beide Gedanken sind dem Schriftsteller so selbstverständlich, dass er sie—in dieser einfachsten Form wenigstens—nie besonders ausspricht, sondern immer nur an thatsächlichen Beispielen ihre Geltung zeigt, und zwar in einer Weise, welche die Absichtlichkeit unverkennbar erscheinen lässt.}\]

The picture of the strict and just Herodotean divinity that emerges from Meuss’s work contains several ideas that we should distinguish: first that the gods punish crimes, second that they reward virtue, and third that the cause of human misfortune is always guilt (i.e. that the gods do not harm, but rather protect or reward the guiltless). This bundling together of these different propositions—and Meuss, for whom this is an open thesis rather than a tacit assumption,\(^{111}\) is neither the first nor the last to do this—is important. Many later claims about Herodotus’ ‘inconsistency’ seem to derive from a discomfort with the idea that Herodotus’ gods both obey and break the rule of ‘divine justice’, conceived as a compound of these different ideas. It is only from this perspective that the rule of divine punishment of great crimes (e.g. 2.120.5) seems to contradict the fact that the gods visit mortals with unearned sufferings due to *phthonos* (e.g. 7.46). As we shall see, it is not to be assumed that any statement that implies that the gods may behave in a moral or just fashion implies that all divine action is characterized by morality and justice.

Meuss’s attempt to defend the entire text leads him to make some dazzlingly falsifiable claims, which have, however, proved enduring. Chief amongst these is his

\(^{110}\) Meuss (1888), 11.

\(^{111}\) Meuss (1888), 12.
description of oracles as uniformly benevolent attempts to help mortals: only the foolish and arrogant fail to draw help from them, thereby destroying themselves despite the divine aid that had been offered to them.\textsuperscript{112} The Valckenaerian view of divine \textit{phthonos} is adopted in full, and defended for the first time with a detailed philological discussion.\textsuperscript{113} Meuss concludes that the moral crime (\textit{sittliche Schuld}) in response to which Herodotus’ \textit{phthoneros} divinity inflicts punishment is \textit{hubris} (the forgetfulness of the limits of human good fortune, by now a scholarly commonplace), a concept of central importance to the \textit{Histories}, Meuss argues, even though Herodotus does not have a word for it. Meuss criticizes the translation of \textit{phthonos} as ‘Neid’ and ‘Eifersucht’ (suggesting, instead, that the central sense is ‘Nichtgönnens’) and provides a perceptive analysis of the speeches in question, which scarcely supports his conclusion that ‘Der \textit{phthonos} der herodoteischen Gottheit ist die besondere form göttlicher Strafgerechtigkeit dem frevelhaften Verkennen menschlicher Glückesbeschränktheit gegenüber’, which can be translated as ‘disfavour’ (\textit{Ungunst}) and is, crucially, ‘sittlich’.\textsuperscript{114} Admitting that the adjective \textit{phthoneros} seems to belie his conclusions—since it indicates a ‘permanently abiding hostile (\textit{missgünstig}) or negative (\textit{ungünstig}) emotion of the gods against mortals’—Meuss offers a rather suspect explanation: Herodotus did not invent this adjective and used it in the absence of another suitable word. But Meuss ends with a classic caveat. Although Herodotus was committed to divine benevolence and the perfect fit between human crime and divine punishment, his belief was to be distinguished from Christianity: ‘Was ihr fehlt, das ist barmherzige Liebe im Sinne christlicher Gottesanschauung’.\textsuperscript{116}

The assimilation of \textit{phthonos} to \textit{nemesis} (perhaps via Baehr) was quickly internalized by English scholarship.\textsuperscript{117} A particularly simple formulation is the entry on Herodotus in William Smith’s \textit{Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and

\textsuperscript{112} Meuss (1888), 8-10. This idea has proved enduring, despite the textual contradiction (cf. §1.9, §4.2, appendix 7).
\textsuperscript{113} Meuss (1888), 14-17.
\textsuperscript{114} Meuss (1888), 19.
\textsuperscript{115} Meuss (1888), 19-20, ‘einer dauernd vorhandenen missgünstigen oder ungünstigen Stimmung der Götter gegen der Sterblichen’.
\textsuperscript{116} Meuss (1888), 20.
\textsuperscript{117} Turner (1848) is the first English scholar I have found who references Baehr and Valckenaer, but Smith’s \textit{Dictionary of Biography} (1844), shows a familiarity with the same arguments.
The divine power with him [Herodotus] is rather the manifestation of eternal justice, which keeps all things in a proper equilibrium, assigning to each being its path, and keeps it within its bounds. Where it punishes overweening haughtiness and insolence, it assumes the character of the divine Nemesis… When Herodotus speaks of the envy of the Gods as he often does, we must understand by this divine Nemesis who appears sooner or later to pursue or destroy him who, in frivolous insolence and conceit, raises himself above his proper sphere.

The vision of Nemesis as a goddess of ‘balance’ or ‘moderation’ aligned with justice had been influentially defended by Herder, and this would come increasingly to dominate the interpretation of divine phthonos. In a more schematic form the same idea appears in Reginald Macan’s commentary of 1895, which argues for Herodotus’ unified vision of causation—‘divine justice’ or ‘poetic justice’—expressed by any of four formulae: δίκη (justice), τίσις (vengeance/retribution), φθόνος (envy), and νέμεσις (indignation). Herodotus might use different expressions, but behind them all there lies a coherent notion of a rather abstract divinity. In their 1912 commentary How and Wells entitle this the ‘doctrine of Nemesis’, and for them, too, it comprised the same four elements.

In so far as we can generalize about the scholars reviewed in this section, all (Schuler aside) interpret phthonos as a moral response to human crimes and arrogance, and allied to justice. It is helpful, I think, to distinguish two substantive elements of this position. The first is the interpretation of the basic dynamic itself, namely that phthonos is responsive to human action or thought (rather than arbitrary) and thus the notion of a phthoneros divinity indicates that humans are the cause of their own

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118 Smith (ed.) (1844), s.v. Herodotus.
119 Herder (1786), for whom ‘Nemesis ist keine Rach- und Plagegöttin’, but is rather ‘eine hohe rechtverteilerin, eine Unbetrügliche, die in den Busen blickt, wenn sie nach dem eigenen Betragen des Menschen den Erfolg seiner Taten abwäget.’ (‘Nemesis is no goddess of revenge and trouble’, she is ‘a lofty allocator of justice, unfoolable, who looks into one’s breast when she balances the success of a man’s deeds with his own behaviour’).
120 Welcker (1862), 25-35, for example, supports Herder’s view of Nemesis against Zoega’s criticisms (1817), and sees this idea present in the Histories: ‘Herodotus does not name [Nemesis]; but related to her nature is the idea that he calls the envy of the gods’ (28-9).
121 How & Wells (1912.1), 49-50; see also their comments ad 1.32.1 (cf. §1.6.2).
misfortunes: these stories, then, can have a didactic and moral purpose. The second is that the divine action is to be positively evaluated and, in the most basic terms, that our sympathy lies with the gods, not the characters who suffer misfortune: things went as they should. The validity of these two positions (and the validity of approaching Herodotus’ text with these criteria in mind) will be challenged in the third chapter. But the differences between these views are also important: Macan follows Baehr in seeing a more abstract, depersonalized divinity somewhere between a ‘god’ and a philosophical ‘principle’ (of the sort known to the early Ionian philosophers), while Meuss saw human arrogance destroy itself despite the attempts of a somewhat anthropomorphific divinity who—acting with mercy and benevolence—actively attempted to help mortals by various forms of prophecy and warning.

Widespread, too, is the assumption that Herodotus’ religious beliefs should be imagined to cohere on a single principle or a set of unified theological ideas that may be expressed by any of a number of various terms. The notion that some or all of the terms used for supernatural forces (i.e. divine phthonos, divine pronoia, divine nemesis, divine timória, tisis, and moira) are aspects of a unified vision of divinity would be increasingly criticized in the course of the nineteenth century by scholars working in a quite different intellectual tradition. The tradition of Herodotean exegesis reviewed in this section remains alive, although it is no longer associated with the defence of Herodotus for audiences committed to Platonic or Christian theology. We shall examine this tradition in its twentieth-century incarnation below (§1.9).
1.6. The Rise of ‘Immoral’ Gods in Herodotean Theology:
Part 1: Pessimism & Divine Hostility

The late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw a number of apostates from the interpretative tradition just discussed. In 1797 Friedrich Schiller freely reworked Herodotus’ story of Amasis and Polycrates into a ballad, Der Ring des Polykrates, drawing also on aspects of Herodotus’ dialogue of Solon and Croesus. Schiller’s treatment of divine *phthonos*—‘der Götter Neid’—seems quite unaffected by the theodicy attempted by his academic contemporaries. Divine *phthonos* is linked not to divine justice, but to the inevitability of human suffering and grief: themes similar to those explored in his earlier Resignation (1786). Schiller’s emphasis is on the hostility of the gods (‘Die Götter wollen dein Verderben’, 16.4), the mysterious inevitability of approaching destruction, despite attempts to escape it, and the impossibility of perpetual success (‘Dein Glück ist heute gut gelaunet, / doch fürchte seinen Unbestand’, 7.2-3).

Schiller says no more than Herodotus of the justice of Polycrates’ approaching doom, or the moral culpability of the unfortunate tyrant: the reference to Polycrates’ desire to be recognized as ‘fortunate’ echoes the story of Solon and Croesus—at the end of the first stanza Polycrates demands ‘Gestehe, daß ich glücklich bin’—but Schiller makes no mention of themes that scholars working in the tradition of Valckeaer and Meuss see: human injustice, foolishness, irrationality, self-destruction, or a subversive desire to dethrone the gods (further §1.9, §3.5.3, §3.7, §4.2). The mysterious force of ‘fortune’ (Glück) to which the wise Egyptian king, too, had paid his ‘dues’ by the death of his son (‘Dem Glück bezahlt’ ich meine Schuld’, 10.6) bears little relation to a benevolent divinity, who causes suffering and misfortune only in the form of righteous punishment. The notion of *Schuld* (‘debt’ or ‘guilt’) that emerges from this narrative is significantly different from that which underlies Christian thought: success itself, desired or not, is transmuted into a ‘debt’ to be ‘repaid’ by familial blood.

122 Borrowed from the Herodotean Croesus at 1.30. The warning from Herodotus’ Amasis, of course, comes to Polycrates by letter, and is unelicited.
Despite significant structural changes in the staging of the scene—the Egyptian king warns Polycrates in person, and is present at the announcement of each of his successes—numerous small details indicate his knowledge of and fidelity to the Herodotean original.123 The divine world is evoked by various terms: ‘die Götter’, ‘Gott’, ‘Glück’, and ‘Himmel’, in a manner evocative of Herodotus, and as well as by somewhat darker terms with no Herodotean counterpart: ‘the unseen ones’.124

The relationship between Greek theology and Schiller’s personal religion is a topic far too great for this chapter. Divine phthonos is a motif that Schiller, like Herodotus, inherited from earlier authors and used in a self-consciously literary context, and I shall not offer a view on the fascinating question of what theological beliefs can be deduced from his frequent use of early Greek theological motifs to write about the question of human suffering.125 (A similar caution can, of course, be urged in the case of Herodotus). But Schiller’s reworking of Polycrates’ story represents an approach to Herodotean theology that we have not yet encountered. When they had acknowledged its existence, Melanchthon and Baehr had suggested that Hellenic pessimism (including the doctrine of divine phthonos) was all but inevitable for those that walked the loveless earth in the days before Christ’s salvation: it was an understandable but erroneous belief spawned of their ignorance of God. Those who defended Herodotean theology, as we have seen, sought to defend divine phthonos by giving it a place within an accepted Christian outlook: divine punishment of humans made ‘guilty’ by ‘crime’. In the context of his wider works Schiller seems to attempt neither, but rather to use Greek notions of divine phthonos and hostility to communicate a vision of human life. Schiller, like Leopardi, numbers among the early-modern pessimists who drew inspiration directly from the ancients.

123 See, for example, the reference to ‘unmixed happiness’, and the echoes between the Egyptian king ‘Noch keinen sah ich fröhlich enden’ (11.4), and Amasis’ at 3.40: οὐδένα γὰρ κω λόγῳ οἴδα ἄκούσας ὅστις ἐς τέλος οὐ κακῶς ἔπελεύθησε πρόρριζος, εὐτυχεῖς τὰ πάντα.
124 On the many non-specific terms Herodotus uses interchangeably for the collective divine powers: §2.8.
125 For the defence of this practice see e.g. Coleridge (1851 = 1822). On ‘the classical allegory of divine envy’ see Guthrie (1909), 195-200, (who deftly strips the poems of their mystical horror and pessimism in denying divine malevoence), and, for further examples of divine phthonos in Schiller’s works, Lehrs (1856 = 1838), 44-6.
Moving back to the academy, the brief comments on Herodotus’ religious beliefs made by Dahlmann in 1823 also construct a quite different view of Herodotean divinity from that described in the last section commentary. The divine, a limited rather than omnipotent force, causes suffering and interferes in mortal affairs due to its jealousy (Neid), not for the sake of humans, but to retain its position as ‘Meister in der Weltordnung’. Dahlmann observes that the Hebrews ‘too’ knew a jealous god (eifersüchtig), committing himself to an idea with which Larcher had only flirted: that the divine phthonos of the Greek writers resembles the jealous god of the Jews.  

Julius Müller, a German Protestant theologian, voices an important vision of Greek theology in his 1844 Die christliche Lehre von der Sünde. Müller does not comment directly on Herodotus, but in the same year Georg Schömann would defend Herodotus against such characterization (§1.5). The vision of Herodotus as a profound pessimist convinced of the hostile nature of god was apparently capable of uniting Romantic poet, anti-syncretist Protestant theologian, and classical philologist. Heinrich Stein, the greatest Herodotean scholar of his century— with no reference to any commentator later than Plutarch—saw Herodotus’ divine phthonos as unmoralized (‘Eifersucht, Mißgunst, Neid’), and related to a wider conception of a hostile divinity held by all but a few Greeks (Aeschylus and Plato are named as exceptions). Stein suggested a link between divine resentment of human success, the historical vision laid out at the start of the work by the narrator (1.5.4), and Croesus’ speech to Cyrus on the 'circle of human affairs' (1.207). By

126 See Dahlmann (1823), 176-8 = (1845), 131-2.
127 J. Müller (1844), 325.
numerous parallels to Homer, Theognis, archaic poetry, and tragedy Stein places Herodotus in the context of Greek theological pessimism: not to be born is best.  

In this context it is less surprising that, in 1869, Schuler should have decided to characterize Herodotus against ‘traditional’ Greek belief, for a not insubstantial scholarly and theological tradition—traceable, ironically, to Melanchthon—considered ‘traditional’ Greek thought to be a strongly pessimistic philosophy that viewed the gods as amoral and troublesome, a foil to 'moralized' notions of god in Christianity. Outside Stein’s footnotes, Greek theological pessimism entered the public eye far more dramatically in the writings and lectures of Burckhardt and Nietzsche. The literature of the Greeks seemed to them preoccupied with the portrayal of the arbitrary and terrifying nature of the gods and fate. In the words of Burckhardt:  

In myth generally, it is fate and the jealousy of the gods that determines the heroes’ destinies, and fate hardly seems to condescend to catching the hero out in any matter of moral blame.

The same scenes that in the eyes of most of the contemporary Classical academy testified to Herodotus’ belief in divine justice and benevolence were read as they had been by Plutarch, but this time it was by an admirer of Schopenhauer who considered ‘one of the noblest of all occupations’ to be ‘the study of times past, of the story of human life and human suffering as a whole’. Burckhardt’s lectures on Greek cultural history were not published until after his death, due both to their author’s emphasis on teaching to the exclusion of publishing, and his well-founded fear at their reception by the ‘viri eruditissimi’ of Classics. As Burckhardt had predicted, Wilamowitz and Mommsen rejected his Greeks as the fiction of an amateur. It was Meuss’s and Macan’s vision of Herodotean divinity, not that of Schiller, Stein, Müller, or Burckhardt, that would dominate the reception of Herodotus (outside the

128 Stein (1883/94), ad 7.10.e & 7.46.
129 Burckhardt (1998), 92.
131 For Burckhardt’s fears and his reception by Wilamowitz and Mommsen see Murray (1998), xxxiv-xxxv, citing Wilamowitz (1899.2), 7. For his views on publication see the letter to Bernard Kugler on 5.10.1874, cited in Murray (1998), xviii.
field of anthropology) until the 1920s, at which time the notion of theological pessimism resurfaced.\(^{132}\)

But a brief anecdote suggests that in some circles a decidedly immoral interpretation of Herodotean narratives and divine *phthonos* was catching the imagination at the turn of the twentieth century. Just a short time after his release from prison Oscar Wilde is said to have told the following anecdote:\(^{133}\)

There was a time in my life when I had really nothing more to wish for. I was rich, held in great affection, famous, and in perfect health. At the time I was resting at Sorrento in a delightful villa whose garden was filled with orange trees. The sea lapped at the base of the terrace. From it my eye could follow the delightful, undulating curves of a countryside as sensuous as the body of a young girl.

On this terrace I was absentmindedly contemplating the white sails which studded the sea at its horizon. Suddenly I began to reflect, with a secret feeling of terror, that in reality I was too happy, that such improbable bliss could only be a trap set by my evil genius. For a long time this idea haunted me.

In the end I recalled the adventure of that tyrant of antiquity—Polycrates I think was his name—who had thrown a highly esteemed precious ring into the sea to ward off misfortune.

I resolved to imitate Polycrates. It’s true that his sacrifice had proved vain, but perhaps I would be more fortunate. As far out into the sea as I could I flung a ring with a huge diamond that I kept in memory of a very dear friend. I thought I had appeased the hostile gods with this sacrifice and I regained my composure.

That the author of the *Ballad of Reading Gaol* should paint his earlier self as the Herodotean Polycrates—possibly mediated through Schiller—testifies the power of the story as a symbol of a world hostile to greatness, in which suffering is the necessary and ineluctable price for success and happiness.

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\(^{132}\) See, for example, Diels (1921), Wehrli (1923), later Maddalena (1950), Opstelten (1952).

\(^{133}\) The story is told by Gustave Le Rouge; I cite it from J. P. Brown (1997), 5-6.
Later that century Fornara would argue that the dialogues between sage and monarch evince Herodotus’ own ‘philosophy of history’, at the centre of which is ‘the instability of good fortune’.\(^{134}\)

The essential truth for Herodotus was ebb and flow. God will strike down the highest tree without exception and, if necessary, without excuse. In most cases the *hybris* of man brings on his downfall—as, for instance, with Cyrus or Cleomenes. In other cases, nothing but malignancy or jealousy of God can explain it.\(^{135}\) States, like men, were caught in the same net.

For Fornara, then, divine *phthonos* is linked with an overtly negative evaluation of divinity that leads to unmerited misfortune that has its origin in the disposition of God.

Asheri also argued that Herodotus’ notion of divine *phthonos* is not a ‘moral principle’, but connected to a set of negative, anthropomorphic character traits that are central to Herodotus' ideas of historical causation.\(^{136}\)

The gods, then, are not driven by moral principles: quite the contrary, they are driven by envy, self-esteem, and self-love, and the desire to avenge and persecute. They are the enemies of humankind: human beings should beware them, placate them, but they cannot love them. Divine jealousy may seem like a reaction to human *hybris*, but that *hybris* is sometimes provoked by the divinity itself in accordance with the famous maxim *quos deus vult perdere dementat prius*. The catastrophes which befall Croesus, Cambyses, and Xerxes are interpreted in this tragic way. Herodotus’ extremely negative conception of the gods’ behaviour is not a new invention: its roots can be found in the pessimism of archaic Greek thought.

While many scholars who argue for the inconsistency of Herodotean theology subscribe to a non-moral interpretation of divine *phthonos* (see the next section), the scholars mentioned in this section are grouped here because they, on the whole,

\(^{134}\) Fornara (1971), 18-19, 64-5, 77-9. The citation is from 77.

\(^{135}\) In this Fornara follows How & Wells’s view that divine *phthonos* is sometimes moralized, sometimes unmoralized (see the next section). In (1990), 40, however, Fornara moves closer to Macan's view, describing divine *phthonos* as 'the result of a vaguely superstitious impulse, [which] is hardly profound… it is apparent that Herodotus' own metaphysical system, if I may call it that, comprehended much more than this', namely *tisiv* or retribution (cf. 40-44).

\(^{136}\) Asheri (2007), 39-40. Asheri’s views of human behaviour are equally pessimistic, however, and (on the face of them) seem to suggest a slightly different view of divinity.
consider divine *phthonos* to be at the centre of Herodotus’ vision of humanity and history.

To conclude this section, two things seem particularly remarkable. The first is the great continuity between the vision of Hellenic divinity (of which Herodotus is considered but one example) that emerges from Melanchthon’s Christmas sermons, Müller’s Protestant theology, Burekhardt’s and Nietzsche’s studies of Greek pessimism, and the analyses of Asheri and Fornara, apparently independently of one another. The second is much stranger: the refusal of the ‘ancient pessimism’ school and the ‘theodicy school’ to engage with or even acknowledge the arguments of their opponents on issues that cut to the very core of their reading of Herodotean theology, philosophy, and narrative. Contemporaries or near-contemporaries like Valckenaer and Geinoz, Baehr and Müller, Stein and Macan, might have been writing in entirely separate communities for all the references they make to contemporary scholars who directly oppose their basic assumptions.
1.6. The Rise of the Immoral in Herodotean Theology

Part 2: From Heathen, to Primitive, to Theist: An Inconsistent Herodotus

Needless to say, the savage is no philosopher to balance such considerations against each other... It is almost subconsciously, that is to say, blindly, that he reaches a working solution of the puzzle.

Robert Ranulph Marett.137

It is hard to put a finger on any particular moment in classical scholarship when the religion of the ancient ‘heathen’, criticized by the Modernes of the Querelle, becomes the primitive religion of the ancient ‘savage’, dissected by early anthropologists. The superiority that the Moderne derived from his Christianity at the start of the eighteenth century shades gradually into the superiority that the anthropologist of the late nineteenth century derived from his liberation from superstition (and perhaps traditional religion). Despite many changes in self-conception, to both Moderne and early anthropologist ‘the here and now' represented an intellectual and moral improvement upon the past—a past that lived on in the heathen/primitive regions of the contemporary world. For the northern European anthropologist, who considered his contemporary society the pinnacle of human intellectual evolution, the direction of progress was self-evidently from coercive magic through supplicatory religion to empirical and coercive science;138 it was from polytheism to monotheism,139 and from non-moral to moral conceptions of divinity.140 These details would play an important role at the point when academic

137 (1932), 12.
138 See Frazer’s letter to Spencer cited in Ackermann (1990), 157; cf. Weber (1964 = 1922), 28-31, who distinguishes between ‘sorcery’ (the magical coercion of demons) and ‘religion’ or ‘cult’ (the entreaty of gods).
139 See Zeller (1862); Tylor (1891.2), 331-3, argues that (in the strict sense that he gives to ‘monotheism’) ‘no savage tribe of monotheists has been ever known. Nor are any fair representatives of the lower culture in a strict sense pantheists. The doctrine which they do widely hold, and which opens them to a course tending in one or other of these directions, is polytheism culminating in the rule of one supreme divinity.’ Weber (1964 = 1922), 20, 24-5, discusses ‘the path to monotheism’ (further appendix 4).
140 For Tylor (1891.2), 360-1, the union of morality with religion is the key feature separating ‘higher’ from ‘lower’ or ‘savage’ animism (which is ‘unmoral’). Marett (1932), 23-6, likewise traces the
anthropology began to influence the study of Herodotus. Although such progress-based models of man’s religious past differed in many respects from the biblical narratives of the previous centuries—which, as we have seen (§1.1), often posited an initial decline from a pure Mosaic monotheism to pagan idolatry via Euhemerism and the deification of nature— the early anthropologist, like the Christian Moderne, considered man to have taken a step in the right direction when he abandoned the many anthropomorphic, arbitrary gods of Homer and embraced the moralized, abstracted, numerically restricted, divine λόγος of John's Gospel.

Although they span a similar time period, the scholars treated here differ from those discussed in the last section in one important respect: that to a greater or lesser degree they view Herodotus’ theological beliefs as an amalgam of concepts inherited from different sources that are evolving and coalescing within the intellectual culture of ancient Greece. They attempt to plot Herodotus’ position on the road that leads to modernity (however conceived), rather than seeking a whole and self-standing religious or philosophical position worthy of examination in its own right. This is important because the conviction that the object of study is a relic of a primitive thought-world that is to be incorporated into wider narratives of human intellectual progress is one of the most potent forces in the interpretation of Herodotus. It is interesting that the developmental assumptions that seemed, in the nineteenth and

\[^{141}\text{Döllinger’s ‘Verdunklung des ursprünglichen Gottesbewußtseins’ might be explained by Euhemerism (the deification of secular rulers by their descendants), by the deification of nature (e.g. Vos (1668 = 1642); Döllinger (1857), 53, where the ‘Vergötterung der Natur’ is the basis of all heathen religion), and especially by perversions that occurred when traditional Jewish religion was set to music for memorization (e.g. Horsley (1816), 33-8). See also Tylor (1891.2), 256, arguing that animistic evidence supports the ‘development-theory’ rather than the ‘degradation-theory’ of human religious belief, and Wilamowitz (1931/2.1), 6, on Humboldt's disagreement with Welcker (who never entirely liberated himself ‘von dem Glauben an einen primitiven Monotheismus’).}

\[^{142}\text{For unforgiving criticism of the assumptions of early anthropology see Leach (1985), 221. Classical and anthropological scholarship has, at least officially, progressed from developmental views; as Versnel says, “not yet” and “primitive” are precisely the two words that cannot be decently used anymore.” (2011), 216-17.}

\[^{143}\text{On the history of the mythos/logos dichotomy—another debate commonly conceived in developmental terms—see Fowler (2011).}\]
early twentieth centuries, so self-evident that they required no defence are now considered so self-evidently incorrect that they require no refutation.\textsuperscript{144}

In 1854 the Reverend Blakesley described Herodotean theology through a botanical metaphor: in the \textit{Histories} the ‘Asiatic’ idea of divine ‘envy’, created by analogy with despotic Eastern rulers, is ‘grafted on to an idea nearly akin to it but of Achaean origin—that of divine νέμεσις, or the wrath of the god called forth by the commission of a crime… exerting itself mainly by the agency of the criminal himself.’ Blakesley introduces his work by tracing the evolution of Greek religious thought from pantheism to polytheism and the religion of Herodotus’ day. Blakesley considered divine \textit{phthonos} the emotion of a hostile and cruel deity, a vision ‘most fully developed’ in the speeches of Artabanus at the Persian War Council and at Abydos: ‘the happiness of life is bestowed merely to arouse desire, in order that the greater pain may be inflicted by thwarting it.’\textsuperscript{145} In contrast to the expansive monographs that argued for the equation of divine \textit{phthonos} and divine justice, the non-moral interpretation of \textit{phthonos} is typically advanced, as by Blakesley, in a sentence or two.\textsuperscript{146}

In 1913 Felix Jacoby directly confronted the disagreements reviewed in the last two sections: are Herodotus’ divinities immoral, invidious agents who resent the success of guiltless humans, or are they moral agents who punish human \textit{hybris}? Refusing to argue for one or the other, Jacoby speaks openly of the contradictions (\textit{Widersprüche}) in Herodotus’ outlook: Herodotus’ divinities are both moral and immoral, both just and unjust.\textsuperscript{147} How and Wells perceived a similar contradiction: Herodotus, they write, ‘shares the half-conscious pessimism of the masses, who could not rise to the ethical conceptions of Aeschylus and Pindar’, and they marvel

\textsuperscript{144} See, e.g., Fowler (1996), 65-8, on Jacoby’s great-man theory of historiographical development. It is interesting that one of Fowler’s main arguments against this theory is that a neat development of this sort is ‘inherently unlikely’ (68)—appealing to undefended contemporary notions of plausibility (which I, of course, share)—in precisely the way that Jacoby reasoned on the basis of what seemed ‘likely’ to him in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

\textsuperscript{145} Blakesley (1854), \textit{ad} 7.46.

\textsuperscript{146} See §1.6.1 on Dahlmann and Stein; cf. Rawlinson (1880 = 1858), \textit{ad} 1.32.

\textsuperscript{147} Jacoby (1982 = 1913), 29-30: ‘aber ebenso wie Xerxes bald schuldlos in den Krieg gehetzt wird von einer neidischen Gottheit [i.e. 7.5-18] bald die gerechte Strafe für seine ἰβρις erfährt und ἀνόσιός τε καὶ ἀτᾶσθαλος heißt [i.e. 8.109.3]. Auch hier schient mir Meyer [(1899), 261] die Widersprüche in Herodots Auffassung zu übersehen’.
that Herodotus’ piety ‘did not revolt from such a view of the deity’. Yet they also share with Macan the view that Herodotus sometimes considers *phthonos, nemesis, tisis* and *dikê* all to refer to the same retributive divine response to mortal injustice: ‘as a rule [divine jealousy] was accompanied by pride and presumption (cf. 1.32.1 & 1.34.1), and frequently by guilt, personal or inherited (1.91.1)’.

What How and Wells construed in social terms, as a fluctuating and semi-conscious combination of ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ (or popular and elite) theological ideas, was shortly, and with only a slight change in emphasis, to be interpreted in developmental terms as a sign of Herodotus’ liminal position between two theological worlds: the older, primitive world (which survived amongst the ‘people’), and the modern, rational world (primarily cultivated by the elite). At the turn of the century Erwin Rohde suggested that the idea of divine *phthonos* itself was gradually ‘moralized’ so as to become the divine response to *hybris* and equivalent to *nemesis*. As we shall see later (§3.4.1), most early and mid twentieth century scholarship incorporated divine *phthonos* into developmental theories of religion, but there remained a real disagreement about when (and whether) the ‘moralization’ of divine *phthonos* took place and in which authors it remains ‘immoral’. Thus Greene considers Herodotus an adherent of the older, ‘popular’ and ‘primitive’ view of divine *phthonos*, showing only the faintest glimmers of the ‘purified’ doctrine of Aeschylus and Pindar. This seemed unsurprising in view of the fact that Herodotus lived in a period of transition in Greek thought—an Übergangszeit, as Wilamowitz put it—which left him suspended between Ionian rationalism and popular belief.

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148 The opposition between the ‘vulgar’ or ‘crude’ views of the masses (represented by traditional Homeric mythology, to which even ‘high’ authors like Sophocles occasionally had to be relegated) and ‘nobler’ or ‘purer’ conceptions of the elite (represented by Plato and other philosophers) is taken over from the scholars already discussed, e.g. Meuss (1888), Schuler (1869), Döllinger (1857), Schömann (1844), Baehr (1830/5).

149 How & Wells (1912.1), 49-50.

150 Rohde (1901), 328-30. Jacoby (cited above), like Rawlinson still interprets *phthonos* as an ‘immoral’ hostility to ‘guiltless’ mortals.

151 Greene (1944), 87-8: ‘The jealousy of the gods, as Herodotus understands it, therefore, has little in common with the conception of divine justice. Only as he applies the notion to his larger scheme, the conflict of Greece with Persia, does he begin to find in it the germ of a really ethical idea. But it is only a beginning...’

152 Wilamowitz (1931/2.2), 206-7. Similar assessments can be found in, e.g., Bauer (1878), 46-7, who focuses on the discrepancy between the ‘rationalism’ and ‘enlightened’ tone of Books 2 (and part of
Anschauungen, wie sie Aischylos hat, und wieder solche, die im Glauben des Volkes und des Sophokles noch herrschend sind, und wieder solche, die dem ionischen Rationalismus eigentümlich sind, stehen unvermittelt nebeneinander.

Dodds, approaching Greek religion from an explicitly anthropological perspective, situated the progressive moralization of divine *phthonos* within the development of Greek thought from a Homeric ‘shame culture’ to the ‘guilt culture’ of the Archaic and Classical periods. Dodds’s Herodotus, too, stands astride two intellectual worlds: the older, irrational, immoral world in which divine *phthonos* is provoked by success, and more moral, modern, rational world in which success leads to *hybris*, which draws down the punishment of a moralized divine *phthonos*.

Jacoby’s response to the impossibility of fitting Herodotus into traditional theological categories—to diagnose inconsistency—becomes increasingly common in the course of the twentieth century. In 1950 Antonio Maddalena exposed Herodotus’ self-contradictions on issues of fatalism and divine justice or injustice, criticizing scholarly attempts to impart a unity to the work. Maddalena’s Herodotus was a theological pessimist who was also convinced of the reality of divine justice, and his vision of fate was ‘philosophically absurd’. Since Jacoby, scholars of Herodotus’ religious and moral thoughts have increasingly focused on textual inconsistencies and self-contradiction. In the twentieth century it is increasingly suggested that one of the primary differences between Herodotus and the modern scholar is his lack of rationality, consistency, and logic. De Ste Croix, like Jacoby, based his conclusion of Herodotus’ theological incoherence largely on Herodotus’ refusal to commit to the entirely moral or immoral nature of the gods:

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4) and the ‘childlike belief in god’ (‘kindlichen Götterglaubens’) in the rest of the work. For similar views see Diehls (1887); Norden (1898.1), 39; Nestle (1908), 14, 37.

53 The concept of the ‘shame culture’ was borrowed from Benedict’s sociological study of Japan, (1946), 222-5. Dodds sees only a ‘relative... gradual and incomplete’ transition between the two types of culture (1951), 28. (For criticisms of this construct: Dickie (1978), Lloyd-Jones (1990), Cairns (2010)). Dodds, however, also views divine *phthonos* as, in Herodotus’ view, ‘the underlying pattern of all history’, (1951), 44.

154 Maddalena (1950), 67.

155 E.g. Legrand (1932/54.1), 147.

156 De Ste Croix (1977), 139.
Within [Herodotus’ ‘religious outlook’] there coexist several strands of religious thought which are not really compatible and Herodotus will sometimes jump from one to another, without realizing what he is doing.

Problems that had provoked scores of nineteenth-century studies were disarmed at a stroke, by relinquishing the dogma that a scholar must ‘make sense’ of an inconsistent text. No longer were scholars required to decide between the blasphemous abuse of the gods that Plutarch saw in divine phthonos, and the divine benevolence, justice, and mercy that Meuss had advocated. Herodotus, it was argued, held no coherent theology or philosophy, but rather deployed a series of proverbs and maxims, often incompatible, with little profundity of thought.

Increasingly in the twentieth century it is not Herodotus’ status as a heathen or his position at a primitive stage of religious thought, but rather his very status as a theist and teller of folk tales that is offered as the explanation for his inconsistencies and self-contradictions. Matthew Dickie’s excellent study of divine phthonos takes it as axiomatic that religious thought (outside the realm of philosophy), like human thought in general, contains much confusion, and, apropos divine phthonos, argues that Herodotus lacks any coherent notion of causality.157

Posso... affermare di credere che Erodoto non ha un’unica teoria o spiegazione della causalità, ma che egli opera con diverse teorie inconcilibili tra di loro [i.e. divine phthonos of prosperity and punishment of hybris]. Perciò non ha senso estrarre qualche principio comprensivo. Faremmo meglio a riconoscere che non c’è coerenza e che Erodoto usa quella teoria che sembra dare il miglior senso ai fatti che ha sottomano.

The connection made by Wilamowitz and Linforth between contradiction and religious beliefs is widely accepted, and attempts to ‘solve’ contradictions have been largely abandoned.158 ‘Inconsistencies in belief are not just an inevitable flaw of all

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158 Wilamowitz (1931/2.2), 206-7 (a propos Herodotus’ inconsistencies): ‘wir wissen aber auch, daß es immer zahlreiche Menschen gibt, die sich der Widersprüche in ihrem inneren Verhalten zu der Religion oder auch der Weltanschauung gar nicht bewußt werden, nicht einmal bewußt werden wollen’; cf. Linforth (1926), 25: ‘The human mind, in operating with the concepts of religion, can seldom maintain for any length of time a uniform bearing, whether of reason or of emotion. We should not be surprised, therefore, to find contradictions in the mind of Herodotus; and in point of fact we do find them... In the end it is plain that Herodotus could not support his position for a moment
religions’, Harrison writes in his discussion of Herodotean religion, ‘but actually a means whereby belief is maintained’, suggesting that the contradictions visible in the *Histories* might serve a functional role and reveal the practical workings of Greek religion (further §2.10). More recently Versnel has argued that Herodotus is not alone in luxuriating in multiple, inconsistent ideas about divine causation and the nature of the gods: a multitude of irreconcilable theological beliefs compete with one another in the works of Homer, Hesiod, and Solon (further §1.7-8).

As we shall see, there is something of a divide between the approach of literary scholars—who tend to see fairly straightforward thematic oppositions in the *Histories* that are consistently echoed throughout the work (further §1.9)—and scholars of ancient religion, who tend to relinquish the notion of ‘coherence’ in favour of more ‘realistic’ assessment of ancient religious thought. Pelling is notable in providing a literary analysis of Herodotus while taking account of the arguments of such anthropologically-minded classicists. Where Gould, Harrison, and Versnel ask what the theological dissonances of the *Histories* can tell us about the history of religious belief or Herodotus as an author, Pelling implicitly attributes this textual incoherence to Herodotus’ intention, and looks at how the competing strands of thought in Solon’s speech to Croesus can be viewed as a literary merit (see §1.7). These incompatible strands teach a meta-lesson: truth is hard to find because, in the court of an oriental monarch, ‘no one can talk straight, and λόγος itself becomes distorted’.

Both the anthropological solution (religions are necessarily inconsistent) and the literary solution (the author is playful and subtle) to the perceived instability of the text on theological matters enable their proponents to move past the interpretative

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159 Harrison (2000), 16, cf. 115-6. In 2007 Harrison explores how the Greek belief in the certainty of divine intervention and divine justice was rendered ‘sustainable’ (in the light of non-fulfillment) by ‘blocks to falsifiability’ or ‘let-out clauses’ contained within his system of beliefs. He offers four methods: divine retribution is often indirect; it may be delayed; the gods do not punish every offence; the gods are not always just. (It is as the fourth of these propositions that the notion of the *phthoneros* divinity is classed.) Compare Harrison (2007), 375-80, with the twenty-two points noted by Evans-Pritchard (1937), 475-80. Similar interests characterize Harrison’s study of Herodotus (2000). The approach, Harrison points out, goes back to Tylor (1891.1), 134.

difficulties that had seemed to plague earlier (and some current) scholarship that adhered to an unyielding ‘divine hostility’ or ‘divine justice’ reading of Herodotus, by admitting the existence of numerous different views on the nature of the gods and the causes of events.

The most characteristic response of the scholars reviewed in this section is to suggest that divine *phthonos* is one of a number of incompatible ideas plucked from a wider cultural milieu. The motif has been firmly dethroned, in all these readings, from its long-standing position at the centre of all interpretations of the work. Harrison, for example, devotes a thorough chapter to the ‘Solonian’ philosophy, but underlines his opposition to Fornara’s vision of a ‘philosophy of history’. Divine *phthonos* and the rest of Solon’s ideas are:161

... part of a body of proverbial wisdom to a large extent taken for granted by both Herodotus and his contemporaries. Consequently, it would be absurd to expect too high a level of consistency in Herodotus’ reiteration of this ‘Solonian philosophy’.

Lang has argued that ‘the divine jealousy maxim’ is a hangover from traditions of folk narrative, not the self-consciously urged ‘philosophy of history’ that Fornara claimed. It has ‘no merit for Herodotus as an expression of historical causation’.162 Gould takes the comparison with folk proverbs further: the envy of divinity is merely one of ‘a number of metaphors with very different implications’ that Herodotus employs within the same stories, and even speeches.163 For Versnel, too, divine *phthonos* is but one of a host of inconsistent ideas that Herodotus embraces, and holds no privileged position in his literary composition.

The long-debated meaning of divine *phthonos* is, on this reading, of far less importance, since it carries no particular significance for the work as a whole. Its meaning is, therefore, typically discussed fairly briefly and without

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163 Gould (1989), 79-82. His reading of Solon’s speech is analysed below (§1.7, cf. appendix 3).
problematization.\textsuperscript{164} While Harrison refuses to be drawn on whether divine \textit{nemesis} is a confirmation or a contradiction of divine \textit{phthonos},\textsuperscript{165} many others understand divine \textit{phthonos} in the ‘immoral’ terms proposed from Geinoz to Jacoby (thereby rendering it ‘incompatible’ with ‘moral’ divine \textit{nemesis} at 1.34). Dickie sees divine \textit{phthonos} as ‘privo di qualsiasi elemento morale ed... semplicemente una forza capricciosa, maligna e dannosa che non può sopportare la vista della felicità umana’.\textsuperscript{166} Gould and Versnel translate divine \textit{phthonos} as ‘envy’, and they state without elaboration that it implies both an ‘anthropomorphic’ notion of divinity, and ‘predictable’ divine action.\textsuperscript{167} For Pelling it is an undiscriminating sense of divine ‘envy’ that should affect all mortals equally, while the divine \textit{nemesis} mentioned by the narrator represents a moralized response implicitly connected with the concept of \textit{hybris}.

\textsuperscript{164} An exception being Dickie (1987).
\textsuperscript{165} Harrison initially suggests that the narrator’s \textit{nemesis} is a confirmation of Solon’s \textit{phthonos} (2000), 36. Later (2000), 39 n.3, he suggests a different reading: Herodotus’ comment on \textit{nemesis} ‘may arguably... imply a suggestion of Croesus’ end as deserved that is at variance with the philosophy outlined by Solon.’
\textsuperscript{166} (1987), 117, cf. 115.
\textsuperscript{167} Versnel (2011), 528, considers divine ‘envy’ to threaten ‘only the excessively prosperous’ (183), and defines it as an anthropomorphic and predictable emotion (further §1.7 & n.177). \textit{Nemesis} by contrast is interpreted as the emotion of ‘righteous indignation’ (532 n.9, cf. 184 n.79)—it is presumably \textit{nemesis} that leads Versnel to claim that ‘the principle of divine justice’ is at work in the story of Croesus (197). Gould’s comments are given in the next section.
### 1.7. Inconsistency Examined:
The Theology of Solon’s Speech to Croesus

Since most recent scholars of Herodotean religion stress the text’s theological inconsistency—whether then explained as a typical feature of religious and folk thought, a personal intellectual failing, or a fruitful literary tactic—it is worth pausing to ask how the expectation of theological inconsistency which underlies many studies of Herodotus might be prejudicial to our analysis of Herodotus’ thought.

By way of illustration I take the dialogue between Solon and Croesus (1.30-34), and Croesus’ subsequent comments to Cyrus on the ‘circle (kuklos) of human affairs’ (1.207). Treated by every detailed study on Herodotean religion for three centuries, these two dialogues (and the wider story of the rise and fall of Croesus and the Mermnadae in which they sit) have become the paradigmatic example of theological inconsistency since John Gould’s influential analysis in 1989:168

Closer inspection suggests that we are not quite dealing with the sort of unified and structured set of ideas that we are entitled to call a theory, but rather with a set of metaphors of very different implications. A ‘cycle’ (kyklos) of human experience suggests regularity and recurrence as well as inevitability; the ‘envy’ (phthonos) of divinity seems to imply a pattern of supernatural intervention in a human life which is itself recognizably ‘human’ in its motivation and hence once more in principle predictable. But ‘disruptiveness’ (to tarachôdes) and the recurring idea of ‘chance’ seemingly stress the randomness and unpredictability of divine intervention, while the impossibility of a man’s possessing all goods seems to point to something different again, something more like a natural limitation.

In a similar vein, Pelling perceives three distinct strands of causation in Solon’s speech, not all of which are compatible with one another. First, that ‘life is mutable; anyone’s fortunes may change’ (i.e. Herodotus' statement that man is sumphorê); second that ‘God is envious of those who come closest to divine prosperity, and turbulent in destroying them’ (i.e. ‘the divine is phthoneros and tarakhôdês’, 1.32.1); third that ‘the most prosperous act or think in particular ways, and those ways

contribute to their destruction’ (i.e. *hubris, adikia, and nemeosis*). Pelling sums up:

The first is the most general thesis, one that applies to all humanity; all are equally subject to such mutability. It has particular reference to the wealthiest and most powerful only in the sense that they start at the top of Fortune’s Wheel and can only swing downwards; their shifts may therefore be the most marked. The second and third differ from the first in focusing on the rich and powerful; it is not now simply a question of Fortune’s universal Wheel, it is rather that these people will be *more* subject to fortune-changes than the mass of humanity.

Versnel has expanded upon these analyses suggesting, amongst other things, that divine *phthonos* and *sumphorê* are ‘two crystal clear, distinct options to explain (mis)fortune’, since the mechanisms they imply are quite discrete:

Solon mentions two different conceptions: divine envy threatening only the excessively prosperous, side by side with the vicissitude of luck (*sumphorê*), which should concern every human being since it works in both directions: from good to bad and in reverse, and also includes various mixtures. Either of the two—divine envy and chance—often occurs as a general principle in its own right in Herodotus. So this passage confronts us with two—not necessarily mutually exclusive, yet clearly distinct—explanations of sudden changes in human life.

The conclusion of these three influential studies is that the narrative presents us with multiple distinct ideas that have little internal coherence, and which are often dissonant or incompatibile. These conclusions are, however, strongly determined by the interpretative methods employed. Gould, Pelling, and Versnel tend to treat Herodotus’ phrases, images, and metaphors as if each had a fixed meaning that Herodotus deploys—irrespective of whether (or how) he understood it—that can be interpreted independently of the context.

It is worth noting that an ‘envious’, ‘jealous’, or ‘grudging’ divinity might be imagined to operate in numerous different ways if entirely decontextualized. The

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169 The *adikia* is, Pelling notes, not mentioned in the dialogue, but in the earlier description of Croesus’ campaigns at 1.5.3, 6.4, 92.1.
170 Pelling (2006b), 147-9. For criticism of Pelling’s ‘third strand’, not to be found in Solon’s speech itself, see Versnel (2011), 532-6, and §4.2.
divinity’s downward-looking, protective jealousy (phthonos) of its own prosperity might grudge all success to all mortals, ensuring that no one reaches a high level of prosperity, or anyone rise above anyone else (resulting in a miserable, egalitarian society). Or divine jealousy might manifest itself in the periodic destruction of those who approach god by great good fortune, who might then replaced by the less fortunate as they rise to fill the vacuum created. (We would then have the cycle of prosperity, in which individuals or cities rise and fall, pronounced by Croesus at 1.207 and the narrator at 1.5.4.) An upward-looking divine envy (phthonos) might focus only on those mortals who surpass divinity in excellence and bravery by, say, risking their lives in a way gods cannot. Unshackled from the context we might imagine many more such models for a word with a semantic range as wide as phthoneros. The phrase ‘the divine is phthoneros’ alone provides no warrant for assuming, as Versnel does, that divine phthonos must evoke a ‘predictable’ and ‘one-way’ movement of success that contrasts with the ‘arbitrary’ and ‘two-way’ movement of sumphorê (which he interprets as the principle of ‘random chance’). Those who stress Solon’s inconsistency proceed on the assumption that the words τὸ θεῖον πάν ἐδών φθονερόν evokes one theological world, and without explanation they select a very specific interpretation dissonant with the immediate context, sometimes to the point of logically precluding others in the immediate context. In summarizing the different causational patterns of the Croesus logos Versnel writes:172

Despite all ingenious, elegant and seductive attempts at overall interpretations it still is asking too much to glue together divine envy, arbitrary chance, mechanical rules of alternation, the law that the excessively fortunate will end badly, the will of the gods, predestined fate, retribution for the offence of an ancestor and personal error into one satisfactory coherent composition.

Versnel is, of course, correct in his fundamental point: not every utterance about causation and the gods within the Histories is presented in such a way that they can be literally reconciled into a unified vision of causality and theology. But this is unsurprising. As I shall argue in the next chapter, it is in the nature of Herodotus’ literary project that numerous theological discourses should emerge, and this is

172 Versnel (2011), 197. I mark in bold those words which seem to be supplied by Versnel’s interpretative faculties (actively employed, as they are, in the detection of inconsistency).
clearly to some degree intentional. Yet the impression of total metaphysical chaos that scholars are increasingly advocating is a caricature. It privileges the methodology of one social science (the anthropological study of religion with its refusal to ‘make sense’ of a foreign, possibly irrational ideological world) to the total exclusion of another (the study of how humans communicate by means of arbitrary symbols—words, images, metaphors—that have multiple potential meanings, from which sense must be made and meaning attributed to the speaker by paying attention to context).  

While it is certainly important not to place our own ideas into an ancient author’s mouth in order to make his ideas seem sensible to us, the task of interpretation is not thereby simplified into a simple and honest reporting of the ‘real’ meaning of the words on the page. It scarcely need be pointed out that no such thing exists. Words, phrases, proverbs, and metaphors of all kinds are polysemic; the first word in a sentence influences the way we understand the second, and both influence our perception of the third: only in certain forms of esoteric exegesis and cryptic crosswords does one analyse each word for its context-independent sense. In any interpretation the degree of coherence we attribute to the author will rely upon the definition of the words which we find (the squiggles on the page being quite meaningless until decoded), and thus our willingness or reluctance to find the perspectives from which the ideas might form a coherent whole. By ‘bringing out’ unexpressed theological assumptions one scholar can confirm his suspicion of

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173 For the defence of the right not to ‘make sense’ of Greek religion see J. Gould (1985). The arguments are excellent for the discussion of ‘Greek religion’ in general, but do not apply to individual authors, and still less individual passages.

174 Versnel writes eloquently elsewhere on polysemy, misunderstanding, and the inherent vagueness of many words humans generally utter; cf. (1990), 14 n.37 & 16-19.

175 This is as clear from studies in linguistics as it is from anthropological fieldwork on proverbs. See Lieber (1984), 429-30, on the motto of the Chicago Police Academy (‘Don’t walk up 17 flights of stairs without making an arrest’) and his revealing discussion (426-8) of the ‘analogical ambiguity’ inherent in most word-pairs concluding (434): ‘few, if any, proverb texts can be assumed to have a single, categorical meaning. To conduct field research or organize a typology on this assumption is ethnographically self-defeating in that the case is prejudiced. Any proverb text may have a potential range of meanings defined by the kind and number of different relationships that are known by informants to obtain between the pair of terms in the text.’ Cf. Jason (1971), 621; Golopentia-Eretescu (1970) & (1971); Herzog (1936), 6. Nor is this foreign to classical or Herodotean scholars: see Shapiro (2000), 93-4, and appendix 3.

176 Grice (2001), 11-12, 17-18, illustrates the point nicely with his memorable comparison of the reception of the philosopher Botvinnik and his contemporary ‘Shropshire’.
immense theological depth (see, for example, Hoffmeister, discussed in §2.9); by refusing to ‘impose’ order upon chaos, another scholar can confirm his suspicion that the author was a religious folk-thinker whose thought admitted no philosophical profundity.

There has, to date, been no resistance to the practice of giving highly specific definitions to concepts like sumphoré, phthoneros, tarakhôdês, and nemesi̇s without explanation or reference to the context, a method that indicates (but does not itself support) the scholarly assumption that the text is a string of incoherent proverbs, maxims, and traditional ideas. But it is a highly questionable method to interpret the two predicates Solon uses to describe ‘the divinity’—tarakhôdês and phthoneros—in isolation from one another and to conclude that Solon is evoking two different and incoherent conceptions of divinity within the same breath. Why should each word not influence our interpretation of the other? If I say ‘leave Frank alone: he’s sad and angry’ my conversant does not take the phrase ‘Frank is sad’ and the phrase ‘Frank is angry’ and then add the separate meaning of each together so as to conclude that Frank is simultaneously moping disconsolately in a corner and in a pillow-thumping rage, neatly symbolizing the paradoxes lying at the heart of the modern constructions of masculinity. The first adjective naturally establishes a framework within which the second is understood. The divinity is grudging, and that is all the more threatening

177 Gould explicitly does so by turning the adjective (ταραχώδης) into an abstract noun (τὸ ταραχῶδες, cited above n.168) when he then analyses as a metaphysical principle in its own right. In the Histories the two adjectives (phthoneros and tarakhôdês) are separated (or rather connected) by τε καί. Versnel considers sumphoré and phthonos as not ‘exclusive’, but as having ‘different implications’ (2011), 528: ‘Divine envy always and inevitably results in doom, is typically human/anthropomorphic in its motivation and hence predictable, especially as a satisfactory staff to beat a very rich dog. Ταραχῶδες, on the other hand, represents the random, confusing, and disruptive, but not rationally reducible side of the supernatural and it is as such used inter alia to predicate tyche (LSJ)’ (my italics). Gould (1985), 29, 32, sees a similiar contradiction in these words, which encapsulates the two sides of Greek religion—order and disorder: ‘the essence of divinity lies in the paradoxical coexistence of incompatible truths about human experience’ (my italics).

178 The classic study by Solomon Asch demonstrates the way in which adjectives describing a personality influence one another in forming an impression of that personality. Particularly striking is the importance of the order in which they are encountered. Consider the following descriptions by way of illustration:

Jason is: intelligent—industrious—impulsive—critical—stubborn—envious.

Rupert is: envious—stubborn—critical—impulsive—industrious—intelligent.

These six adjectives create quite different impressions depending on the order in which we encounter them. The envy that dominates our impression of Rupert is only a minor flaw in Jason, while the intelligence laudable in Jason only helps Rupert to realize his dastardly plans. See Asch (1946), 270-2 (I borrow the format of presentation from Kahneman (2011), 82).
because the divinity meddles in human life at the drop of a hat. The two adjectives are, in fact, regularly linked in Greek discussions of *phthonos* to describe the same individual.\(^{179}\) Only if we perceive a change of speaker or intention does it seem valid not to place one word in the context of those that precede and expand them into two *separate* and incompatible theological propositions.\(^{180}\) It seems similarly problematic to proceed without discussion from Solon’s word *sumphorê* to the translation ‘arbitrary chance’ (Versnel), amassing attributes such as ‘randomness and unpredictability’ (Gould), so as to emphasize the contrast with an allegedly ‘predictable’, divine *phthonos*. *Sumphorê* has a wide semantic range that includes ‘what one encounters’ (the etymological root is from *sun* + *pherein*: ‘to bring together’) and ‘disaster’ (the sense in which it occurs with remarkable frequency in Herodotus’ subsequent narrative).\(^{181}\) There is every reason to understand Solon’s emphasis on the importance of *sumphorê*—understood as ‘(unforeseeable and inevitably undesirable) events one encounters’—in the context of the statements that immediately precede it: that the divine is grudging and meddlesome.\(^{182}\) The description works to build up a composite picture rather than to establish numerous, specific, conceptually distinct and exclusive ideas. Likewise, the section that follows, which emphasizes Croesus’ wealth, suggests that he is a particularly likely candidate for the ‘misfortunes’ that every man, in any case, encounters.

When we look below the surface of the analyses cited above it becomes clear that a translation of *sumphorê* as a ‘two-way’ metaphysical force of ‘unpredictable’ and ‘arbitrary’ ‘Chance’ that is logically incompatible with a ‘mechanical’, ‘predestined fate’, *and* with a ‘one-way’, ‘anthropomorphic’, purely destructive, and ‘predictable’ divine *phthonos*, *and* with divine *nemesis* (expanded into nothing less than the ‘principle of divine justice’)\(^{183}\) only looks plausible if we approach Solon’s words with the assumption that Herodotus skipped blithely between highly specific and

\(^{179}\) References in §3.5.2 n.102.

\(^{180}\) For this reason Versnel’s discussion of Homeric inconsistencies employs the strategy of not ‘making sense’ to greater effect. (2011), 163-179.

\(^{181}\) Lloyd-Jones (1971), 68, neatly summarizes: συμφορή ‘basically means “a combination of circumstances” but often means “disaster”’. It should be added that this combination of circumstances is often bad and never good.

\(^{182}\) *Tukkhê*, too, sometimes seems to indicate simply what one encounters (e.g. 6.70.3); cf. Eidinow (2011), 106, 113 (on the absence of truly ‘random chance’).

\(^{183}\) Versnel (2011), 197.
logically incompatible theological ideas. In spite of an apotropaic footnote offered by Versnel,\(^{184}\) the difficulties of extracting meaning from a text are wholly neglected in the hunt for the inconsistent Herodotus. What is currently presented as evidence for Herodotus’ inconsistency is, to a large degree, the result of an expectation of inconsistency, which has prompted scholars to actively seek the most incoherent readings by employing extreme hermeneutic strategies.\(^{185}\) On what basis, then, might such an expectation be justified?

\(^{184}\) Versnel (2011), 195 n.6, citing Grice (1975). It is a fine aside, typical of Versnel’s broad reading across numerous disciplines, but it plays no further role in the discussion. Gould, too, argues for non-literal meanings of various Herodotean expressions (particularly the pattern: ‘it had to happen’), see (1989), 77, but likewise ignores this possibility in criticizing the notion that Herodotus had a ‘theory of history’ (on which see below).

\(^{185}\) On the halo effect and confirmation bias: Kahneman (2011), 80-5.
1.8. Beyond Inconsistency: 
Rationality, Coherence, Consistency, and Belief

Thus runs one of Wittgenstein’s many inflammatory criticisms of James Frazer’s seminal work of early anthropology, *The Golden Bough*. It raises a debate that has, in various forms, raged since the seventeenth century: the question of human universals and cultural specifics. Is Herodotus’ thought ‘desperately foreign’ by virtue of his very alien intellectual culture (alien because heathen, primitive, religious, or uneducated—and thus indifferent to the laws of non-contradiction), or should we expect it to follow familiar patterns to our own, by virtue of our common humanity? Although couched in different terms, this is the modern counterpart to the question that divided the sixteenth-century Platonic syncretist from censorious Christian Moderne; in essence: How similar is Herodotus to me?

Within every generation voices can be heard that incorporate Herodotus within what is perceived as the ‘modern’ paradigm of thought, while competing voices assert that the ‘modern’ mind operates in new and unprecedented ways by virtue of its religion (or lack thereof), cultural evolution, or education.\(^{187}\) Even when this question is not explicitly addressed, a scholar’s opinion is often clear from the angle he takes and the types of explanation and treatment he considers legitimate. A debate conducted in terms of Christianity and paganism for many centuries morphed into a debate between primitive and higher (or popular and elite) forms of religion in the nineteenth century, and was recast in the twentieth as an opposition between irrational religiosity and rational atheism. Current debate is clearly the child (if a wayward one) of this most recent phase. As has been pointed out many times, it

\(^{186}\) Wittgenstein (1979), 8.

\(^{187}\) On the self-characterization of ‘modernity’ since the 12\(^{th}\) century see Schmitt (2012), 1-66.
seems a safe starting assumption that Herodotus’ thought will be neither identical to our own nor entirely foreign,\textsuperscript{188} but an awareness of this dichotomy is useful inasmuch as it makes us more self-conscious about the strategies we employ to make sense of a text, and the assumptions on which they rely. Given the ability of every analyst to corroborate his starting assumptions (to his own satisfaction at least) by employing interpretative methods that are (to some degree) self-confirming, it is worth asking explicitly at this point what we should expect of the theological thought of a Greek in the fifth century BC.

The increasing use of terms like ‘inconsistent’, ‘incoherent’, ‘illogical’, ‘subconscious’ and ‘proverbial’ to describe Herodotus’ theological thought over the last century or so continues a tradition begun by Jacoby. The view taken by many scholars of Greek religion, however, is not (or, at least, not only) that they are uncovering ‘irrational’ elements present in all human thought, but rather that these irrational aspects are 	extit{particularly} the territory of ancient thought, or of religious thought, and quite alien to the modern academic thinker outside its more frivolous manifestations. This version of the thesis results in a particular strategy of explanation: to make analogies between ancient religious thought and other groups of thinkers (ancient or modern) that are considered equally irrational. Two (overlapping) groups recur in such explanations: the ‘religious’, and ‘folk’ who have not received a scientific Western education (particularly those from an ‘oral’ culture who interact by means of ‘proverbs’ or ‘maxims’). The way these groups think, and the incoherence of their thought is then briefly described, the incoherence of Herodotus’ thought rendered explicable, and the interpretative problems diffused. Consequently, when confronted with difficulties scholars interpret these as evidence of Herodotus’ intellectual alienness, manifested in his irrationality or inconsistency. This attitude is fairly common, and clearly discourages closer analysis of the nature of Herodotus’ religious and philosophical thought, or of the characterization (implicit or explicit) of the ‘modern’ thought with which Herodotus is contrasted. There is a general reluctance to accept the idea that Herodotus’ utterances might well be

\footnote{188 Most recently by Versnel (2011), 14-15, citing Wilhel Dilthey.}
inconsistent, but that they are no more incoherent than those that escape the mouth of people just like us.

The thesis of ‘ancient irrationality’ or ‘religious irrationality’ is importantly different from the thesis of ‘human irrationality’ (in itself an idea that needs careful discussion—see below) for it implies a contrast with modern, non-religious, or educated thought. In reading ancient texts, it is often claimed, we enter a mental world that is qualitatively different from that of the modern, atheist academic. Harrison, who dispassionately charts Herodotus’ inconsistencies, begins his book by debunking the traditional view of Herodotus as ‘excessively ingenious’ and ‘sinisterly clever’. ‘It would be absurd’, he says elsewhere ‘to expect too high a level of consistency in Herodotus’ reiteration of this “Solonian philosophy”, to sort this philosophy into a number of discrete propositions’. 189

Where Harrison, like Wilamowitz, Jacoby, and Linforth, focuses on Herodotus’ thought insofar as it is religious, Gould argues that the appropriate comparison is to those in the contemporary world who think with proverbs rather than theories (some particular features of his discussion are treated in appendix three). Versnel has made the most extensive attempt to date to justify his low evaluation of Herodotus’ rationality, coherence, and consistency and to situate it in the context of modern thought. He provides a wealth of modern parallels alongside relevant academic literature, particularly from cognitive science and religious anthropology. Versnel builds upon Gould’s idea that Greek religion consisted in thinking with gnômai and allowed ‘luxuriant multiplicity’ of ideas. For Versnel ancient religious thought differs fundamentally from modern non-religious thought in being ‘paratactic’, trading in disconnected nuggets of ‘gnomic’ wisdom. 190 To illustrate his vision of

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189 Harrison (2000), 39-40. Harrison, in treating the unity and multiplicity of the divine, detects ‘confusion’, ‘uncertainty and contradiction’, ‘casualness in his thought’, ‘slips’, and so on (e.g. 158-64). He notes, (2000), 21, that ‘Christianity is also riven with contradictions and inconsistencies’, citing Evans-Pritchard (1965), 108, (whose criticism is focused less on ‘primitive’ religion than religion in general): ‘It may, indeed, be true that primitive beliefs are vague and uncertain, but it does not seem to have occurred to these writers that so are those of ordinary people in our own society; for how could it not be otherwise when religion concerns beings which cannot be directly apprehended by the senses or fully comprehended by reason?’. Cf. Wilamowitz and Linforth (n. 158).

190 Elsewhere this is linked to Oudemans & Lardinois’ thesis of two different ‘cosmologies’: the modern ‘separative’ cosmology and the archaic Greek ‘interconnected’ cosmology. See Oudemans &
ancient religious thought Versnel describes a personal encounter with a Greek lady who invoked numerous partly contradictory explanations for a tragic and unexpected misfortune—the drowning of a young girl:191

In an avalanche of words she explained that this was a punishment by God, that it was the will of God, that it was written (γραμμένον είναι), that those whom God loves die young. What can we do? (Τί να κάνομε). The baffling thing was that these different explanations—multiple, different and in my view partly discordant—were presented not as discursive alternatives open for discussion or rational choice, but in an asyndetic chain of assertions.

Versnel offers this string of discordant gnomic expressions as the modern analogue for the religious thought of Herodotus, Solon, and Hesiod. Placed in this context, Versnel’s reluctance to see the unity of Solon’s speech to Croesus—if not his willingness to seek out particularly dissonant interpretations—seems perfectly reasonable.192 By this and several other modern parallels from religion and folk thought (e.g. Christian theodicy)193 Versnel consigns archaic religious thought, folk thought, and modern religious thought to a distant realm, insisting that we should not judge the ancient Greek by ‘our modern paradigm’ (apparently a logical one based on the principle of non-contradiction derived from Aristotle); instead we should judge the religious Greek by ‘his own’ paradigm, which tolerates ‘contradiction, incongruity and inconsistency’.194

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191 Versnel (2011), 218 (his italics).
192 One might, however, have expected him to give an ‘expressivist’ rather than ‘propositional’ interpretation of the woman’s speech, of the sort he outlines in (1990), 18.
193 Versnel (2011), 236-7 & n.204. Christian theodicy, however, is the project of constructing rational arguments (on the basis of criteria like internal non-contradiction) in the defence of an a priori claim (however implausible it may seem). By this comparison Versnel seems to conflate the desire to produce a coherent argument with the ability to produce a plausible argument: theodicy is implausible, but far from abandoning all desire for coherence it employs every rhetorical and logical tactic it can. This is emphatically not what Versnel thinks is going on in the Greek examples he discusses.
194 Versnel (2011), 7-8; Despite Versnel’s resistance—often successful—to pronouncing the Greeks ‘desperately alien’, this portion of his analysis unquestionably does so. Not one of the many parallels he draws for the Greek ‘paratactic’ rather than ‘syntactic’ brand of logic and thought is from outside the folksy or the faithful.
From a growing consensus of the last century Versnel has forged a thesis that requires serious consideration. I shall argue that, in so far as he draws a hard line between ‘us’ and ‘them’, Versnel fails to give us a sound perception of several aspects of Herodotus’ thought, and of ancient religious thought in general, chiefly because he relies upon a false contrast between religious and non-religious thought and between ‘folk’ and ‘scholarly’ (or again ‘ancient’ and ‘modern’) thought.

This seems an odd criticism to make of a scholar who grounds his work in cognitive anthropology—a discipline recently criticized for uncritically assuming that human cognition is identical across different cultures—and defends his discussion of the multiple ‘registers’ of Greek religious thought by reference to the supposedly universal phenomenon of cognitive dissonance, and who also eloquently attacks the platitudinous commonplace that the Greeks are ‘desperately other’. Yet, despite his ‘humanizing’ approach, Versnel frequently adopts the traditional scholarly posture of a modern, scientifically-minded atheist with a natural desire for consistency and logical coherence, who is initially baffled in his attempts to interpret ancient Greek literature, whose authors value neither. There is a tacit but frequent tension throughout his most recent book between a tendency to explain the chaotic multiplicity of religious ideas that he sees in several ancient texts as either 1) a universal feature of ‘the human mind’ or 2) ‘characteristic’ of the very foreign nature of ancient Archaic and Classical religious thought. Although the former explanation surfaces frequently throughout his most recent book, it is the latter that dominates Versnel’s close analysis of the Histories, which, as we have seen, adopts and extends Gould’s strategy of systematically disimmilating the individual words

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195 On the assumption of universality in cognitive anthropology see the preliminary survey of cross-cultural variants in cognition given by Henrich et al. (2010), and see below for discussion of cross-cultural variation in cognitive dissonance. This is, however, a recent qualification to the field of study: Versnel treats the phenomena he describes as ‘universal’ See, e.g., Versnel (2011), 87 & n.234, and especially Ter Unus; on ‘cognitive dissonance’ and Greek religion see further appendix 2.

196 Put with admirable clarity at (2011), 237.

197 In (1990), 1-25, esp. 12-13, Versnel more consistently insists on the irrational nature of ‘modern’ thought (‘equally popular among such widely divergent categories as adolescents, adults—both Western and non-Western—, scholars, theologians, politicians and idiotai’); see also his discussion of Skinner (1969), Fischer (1970), & Pocock (1971). But there, too, religion is singled out as particularly susceptible to the universal phenomenon: ‘There is no need to say that it is again religion that offers the most striking instances.’ (1990), 8.
and metaphors of Solon's speech. Versnel endorses a theory of Greek theology as strings of incompatible gnômai.¹⁹⁸

This picture of a ‘luxuriant multiplicity’ is best explained as a corollary of an endemic gnomic type of wisdom sayings characterized by an often asyndetic paratactic style. It pervades Greek literature of the Archaic and (early) Classical periods and belongs to the most characteristic traits of Greek theological expression. And it is precisely these testimonies of what we experience as contradiction, incongruity, and inconsistency in e.g. Homer, Solon, and Herodotus from which modern hermeneuticians in their ‘drive towards coherence’ try to save their authors. I hope to show that in doing so they unconsciously claim their author for our modern paradigm and thus alienate him from his own.

Such a vision of Greek religion cannot, I think, be accepted in quite this form; the speech of the modern atheist academic, too, can be analysed in terms of ‘luxuriant multiplicity’, though this observation per se would afford us little insight into their intellectual world. We moderns, too, no matter how small we make the modern ‘us’ (assuming, for ease of expression, that I am not left out) use both ‘gnomic’ expressions and multiple conflicting thought-paradigms. Yet it would not be correct to assume that we are tolerant of contradiction in the way Versnel sometimes suggests of the early Greeks: ‘accepting no bridle in their shifts of perspective, undogmatic in the elasticity of their representations, undaunted in accommodating the incompatible, desperate and hopeful, polytropic’.¹⁹⁹ Attractive though this picture may be, it is not, I think, an accurate description of the way that either we or Herodotus are inconsistent. I shall suggest that our own capacity for logic and rationality, however small it may be, typically consists not in our continuous coherence and consistency, but in our ability to move according to accepted conventions between superficially incompatible thought paradigms and expressions, and in being able to rationalize our rather fragmented statements occasionally when motivated to do so. The impression of total mental and metaphysical chaos that Versnel and Gould paint is, I suspect, an outsider’s impression. To characterize Herodotus’ thought as qualitatively different from our own not only draws an

erroneous contrast by misevaluating ourselves: it tempts us to exaggerate the incoherence of Herodotus’ words.

Consider, by way of illustration, a cognitive anthropologist of the twenty-first century who makes the following four statements in different contexts:

1) ‘A slave to Venus, was I born, and enemy to Mars’ (poetic self-description—by some sort of romantic pacifist—using Roman gods as erudite metonyms for long-term emotional dispositions).

2) ‘I’m of a sanguine disposition’ (self-description by a term originating in a theory of the emotions that is firmly defunct at the time of speech).

3) ‘I don’t know what to do. I feel like my head and my heart are pulling me in different directions’ (self-expression using a ‘folk-theory’ of the emotions where internal organs are associated with particular emotional states and characteristics).

4) ‘One clue to my evolutionary heritage is that certain stimuli cause physiological reactions, including an increased heart-rate, which contextual cues prompt me to interpret as “anger”, resulting in a high-affect state characterized by an inability to moderate my behaviour’ (self-description using specialized vocabulary and borrowing the Schachter-Singer model of emotion).200

If we observe our cognitive anthropologist expressing herself in different contexts over an extended period, and we collect statements that exhibit this sort of variety, what are we to make of these ‘inconsistencies’? What terms should we use to describe an individual capable of such shifts of language and expression, especially if they come within a short time of one another? What theories of emotion does she hold? What does she really think? What does she believe? Is she rational and capable of logical thought? Do these inconsistencies reveal her thought to belong to our modern paradigm, the ancient paradigm of the religious ancient Greek elite as analysed by Versnel, or that of the Azande as analyzed by Evans-Pritchard?

An obvious initial point (obvious to those of us who share her culture) is that it would be incorrect to conclude that she is equally committed to the most literal interpretation of all these ideas. Statement one is clearly making use of a foreign

discourse: it is self-consciously metaphorical and playful. In the second, the term ‘sanguine’ has changed its meaning to become an unmarked and conventional term for a generally cheerful disposition (only an absurdly erudite outsider could suspect that her clothes conceal a colony of strategically applied leeches to balance the humours). In statements three and four, however, it is harder to distinguish what is and is not meant in earnest: we all, to some degree, learn to think about our emotions in terms of the metaphors of sentence three. Oppositions that originate in ‘folk-theories’ of emotion (like ‘head’ versus ‘heart’) may give us important insight into our mental representation of emotions in certain contexts, since the images and metaphors we think with give shape and structure to intangible concepts and have been shown to significantly alter how we approach them. In the fourth sentence we see a more self-conscious presentation that is appropriate to the intellectual or academic context in which she often works. It differs from the third, more traditional emotional discourse in both the language it uses and its underlying structural paradigms.

Which one best describes her beliefs? In the very self-conscious sense that the term ‘belief’ has gained in much philosophical literature only the fourth sentence could possibly support the term. Likewise, if we seek a ‘theory’, in the modern scientific sense, only this could bear the load. In an important sense, however, she might ‘believe’ all these to be true self-descriptions, and might express them all in perfect seriousness. The fact that sentences of types two, three, and four can be observed in a non-ironic fashion with some frequency even amongst scholars of emotion—in the right social (and emotional) context at least—suggests that we would be wrong to ascribe the dissonance between ‘self-consciously professed beliefs’ and various other superficially incompatible statements to our anthropologist’s inability to sustain logical thought; it is rather owing to the fact that she has not undertaken to think and speak about her emotions using only one conceptual paradigm and linguistic discourse. This is, of course, unsurprising, for to do so would make her conversation completely indigestible. She would be perceived as elitist and unpleasant outside an

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201 See, e.g., Thibodeau & Boroditsky (2011) on the impact that a simple priming metaphor can have on the way people approach a problem-solving task, and Boroditsky (2010), on the influence of superficially ‘dead’ temporal metaphors on cognition.
academic context, even by her colleagues. It is, however, possible, even probable, that some of the dissonance has occurred to her, and that she now rationalizes statements of type three to be ‘shorthand’ for those of type four.

Our cognitive anthropologist is capable of using these diverse emotional discourses because she is the inheritor of a complex culture that incorporates traces of the language and thought of several thousands of years, not entirely mixed up together, but to a large degree organized into discrete collections, or discourses appropriate with different people and in different contexts. (One does not, in a psychological report, talk of ‘the influence of Aphrodite upon the patient’s affective state’.) She is committed to these various discourses with differing degrees of literalness. But this is very different from saying that she does not mean, understand, or believe the content of any of these sentences—rather it indicates that the ‘content’ cannot be unproblematically accessed. This complexity is largely opaque to an outsider, and speakers, of course, tend not to provide a key to their own usage.²⁰² We who share our cognitive anthropologist’s culture and language are capable of contextualizing her statements and extracting the right propositional content, and the closer we know her and her intellectual background, education, and environment, the better we can do this. In two and a half thousand years time, however, these statements will look utterly chaotic. For a future analyst to describe her as ‘inconsistent’ would barely scrape the surface (the inconsistency of the literal meaning of all one’s utterances being a banal universal of human expression), and for them to present it as evidence that she is uninterested in logical thought, or entirely unaware of these shifts in her speech would be incorrect. This is not to argue that she is a paragon of logical consistency whose every logical infelicity can be explained as a feature of linguistic registers—this is unlikely of any human—but rather that it would be very easy to perceive much more chaos and logical inconsistency in her statements than can plausibly be attributed to her by those familiar with her mental landscape.

²⁰² The importance of ‘cultural competence’ as opposed to ‘linguistic competence’ is as essential to an understanding of all statements. I borrow the terms from Siran (1993), 225-6, who uses them in stressing the importance of cultural understandings in the comprehension of proverbs. They are, in many respects, analogous to the distinction between ‘sentence meaning’ and ‘speaker meaning’ made by Grice (1975), where the contextual information is situation (not culture) specific.
The failure to take account of these complexities can result in radical misinterpretations: think how different the meaning of ‘heart’ can be depending on whether it is placed in opposition to ‘the head’, or placed in the context of an operating table: in one it is metonymy for the emotions, in the other a physical organ with ventricles, an aorta and so on. What if the word ‘god’, ‘Zeus’, or ‘moira’ is allowed a similarly wide latitude of meanings depending on the context in which it is expressed? One wonders what Gould, Pelling, and Versnel, had they been speakers of an Austronesian language writing in 4511 AD, would make of this cognitive anthropologist's theory of emotions if they approached the data as they currently do Herodotus’ *Histories*. Statements like ‘untidiness, inconsistency, contradiction are the glue by which Herodotus’ religious beliefs hold together’ or Herodotus ‘presents all options, however dissonant, as true’ ascribe to Herodotus a belief in the full consequences of every theological expression that strikes me as unrealistic, given the diversity of the language he employs, and the diverse origins and literary overtones of many of these ideas. As we shall see in chapter three, the notions of divine *phthonos* and *nemesis*, for example, arise only in specific, highly literary contexts in the *Histories* and are traditional literary motifs.

I shall suggest in the second chapter that, for many (though not all) of the theological ‘inconsistencies’ that have been observed in Herodotus (and others that have escaped remark), the above thought-experiment in ‘discourse shifting’ provides a better analogy than those explanations that postulate an alien ‘folk’ or ‘religious’ culture in which inconsistency is given a freer reign than it is in contemporary, atheist, educated society. If the analogy I suggest is appropriate, we might expect to find several features within the *Histories*. First, we would expect a degree of dissonance between the nature of divinity that is assumed in a non-polemical fashion (as a background to stories, for example) and that which is explicitly professed in argumentative contexts. The theological assumptions of non-polemical discourses might reflect the provenance of the stories, the narrative context into which they were placed (particularly the author’s literary concerns and registers in the passage at hand), the degree to which they were adapted to fit this context, as well as numerous

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203 Citations respectively from Harrison (1997), 112, and Versnel (2011), 198; my italics.
seemingly trivial and quite unknowable details that might have influenced the above factors (e.g. where the author was writing, what sort of audience he had in mind at the particular moment, what conversations he had recently been having). Second, we would also expect that much of this dissonance would be *useless* when it comes to protecting particular theological propositions, but quite comprehensible in social or narrative terms. That is, theological dissonances would not be ‘blocks to falsifiability’ that preserve particular items of dogma (as Harrison, for example, analyses many Herodotean inconsistencies), but rather would follow literary or generic lines, whether those of Herodotus’ sources, or those of the narrative context he himself creates.²⁰⁴

If the above features can be established in the *Histories*—chapter two will make the case that they can—it would suggest that many dissonances in Herodotean theology are part of a semi-intentional but largely automatic discourse shifting similar to that observable in the speech of our imaginary anthropologist as she moves from the seminar room, to the dinner party, to stairway chatter, to literary composition in various genres. It would certainly undermine the assumption that the variety in Herodotus’ theological expression and thought paradigms is a feature confined to religious, primitive, non-Christian, folk, or ancient Greek thought, and it would suggest that this variation need not have been unconscious, even if it is never explicitly acknowledged in our sources.

It would also suggest that we must rethink several other problems that currently languish under the blanket explanation that Herodotus simply thinks in a very alien way from ‘us’. The notion of an inconsistent Herodotus seems to have discouraged scholars from looking critically at the conceptual categories they use in analysing the *Histories*. If we find ourselves concluding that Herodotus’ Solon moves between

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²⁰⁴ Evans-Pritchard’s influential anthropological study provides a long list of reasons why the Azande ‘do not perceive the futility of their magic’. No. 6 runs: ‘Contradictions between their beliefs are not noticed by the Azande because the beliefs are not all present at the same time but function in different situations. They are therefore not brought into opposition’, (1937), 475-8. This is an astute observation, but in the context these ‘contradictions’ are analysed as serving a *functional* purpose (i.e. they protect the religious or magical belief) not a social one, and the speakers are said to be *unaware* of all these shifts. I have absolutely no reason to suspect that Evans-Pritchard was incorrect in his analysis of Zande religion, but this explanation for variety in religious explanation, also employed by Harrison, must be deployed with caution.
three or more distinct theological propositions, some of them flat-out contradictions, within several sentences we should look critically at the categories according to which we dissect his views—do we draw lines between concepts where Herodotus does not? Do our boundaries have absolute validity? Much scholarship continues to attempt plot to Herodotus’ position on issues that make much more sense to a sixteenth-century Christian humanist than to a Greek in the fifth century B.C. who did not accept the substance of Plato’s complaints against ‘poetic’ theology. Indeed much of the sense of incoherence results from the widespread tendency to describe what feels unfamiliar as (variously) ‘inconsistent’, ‘incoherent’, ‘incompatible’, or even ‘logically inconsistent’ without any attempt to demonstrate that this a feature of ‘logic’ rather than a cultural difference about which ideas naturally belong together.

In the first volume of his Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion Versnel offers an operative definition of ‘inconsistency’ of surprising width: ‘It embraces such (equally vague, but sometimes more restricted) notions as incompatibility, discrepancy, incongruity, lack of harmony, anomaly and ambiguity.’205 We will struggle to properly understand and contextualize the degree to which Herodotus is ‘consistent’ if we conduct our analysis using a term that covers everything from flat-out logical contradiction to a sense that something lacks an intangible sense of ‘harmony’; the latter is likely to be experienced at some point in encountering any literary product of a foreign culture.

It may be objected that my argument so far can be subjected to the same criticism that it attempts to make: that I provide an analysis of a putative group of thinkers (in this case ‘us’ rather than ‘them’) and use this to legitimize analysing the text with a self-fulfilling interpretative strategy (i.e. making sense) without ever properly demonstrating that my putative thinker actually resembles Herodotus. Of course, were the discussion to stop at this point, this would be fair. Two things urge me to stress the similarity rather than difference between Herodotus variety in ‘religious’ expression and apparently universal (and thus modern) phenomena like discourse shifting. First, there is every evidence that, in an argumentative context, Herodotus felt exactly the same ‘drive towards coherence’ and desire for ‘rationality’ that the

205 Versnel (1990), 4.
modern thinker experiences when confronted with the apparent incoherence of his statements, as much in the theological realm as in the historical. Below (§2.2) I discuss Herodotus’ explanation of the origins of traditional Greek theology and his sustained attempts to make his explanation cohere with apparently conflicting evidence. In view of this fact, the notion that Herodotus has a greater tolerance for wildly incoherent statements about the gods than a modern secular thinker seems unsustainable. This, however, is not an argument for the internal coherence of Herodotus' ideas, but an argument (contra the implications of much recent scholarship) that Herodotus does not differ markedly from us in desiring coherence, when motivated (even in the realms of theology), and in being able to produce it in a satisfactory fashion.

My second point is thus equally important: that Herodotus’ statements sometimes contradict one another in very obvious ways, so that these ‘contradictions’ look both intentional and insignificant. Although many recent claims of inconsistency seem somewhat exaggerated (derived from the strategy of interpretation critiqued at §1.7), it is certain that the Histories do contain several plain and undeniable theological inconsistencies. In the second chapter I argue that the most fruitful manner of understanding much variety in Herodotus’ theological statements (some of which are, in fact, logically exclusive of one another) is according to the notion of ‘discourse shifting’ that seems to be a universal feature of human thought within all complex societies that feature numerous competing thought-paradigms.206 Just as ‘heart’ can be the seat of emotions or an internal organ with four chambers depending on the context, so moira can be a necessity safeguarded by a group of semi-independent personal divinities over whom individual gods cannot prevail (1.91), but at other times a vague designation for what turned out to happen, often apparently arranged by the gods (e.g. 3.142.3, further §2.9). If we stick to context-free comparison and definition we prevent ourselves understanding the fluidity of Greek theological thinking, and how similar it can be to our own ways of thought.

With the above considerations in mind, there seems to be little reason to think that we should assume that Herodotus did not mean anything much by or did not quite realize what he meant by individual propositions like ‘the divine is phthoneros and tarakhodēs’ or ‘man is entirely sumphorē’. The portrait of the author as ‘inconsistent’ used to justify such assumptions (and the attendant strategies of interpretation deployed) are not justified by an analysis of the text, for such ideas are consistently foregrounded in particular narrative contexts and have a clear conceptual unity, which requires only a small amount of interpretative flexibility be perceived (e.g. basic metaphorical thinking, in which Herodotus so often delights elsewhere). There is thus every reason to return to a detailed examination of the unresolved question of what Herodotus’ warners’ speeches about divine phthonos mean and to look at the relationship between the metaphysical ideas they contain and the scenes of misfortune that follow (see §3.5). The importance of context and genre in the presentation of the gods in Greek literature has been increasingly recognized in the course of the last three decades and the idea is itself an ancient one (further §2.1). If the ancient Greeks resemble modern thinkers to some degree in their use of discourses, then disentangling and contextualizing the different discourses that a thinker uses will be an important part of understanding the theology of any ancient author (in so far as this is possible to those comparatively ignorant of the author’s culture). Contextualization will be particularly important in the case of a work like the Histories, due to their huge generic diversity. Some theoretical discussions on methodological issues in the study of Greek religion—related to this topic but outwith the focus of this thesis—are provided in appendices two and three.

207 On the translation of sumphorē as ‘random chance’ (and for reflections on what the English term ‘chance’ means), see appendix 3b.
208 On Herodotus’ generic and narratorial diversity: §2.1.
1.9. Good Gods

While some scholars of Herodotean religion or theology set out to reconstruct Herodotus’ religious beliefs with the dispassionate eye of the anthropologist, many scholars continue to take a very different approach to Herodotean theology, one similar to that suggested by Macan—that the *Histories* is characterized by a ubiquitous force of ‘reciprocity’ or justice, referred to by various different Greek words. Here the powerful link between interpretations of theology, characterization, and narrative patterning is especially visible. The scholars reviewed in this section claim or assume that, in the *Histories*, misfortune is *always* self-inflicted or alternatively is a manifestation of justified divine punishment, and that the disasters that follow divine prophecy are *always* caused by self-deception or are divine *punishment* for crimes. Formidable ingenuity is employed to protect the assumption that the gods of the *Histories* behave in a uniformly retributive or just fashion, continuing the tradition of the Platonizing and Christianizing interpreters of the early nineteenth century, who defended similar propositions, usually as a form of explicit and self-conscious theological apologetics. As a substitute for any divine causation of misfortune, all misfortunes that befall characters in the *Histories* are analyzed according to the (pseudo-Aristotelian) notion of the character-flaw.\(^{209}\)

A striking feature of the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Herodotean scholarship discussed in the previous sections is the tendency to evaluate all narratives in which characters are victims of unjust, cruel, deceptive, or arbitrary gods as primitive, crude, revolting, popular, low, indefensible, vulgar, or heathen, while instances of gods punishing crimes are considered noble, elevated, elite, advanced, and pure.\(^{210}\) By such vocabulary choices these scholars displayed a strong distaste for ‘tragic’ plot lines whereby characters fall victim to unjust or capricious divinities. The aesthetic preference for a neat and providential metaphysical world, characterized by ubiquitous supernatural morality and fairness, has proved enduring.

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\(^{210}\) Examples in §1.5, §1.6.2, §3.4.2. The obvious exception to this tendency are the pessimistic writers and philosophers discussed at §1.6.1.
(as have specific misreadings forged in nineteenth-century attempts to ‘purify’ Herodotus). But in the twentieth century it seems to be not a specifically theological distaste, but rather the structuralist penchant for dualism, polarity, and neatness that has lured scholars into arguing that those who prosper are uniformly ‘good’, while those who suffer suffer properly and fairly as a result of their own character flaws or defects. In the *Histories*, many scholars assume, things turn out just as they should, and many stories are, in continuation of the humanist apologetic tradition, interpreted as morality plays serving a didactic purpose.

The extent to which this assumption dominates literary analysis is neatly indicated by treatment (or rather neglect) of two prominent themes in the *Histories*: divine *phthonos* and divine deception. Many scholars favour one of two explanations of divine *phthonos* that allow key scenes in the *Histories* to be interpreted in terms of ‘justified’ or ‘moral’ divine punishment. The first contends that Herodotus does not support the idea that the gods feel *phthonos*, where *phthonos* is defined as a lowly-regarded ‘resentment’ or ‘envy’ not linked to desert. Instead it is the requirements of courtly euphemism that lead Solon, Artabanus, and Polycrates to couch their message about ‘divine justice’ as one of ‘arbitrary divine *phthonos*’ so as to avoid offending the tyrants they address; the reader is to understand that the divine force at work is a punitive and justified *nemesis*, which the narrator mentions at 1.34 (for discussion of this position see §3.5.2).

An alternative view is that Herodotus does endorse the notion of divine *phthonos*, where *phthonos* is defined as a moral notion equivalent to *nemesis* (which is in turn interpreted as ‘righteous indignation’). Here *phthonos* is a ‘just’ response to arrogance and the crimes that inevitably result from it (i.e. ‘hybris’ on what Fisher calls the ‘traditional’ interpretation). Herodotus thus speaks *through* his warners—Solon, Amasis, and Artabanus—of the divine tendency to righteously castigate mortals who commit the cardinal sin of pride, arrogance, or *hybris*, and other,

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211 A theme I intend to discuss elsewhere—Ellis (in preparation 2)—but touch on in §3.6-7, §4.2.
212 Fisher (1992), 2-5; See, e.g., Lateiner (1982), 100-1; A. Lloyd (2007 = 1988), 233; Darbo-Peschanski (1987), 56-8 & 66; Löfler (2008), 182; Similar claims have been made about the meaning of divine *phthonos* in Pindar by Bulman (1992), 11-12.
concomitant crimes. This latter position, of course, raises the very question that caused such controversy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: how is the statement ‘the divinity is phthoneros’ to be interpreted so as to give the sense of just, moral, and punitive divine action, given the clearly negative and immoral connotations of phthonos when used of humans throughout the Histories? Modern commentators rarely offer explanation.

Frequently, however, divine phthonos, like all instances of divine deception, simply goes unmentioned or is dismissed without any clear explanation,²¹³ and scholars dwell instead on nemesis (interpreted as the just ‘indignation’ or ‘retribution’ of the gods), the divinely guided equilibrium of the universe, and the self-confidence, irrationality, arrogance, lack of critical thought, or impiety by which characters draw misfortune upon themselves (or for which they are punished by god). Character-based explanations of misfortune have thus come to act as a replacement for several theological scenes that are of great importance not only for an appreciation of Herodotus’ religious views, but also his characterization and narrative patterning.

Harris, for example, suggests that the cause of Xerxes’ decision to invade Greece is to be found in the ‘opposition between anger and rational decision making’: ‘the central event of his history, Xerxes’ invasion of Greece, would not have taken place, Herodotus seems to imply, if Xerxes had reflected carefully instead of giving in to anger.’²¹⁴ While the ‘opposition’ is indeed an important part of some Herodotean narratives, Harris uses it as a substitute for a scene of great theological importance which follows. He makes no mention of Xerxes’ decision to heed Artabanus’ sage advice, or of the divine dream that forces Xerxes to stick to his original plan, nor does he acknowledge that it is in fact the wise and cautious Artabanus who takes the final decision to go to war. Instead, Harris suggests, ‘we are meant to look down upon Cambyses and Xerxes because of their lack of self-control, and to see their failures as consequences of their moral defects’.

²¹³ E.g. Kirchberg (1965), 23; Shimron (1989), 35 & n.23; Waters (1985), 99; Long (1987); Van der Veen (1996), 6-7; Hartog (1999); further §3.5-7, §4.2.
²¹⁴ Harris (2001), 178.
Harris’ generally meticulous study is, on this point, representative of a long and powerful tradition of scholarship that discusses character flaw *rather than* pessimistic theological statements or divine deception in order to make Xerxes fully ‘responsible’ for the campaign, often according to notions of ‘moral responsibility’ and ‘guilt’ that look remarkably Christian (further §3.7). Katharina Röttig has recently tackled this tradition head on, focusing on scholarship of the last several decades, but, as we have seen, Xerxes’ dreams were already edited out of interpretations of Herodotus and the Persian Wars in the sixteenth century, and have been consistently deleted by moralizing commentators.

The most unabashed work of theodicy in modern times is Hugh Lloyd-Jones’s *The Justice of Zeus*. Herodotus is given only fleeting treatment: Lloyd-Jones concedes that disasters in the *Histories* might be precipitated by divine action, but argues that the justice of the divine punishment is not thereby diminished.

In the *Iliad* once the gods have determined to destroy a man they see to it that he decides disastrously, and so also in Herodotus; but neither in the *Iliad* nor in Herodotus do they destroy him without just cause.

Lloyd-Jones grants himself a remarkable interpretative prerogative: to deduce from the presence of some ‘crime-punishment’ narratives in the *Histories* that all instances of misfortune represent just ‘punishment' for 'crime'. Even if Herodotus mentions no crime when talking of a character's misfortune or supernaturally-ordained doom, Lloyd-Jones suggests, we should assume that he assumed a crime to be at the beginning of the chain of causation. In asserting immunity from the absence of

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215 See Röttig (2010), 27-45 (on Xerxes’ decision-making in Herodotus) & 46-79 (on the arguments presented by Pietsch (2001) and Schulte-Altedorneburg (2001)). For other twentieth-century attempts to justify ignoring Xerxes’ dreams, see §3.7.
216 See above §1.3 (n.45 on Melanchthon) & §1.5 (n.89 on De Jongh).
218 Lloyd-Jones (1971), 67-8: ‘Dodds finds evidence for Herodotus’ belief in the hostility of the gods in those passages, not infrequent in the history, in which it is said that Candaules, Miltiades or another “was bound to come to a bad end.” Nowhere is it implied that this was in virtue of a purely arbitrary decision; nowhere have we reason to suppose that the fate of the character in question was assigned to him unjustly. As Latte has remarked, it often happens in Herodotus that part of a causal chain can be observed, but that its beginning is not there. That may be because the historian is not able to supply it or because he does not feel obliged to; but so many causal chains of crime and punishment are shown in their full extent that it is not safe to conclude that Herodotus thought that the beginning did
textual support, Lloyd-Jones follows where Meuss led almost a century before.\textsuperscript{219} His analysis of divine \textit{phthonos} relies on one version of the developmental interpretation proposed by Rohde (cf. §1.6.1, §3.4.1): ‘in Aeschylus, as in Herodotus and Pindar, the primitive concept of divine envy has undergone refinement’, and in these authors, as in Euripides, ‘[divine] \textit{phthonos} actually formed part of justice’.\textsuperscript{220} ‘The gods punish Xerxes for his hybris’, he concludes, although (as he concedes) the ‘presumptuous and impious’ behaviour he displays on the campaign can scarcely be the crime for which he is punished by being forced into the campaign. Lloyd-Jones offers a detailed and honest exposition of the fact that Herodotus represents the gods as clearly and directly involved in misleading Croesus and Xerxes—scenes commonly read as self-deception since Meuss—and ultimately falls back upon the argument that the deception of Xerxes is punishment for the inherited ‘stigma of being an aggressor against the Greeks.’\textsuperscript{221} The weakness of Lloyd-Jones's position is that, though recognizing the importance of divine \textit{phthonos} to Herodotus' narratives of the past, he offers no analysis of the \textit{phthonos} speeches themselves (particularly those patently irreconcilable with his position, e.g. 7.46), nor does he explain how we are to find in them the lessons of crime and justified punishment that they must, on his reading, contain.

But the interpretative tradition in which Lloyd-Jones worked has proved popular. Darbo-Peschanski (1987) considers the \textit{Histories} to evince ‘divine justice’ at three different levels: in broader structural terms (restoring the balance of \textit{dikê} (‘justice’) when it is disrupted by generations of Persian \textit{hubris}), as a response to specific impieties against the gods, and as a redress to human justice when excessive or insufficient.\textsuperscript{222} Darbo-Peschanski attempts to demonstrate in all cases she examines that the misfortunes suffered by the characters result from their former injustices, impieties, or \textit{hybris}, often leading her to provide moralizing rationalizations that

\textsuperscript{not exist'} (my italics). The point, of course, is that relating a narrative in which impiety is punished is scarcely equivalent to the statement that \textit{all} human suffering is the result of justified divine punishment.

\textsuperscript{219} Meuss (1888), 13 n.2 & 11 (cited at §1.5, near n.110).
\textsuperscript{220} Lloyd-Jones (1971), 69-70.
\textsuperscript{221} On divine deception see Lloyd-Jones (1971), 60-3.
\textsuperscript{222} Darbo-Peschanski (1987), 54-72.
smooth over arbitrary and cruel events that are linked to the gods.\textsuperscript{223} ‘Divine justice’ and ‘divine jealousy’ are used in free variation with one another, as if self-evidently synonymous, presumably on the basis of the scholarship reviewed above (§1.5), which continues to dominate all of the ‘classic’ commentaries other than Asheri. Similar readings occasionally influence Lateiner, who argues for Herodotus’ vision of cosmic ‘equipoise’ guarded by gods who are ‘custodians of this transcendent equality’, operating through both \textit{tisis} and \textit{phthonos},\textsuperscript{224} while Alan Lloyd argues for \textit{dikê} as the defining principle of divine action.\textsuperscript{225}

The impact of such theological dogmas on literary readings of Herodotus' narrative is well exemplified by Helmut Löffler, who attempts to show that all disasters suffered by characters proceed directly from their own bad decisions and are thus self-induced. Deceptive oracles and dreams are unmentioned or dismissed. Löffler argues that Croesus’ decision to campaign against Persia after ‘misinterpreting’ the Delphic oracle (1.53) are entirely due to personal error, derived from Croesus’ mistaken values (\textit{Bewertungskriterien}): ‘Expansion’, an ‘obsession with the present’ (\textit{Gegenwartsbezogenheit}) and ‘self-satisfaction’ (\textit{Sebstzufriedenheit}).\textsuperscript{226}

So charakterisiert tritt Kroisos in den Entscheidungsprozess, der im Kampf mit Kyros und Kroisos’ Niederlage endet…Auf diese Weise bewertet Kroisos seine gewählte Option falsch, da er die Informationen, die neben den Orakeln auch von einem Warner stammen, nicht korrekt interpretiert und ihre ihn selbst betreffende Bedeutung nicht erkennt… Somit liegt die Verantwortlichkeit beim lydischen König, nicht bei den Göttern.

\textsuperscript{223} On the story of Atys and Adrastus and the oracular misinterpretation: §4.2, nn.7-8. 
\textsuperscript{224} Lateiner (1989), 195, who offers these as two of his ‘five often overlapping, sometimes inconsistent systems for the explanation of historical events’ (namely ‘balance’, ‘\textit{phthonos}’, ‘fate’, ‘the cycle’, and ‘references to divinity’). Later, however, he describes \textit{phthonos} as ‘an immoral and divine envy’, (1989), 196.
\textsuperscript{225} Lloyd (2007 = 1988), 233, sees Herodotus’ theology as ‘dominated by the concept of a cosmic law (\textit{δίκη}) according to which every element had its time and place, its fixed boundaries or limitations which must be observed. Human beings were obliged to recognize this framework and integrate themselves with it. If they did, they were \textit{δίκαιοι} and won the favour of the gods; if they did not, they were \textit{άδικοι}. This state of \textit{άδικη} was reached pre-eminently by the transgression of boundaries in relation to gods or human beings, and exposed the \textit{άδικος} to divine retribution; it could arise either through actions or simply though nurturing a presumptuous attitude of mind.’ Similarly, for Hartog (1999), 194, Herodotus documents ‘the deep and slow historical process which leads in the long run from \textit{adikia} to \textit{tisis}’.
\textsuperscript{226} Löffler (2008), 38.
The clear theological convictions that motivate Löffler’s occasionally tendentious analysis require that some parts of the text be suppressed, and others emphasized: Löffler says nothing of Croesus’ almost excessive concern with consulting the oracle to discover what course of action the gods suggest and how long his prosperity will last, nor does he give any weight to the narrator’s statement that Croesus’ ‘primary’ motivation for invading Persia was his ‘trust’ in the ‘deceptive (kibdēlos) oracles’ from Delphi (1.75.2). Löffler argues, instead, that ‘desire for land’ is Croesus’ dominating motive. Divine phthonos receives no specific treatment other than a vague suggestion that divine phthonos and the subsequent disaster is a response hybris and constitutes ‘punishment’ (Bestrafung). Such readings are hard to reconcile with the text (further §4.2), and the frequency with which they can be found attests to the thrall exerted by unquestioned assumptions about theology and narrative typology.

Löffler is typical in concertedly re-presenting the text to highlight aspects of Croesus’ behaviour that are considered negative and suppress those that are sensible or cautious, and likewise to bury the role of Delphic deception and amoral divine ‘resentment’. Taken as a group, exclusively character-based explanations for misfortune show a protean diversity. Löffler’s primary paradigm for the fall of Croesus and Polycrates is flawed decision-making, usually caused by hybris (understood in the ‘traditional’ sense debunked by Fisher) and an obsession with expansion; Marg’s influential paradigm for interpreting the Histories is that ‘self-confidence’ (Selbstsicherheit) leads to self-inflicted disasters; for Marinatos disasters are caused by ‘Machtbessenheit und Blindheit für die Wahrheit’; Van der Veen considers devotion to ‘pleasure’ (which counsels the opposite of ‘reason’) to be the origin of the ‘irrational impulses’ that lead to disaster, and considers Croesus and Polycrates—and specifically not the gods—responsible for their own downfalls; For Hartog it is Croesus’ status as a barbarian that pushes him towards consulting always

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227 Löffler (2008), 182. Löffler talks on other occasions of the ‘den Neid der Götter und deren bestrafendes Eingreifen’, making it clear again, that he considers the phthoneros nature of the gods to be linked to some kind of responsive punishment (but the combination of a typically pejorative and non-moral emotion (Neid) is in tension with the positive and moral response implied by the notion of Bestrafung).
228 Fisher (1992), 2-5.
too little or too much—Greeks would have known how to respond to and interpret the oracles he received (1.53); In Munson’s view ‘divine necessity tends to concern the ethically rational result of a non-necessary and culpable human action’, where 'ethically rational' action operates according to the principle of tisis or retribution; Kindt argues that Croesus’ foolish attempt to ‘communicate with the gods on their level’ leads to his blindness towards the oracle’s helpful advice and his disastrous attack on Persia (following Meuss in suggesting that oracles are, in fact, benevolent attempts to aid mortals). For Barker, it is the trappings of Eastern despotism that make oracular misinterpretation inevitable, by contrast to the successful interpretations possible in more democratic constitutional frameworks: Croesus loses the ‘struggle... between kingly power and the polysemic divine world’.229

A plethora of rather stark polarities are thus alleged to divide successful oracular consultation from unsuccessful, in each case predicated upon the assumption of the providential order of Herodotus' narrative world in which the good are aided and the bad thwarted: Greek versus barbarian, democrat versus monarch, humble versus arrogant, rational versus pleasure-seeking, pious versus impious, hermeneutically-nimble versus allegorically-challenged. The bleak view of many of Herodotus’ principle characters (particularly Croesus, Polycrates, and Xerxes) that emerges from such studies is the inevitable result of the theological assumptions that they share: that in Herodotus man is ‘responsible’ for his own misfortunes—the gods are either uninvolved or benevolent or obey reasonable and fair rules. As we shall see in chapters three and four, key scenes and details that run contrary to these readings—speeches on divine phthonos, divine deception, and the wise and praiseworthy behaviour exhibited by the those who suffer misfortune—are reinterpreted or trivialized on weak pretexts, or simply omitted, even by scholars who pay lip-service to the notion that the Histories are tragic.230 The ‘tragic’ elements of Herodotus’

230 While broader discussions often accept the notion that the Histories adopt contemporary ‘tragic’ story patterns, the interaction of ‘tragedy’ and ‘divine justice’ has rarely been tackled on the detailed level of characterization and drama. Additionally, many continue the renaissance tradition of
narratives, are, in other words, removed from the text, and the stories nudged into the shape of morality plays. It is this drive towards ‘coherence’ (focused on a particularly indefensible conception of what Herodotus’ gods must be like) that Gould, Harrison, Pelling, and Versnel have resisted, since it generally involves suppressing elements of the more complicated picture.

It is initially surprising that many literary scholars of Herodotus have entirely ignored the claims of their anthropologically-minded colleagues who stress the aspects they ignore (such as ‘immoral’ divine phthonos). The tendency to disregard these conclusions is, however, particularly comprehensible: it is hard to imagine what kind of story line or characterization might emerge from a work in which (according to many scholars who stress Herodotean inconsistency) there is such a superabundance of ‘morals’. If the conclusions of Versnel, for example, are to be accepted, the two great misfortunes of Croesus are to be attributed simultaneously to ‘random chance’, ‘divine envy’, ‘divine justice’, ‘predetermined fate’, and the mechanical rotation of the ‘circle of human affairs’.

While the anthropologically-minded classicist is predisposed to accept the unsatisfactory nature of Herodotus’ theological thought—as we have seen, he often considers the identification of logical errors an essential part of his analytical task—his literary peer is left with the less appealing prospect of picking up the fragmented pieces that, he is told, create no overarching narrative, have no wider moral significance, and would thus seem to deny any coherent characterization. This is, I suspect, one reason why the claims of Herodotus' theological inconsistency have, to date, met with little acceptance amongst literary scholars. Another is that it undermines the hermeneutic principle that has dominated Herodotean scholarship since the sixteenth century and can be considered a continuous exegetical tradition with its own momentum, which produces a reading that many find aesthetically appealing, and which can certainly be found (to a greater or lesser degree) at some points in the massive and diverse Histories: that individual characters are responsible

interpreting ‘tragedy’ as a form of morality play characterized by ‘divine justice’ and punishment of ‘hubris’, on which see Fisher (1992), 2-3, Lurie (2004); cf. §3.5.1 n.74.

231 The primary exception being Pelling (2006b).
for their own disasters, that god is a force for punitive justice (e.g. 2.120.5) or balance (e.g. 3.108.2), or that a principle of reciprocity is at work in the *Histories*. Herodotus’ writings are far from unique in being the focus of theodicy from the Renaissance to the present. Lurie has documented the interpretation of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus* over a similar period, a story in many ways parallel to that described in this chapter. Versnel has been outspoken in his criticism of attempts to moralize awkward passages to produce consistent theology of divine justice,232 and Röttig has done valuable work on the divine dreams of Xerxes.

Chapters three and four will examine the validity of the modern concepts that scholars from Melanchthon to the present have used to classify divine action in the *Histories* in asserting the ubiquity of divine justice and human responsibility, and many other similar positions. Terms for human behaviour (particularly that of Croesus, Polycrates, and Xerxes) include the legal and the religious and they vary between the condemnatory (‘arrogantia’, ‘superbia’, ‘scelera’; ‘crime’, ‘guilt’, ‘sin’, ‘injustice’, ‘*hubris*’; ‘Frevel’, ‘Schuld’, ‘Sünde’, ‘Unrecht’) and the equivocal (‘responsibility’, ‘juridically responsible’, ‘error’; ‘Verantwortlichkeit’, ‘Fehler’, ‘Irrtum’; ‘offense’, ‘erreur’). Divine action and emotion is described as benevolent or punitive (‘modestiam discere’, ‘castigare’, ‘poenire’, ‘vindicare’, ‘ultor’, ‘benevolentia’; ‘justice’, ‘punishment’, ‘indignation’, ‘benevolence’; ‘Bestrafung’, ‘Strafe’, ‘Gerechtigkeit’, ‘Gnade’, ‘Wohlwollend’; ‘châtiment’) or in more neutral terms of retribution or balance (‘iustum moderamen’; ‘reciprocity’, ‘balance’; ‘Vergeltung’, ‘Rache’, ‘Ausgleich’; ‘vengeance’, ‘l’équilibre de la *dikê*’, ‘l’ordre du monde’). In Croesus’ case, the entire Lydian logos is typically read in the terms that the Delphic oracle proposes at the end of the story—that Croesus should recognize that he is himself the αἰτιός (‘cause’, 1.91, but see further §4.2) of the predestined sack of Sardis—and in the light of Croesus’ final admission that the ἁµαρτάς (Ionic for ἁµαρτία) was his own, not Apollo’s. The suitability of the modern terms listed above as interpretations of αἰτίς, ἁµαρτάς, νέμεσις, κίβδηλος, and φθονερός, and their elevation to the exclusive guiding principles of the *Histories* will be questioned in the third and fourth chapters.

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1.10. Two Competing Institutions: 
Anthropological Othering and Literary Theodicy

Again and again we have seen a close relationship between wider theories—be they about Herodotus, Greek literature, or the development of religion and the human intellect—and the view that an individual reader or scholar forms of Herodotus’ gods and theology. Mary Douglas’ notion of successive waves of ‘institutional thinking’, cited at the start of this chapter, cautions us to approach readings that initially strike us as patently false with respect, and to take a realistic position on the longevity of our own. But the five centuries of theological study of the Histories discussed here not only show the influence of successive brands of institutional thought upon Herodotus’ readership, as Douglas suggests (unless we define ‘institution’ extremely broadly). This scholarship can also be seen as an evolving set of debates with several rhetorical positions whose aims and arguments have drifted slightly over the centuries (in no concerted direction) but repeatedly returned to the same issues, armed with different paradigms of the nature and history of humanity, religion, and god.

Many readers seem to approach the Histories looking for reflections of themselves, for their heathen opposite, for their primitive past, or simply for generalized rules that can provide a secure framework for literary interpretation. Few have difficulty finding what they seek. The text of the Histories is large enough and the language of any ancient text sufficiently ambiguous to lend superficial support to a great many ideas, each of which, with a modest amount of rhetoric, selective reading, and ingenuity, can be elevated to the sole guiding principle of the narrative, be it divine retribution, divine hostility, divine justice, Fate, or Fortune.

To draw some preliminary conclusions, there seem to be four substantive issues that must be carefully considered if we are to reach an appreciation of Herodotus’ theological and philosophical views, particularly the notion of the ‘phthoneros divinity’ with which this introduction, like Herodotus, is much concerned. Moving from the narrowest to the widest, the first question is: what emotional disposition is
implied by the words *phthoneó, epiphthonos, and phthoneros* in the *Histories* generally, and do they carry the same sense when applied to the gods? Second, we must contextualize the speeches that feature divine *phthonos*: what is the relationship between Solon’s assertion that divinity is *phthoneros*, and the narrator’s assertion that ‘*nemesis* from god’ took Croesus? Is this a confirmation, a contradiction, or a subtle alteration of what Solon said? Third, it is notable that both the narrator and the characters attribute human emotional dispositions to the gods. The question naturally follows: is this divine anthropomorphism intended literally (i.e. does it reveal how Herodotus actually imagined the gods to be) or is this a traditional discourse which Herodotus employs metaphorically to communicate other ideas about human life or history? Neither answer is, on the face of it, implausible, but if we opt for the latter, we will then have to seek the origin of the metaphor, and explore what its propositional content actually is. The fourth issue is the broadest, and must be tackled after the last three: what is the relationship between the notions of divine causation that emerge from the ‘warner’ dialogues and other statements of causation (whether divine or not) in the *Histories*, particularly *tisis* (e.g. 5.56.1; 8.105.1), divine punishment of human injustices (e.g. 2.120.5), divine wisdom and foresight (3.108), and *moira* (as ‘fate’, e.g. 1.91)?

There is currently no scholarly consensus on any of these questions. Without exception, scholars who set out on a literary or religious examination of the *Histories* take the answers to one or more of these questions to be self-evident. We thus have a situation in which divine *phthonos* is, for a majority of scholars, evidence for Herodotus’ belief in an abstract force of punitive, moral divine justice, and for a sizable minority evidence for Herodotus’ belief in an anthropomorphic, malevolent divinity that dominates his conception of human history, or alternatively is completely incompatible with the theological ideas in the rest of his work and of no particular significance. Other scholars, despite all the fuss, assert that the whole question is irrelevant because the *narrator* never himself calls god *phthoneros.*

If we are to attain a clear perception of the theological idea that Herodotus used to frame the misfortunes of the three most significant empires of the *Histories* and the

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war that is its primary subject we must look at these debates in detail. These questions are central to understanding both Herodotus' religious views and his philosophy of history. The rest of this thesis will be focused on answering these questions, attempting to profit from five centuries of debate.

In the second chapter I set out to examine Herodotus’ use of theological discourses on the assumption that human communication and thought in ancient Greece displayed many of the same characteristics that it does in modern societies, including my own. It is my contention that the idea of Herodotus the inconsistent teller of folk tales has shielded the Histories from a systematic exploration of his interaction with the religious discourses of his contemporary world; I begin with the assumption that such discourses existed and that no socialized writer who produces anything of the length and diversity of the Histories can be exempt from them. The current neglect of theological discourses, I suspect, reflects the unwarranted assumptions of a (largely) secular scholarly community that the views of an (ancient) religious thinker will be less internally consistent than a secular or scientific thinker. But it is also, in part, due to the fact that scholars have tended to discuss Herodotus’ narrative style in generalized terms which suggest consistency, rather than emphasizing Herodotus’ stylistic and generic diversity. The opportunity to explore the influence of

234 Put in these (perhaps unsympathetic) terms, the idea is plainly incorrect. It seems to rely primarily on the commitment that some modern religions require to views that seem to face empirical disproof. Given that few atheists and agnostics have actually seen the reasoning or evidence for many of the beliefs that they hold as indisputably true (at least in their arguments with door-to-door Jesuits), the atheist should consider himself to differ from the Jesuit primarily in having chosen a better source of authority (the findings of people who claim to use the scientific method, rather than those who work within the interpretative scheme of various religions). That is, atheists do not tend to have views that are more internally consistent, nor are they generally better able to perceive a logical connection between the individual ideas that respected scientists assert to be true (e.g. the existence of the Higgs-bosun, the importance of genetic mutation in evolution, and the expanding universe) than a creationist can perceive between those that he takes as axiomatic (e.g. intelligent design, God’s love, and the passion of the Christ). Both people are committed to numerous truths accepted from an external authority, and neither set of views is held primarily on the basis that they are logically coherent with one another. The question of ‘coherence’ and ‘incoherence’ seems thus to be a red herring in the search for the difference between religious and non-religious thought today. I would not dismiss the proposition that it is possible to draw general distinctions between religious and non-religious thought (depending on the width of our definition of ‘religion’, see Wilson (1998) for an overview of the issues involved) but it is plainly anachronistic to then retroject this distinction without modification onto a culture in which the relationship between a belief in gods, religious authority, philosophy, logic, and empiricism was completely different.

235 The great exception is book two. I discuss this topic in more detail elsewhere—Ellis (in preparation)—but cf. §2.1.
differing contexts, sources, and writing styles on the religious expression of the same person is one that classical sources rarely afford us. It may, in fact, be the closest we can come to seeing a single Greek individual cope with chaotic and competing discourses with which every member of the society was familiar, and which have been so well described in several recent works.²³⁶

Ironically a ‘defence’ of Herodotus seems as necessary in the twenty-first century as it was in the sixteenth, but it must demonstrate that the notion of the ‘rational’ and ‘consistent’ modern atheist that lurks as the implicit contrast to many recent intellectual portraits of Herodotus is an unreasonable point of comparison. Yet we can go further. As I shall argue in chapter three, some of the difficulties that anthropological and literary scholars experience in interpreting the Histories are based on a misconception: they work with a dichotomy between a uniformly just and moral and uniformly unjust and malevolent or immoral conception of divinity, rather than an examination of Herodotus’ ideas in their own terms.²³⁷ A debate inherited from Anciens (who stressed ‘divine justice’ in their analysis of Greek religion) and Modernes (who stressed ‘divine malevolence’) has created the illusion that it is inherently contradictory to attribute the activities of ‘punishing injustice’ (or ‘avenging impiety’) and ‘resenting success’ to the same divinity, as if these attributes were drawn from two different, logically exclusive sets. They are, of course, if one is a Platonist. I, however, like most scholars am not. I consider these to be different attributes that gods, like harsh tyrants or abusive fathers, might possess (though it makes them poor company) against which logic has nothing to protest. The assumption that ‘punishing great injustices’ implies a wider belief in ‘divine justice’ (according to which the gods must always behave in a moral fashion) is one I take to be part of the cultural baggage that the modern reader brings to the text from his neo-Platonic (i.e. Christian or post-Christian) culture. As we shall see in chapter three, no argument has yet been advanced why it should be logically incoherent to believe in divinities whose personalities, unlike that of any class of beings with of which we have experience, are not entirely moral or entirely immoral. Likewise, most scholars in all

²³⁷ For the idea that the Greek conception of divine action is not to be paralleled with our own see Ranulf (1933/4.1), 84-112. For some difficulties in his analysis see §3.2-4.
periods assume that divine *phthonos* might be either a purely ‘immoral’ emotion (a negative reaction to human success or happiness) or a purely ‘moral’ emotion (a negative reaction *only* to transgressive crimes of thought or deed). One of the few scholars to question this assumption was the sociologist, Svend Ranulf, whose study of divine *phthonos* argued that Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Herodotus, along with most of the Athenian public, did not perceive any distinction between the divine punishment of crime (which he dubbs ‘Type I’), the capricious destruction of the innocent (‘Type II’), and the jealous destruction of the boastful, arrogant, or prosperous (‘Type III’), hence the apparent interchangeability of these (to us) distinct ‘types’. But Ranulf’s important realization—that Greek theological ideas cannot neatly be mapped onto Christian and Platonic thought—has not influenced the way scholars approach the topic.

Analysis on the basis of divine morality and immorality, a tendency to view theological variety through the rather narrow lens of religious or folk ‘inconsistency’, and a rather simplified approach to the pragmatics of interpretation have left us with an unsatisfactory, and deeply unsympathetic view of Herodotus, an author of subtlety, diversity, and intelligence, and a dramatist of great skill. Meanwhile, largely unaffected by the claims of anthropological classicists, most literary scholars of the *Histories* continue in the venerable tradition of the classical establishment by assuming that ‘divine justice’ or ‘reciprocity’ are the guiding principles for the interpretation of all characters and plots within the *Histories*. A majority of scholars therefore suppress, deny, or trivialize those ideas they perceive as incompatible with ideas of divine reciprocity and divine justice. Yet these are elements crucial not only to a full appreciation of Herodotus’ theology, but also to the exquisite and tragic narratives of the *Histories*. The following three chapters will offer some new analyses of Herodotean theology, the nature of his theological variety, and relationship between theology, narrative, and characterization in the *Histories*.

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238 Ranulf (1933/4.1), 84-112.
Chapter Two
Herodotus’ Religious Discourses

2.1 Genre and Theology: Ancient and Modern Perceptions.

In the first century B.C. Varro identified three different types of ‘theology’:¹ the fabulous or mythical, used by the poet; the natural or physical, used by the philosopher; and the civil, used by the state.² The distinction between the theology of the poet and the philosopher, at least, was of great antiquity, with its roots in Xenophanes’ protests against the Homeric and Hesiodic portrayal of the gods:

πάντα θεοῖς ἀνέθηκαν Ὄμηρός θ’ Ἡσίοδός τε,
ὅσα παρ’ ἀνθρώποισιν ὄνειδεα καὶ ψόγος ἐστίν,
κλέπτειν μοιχεύειν τε καὶ ἄλληλους ἀπατεύειν. (Fr. 11 DK)

Where, in the sixth century, Xenophanes suggests that particular conceptions of the gods are found in Homer and Hesiod (whose names stood for most epic and didactic hexameter poetry), from Euripides to Varro certain notions of divinity were expressed as typical of poets (unqualified), that is, of the ποιητής or ἀοιδός.

² Varro seems to have used the Greek terms for the first two categories mythicon and physicon (which Augustine translates as fabulosus and naturalis respectively), and the Latin term civilis for the last (Augustine Civ. Dei 6.5).
Euripides’ Heracles seems to make a poetry/prose distinction when he dismisses Theseus’ bleak presentation of the unethical nature of the gods:³

δείται γὰρ ὁ θεός, εἶπερ ἢστ' ὥρθος θεός,
οὐδενός· ἀοιδὸν οἶδε δύστηνοι λόγοι.

A god, if truly a god, lacks nothing—
These are the wretched stories of the poets.

The notion of a dichotomy between the gods of poetry and those of prose endured,⁴ unrepentant in its inaccuracy, despite the fact that Xenophanes’ criticisms of Homeric and Hesiodic theology were themselves couched in hexameters, and Herodotus’ Histories, the first surviving work of prose, gives a central position to the notion of ‘divine phthonos’ which was considered a quintessentially ‘poetic’ lie’.⁵

There is, then, a long history to the idea that genre or context, in their most general senses, are related to the presentation of the gods. Although ancient polemic focused on issues such as anthropomorphism and morality (Xenophanes) or morality and disposition towards humanity (Euripides, Plato), it is likely that there were other divergences between genres, and indeed Isocrates (Evag. 9-10) focuses not on the moral peculiarities of poetry, but the technical licences that were forbidden to writers of prose (logos as opposed to poiēsis), as well as the different rules in the portrayal of the gods: namely the possibility of direct human/divine interaction.⁶

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³ E. Her. 1345-6; cf. Solon, fr. 29 West.
⁴ P. Resp. 10, 607b (contrasting philosophiê and poiêtikê); Arist. Met. 983a (criticizing hoi poiētau), Isoc. Evag. 9-10. Herodotus’ own comments on Homer suggest familiarity with and a degree of endorsement of this tradition (further §2.2, §2.11).
⁵ Aristotle seems to have had Herodotus in mind when he criticized the ‘poetic’ notion of divinity as phthoneros (cf. §1.2 n.34), despite his misleading (but influential) insistence that the Histories is to be classed as historia and not poiēsis in its subject matter and approach (Poetics 1541a36-b10). There is potential for confusion on this point since Aristotle elsewhere calls him Ηρόδοτος ὁ μυθολόγος (de gen. an. 756b5, cf. HA 579b2) and Erodotos fabularum scriptor (fr. 248 Rose)—on the associations of myth- words in Aristotle’s day see Fowler (2011); cf. De Ste Croix (1975), 50 & n.33. In these passages, however, I suspect that Aristotle is writing on natural topics and his focus is on Herodotus’ factual errors (i.e. the reproduction of fish and lions, the flooding of the Nile) not on his use of ‘poetic’ theology or his narratorial persona. Aristotle’s judgement in the Poetics seems to be an evaluation of Herodotus’ aims (based on the Egyptian logos etc.); the derogatory comments in his biological studies seem directed at Herodotus’ failure to live up to this standard. (Aristotle, to my knowledge, nowhere refers to Herodotus’ use of ‘poetic’ mythology.)
⁶ The notion of representing the gods according to mythos or poiēsis is found in several ancient scholia on Homer, e.g.: T II. 24.526 ex., bT II. 20.25 ex., esp. bT. II. 8.429 ex. See Nünlist (2009), 269-70.
Recently scholars have noted numerous examples of associations between performance context or genre and particular assumptions about and language for the gods.\(^7\) Parker, for example, has compared the destructive tendencies of tragic gods with the more benevolent gods of comedy and rhetoric.\(^8\) Mikalson has argued that genre was an important factor in determining the degree of anthropomorphism in the depiction of the gods.\(^9\) Versnel likewise stresses the role of context—both literary and non-literary—in eliciting different religious associations and discourses:\(^{10}\)

various different conceptions of the unity or diversity of gods with one name and different epithets or different residences are stored in the mind of a person, but... it is the shift in context—literary, social, regional—(or on the level of education) that triggers a specific focus.

If these scholars are right, we might expect that when Herodotus and his contemporaries talked about ‘god’ or ‘the gods’ they were not drawing on a single or a stable concept. It is, of course, all too easy to treat all areas of thought that concern ‘god(s)’\(^{11}\) as a conceptual unity, accustomed as we are to thinking with categories like ‘religious’ and ‘secular’. But this is not how things look to an individual to whom the gods are not a perverse and discrete intellectual construct, but part of the received fabric of life.

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\(^7\) The idea can be found in one form as early as Meuss (1889).
\(^8\) Parker (1997) explores various ways of resolving the difference in presentation: an important consideration is that the gods are usually imagined in relation to Athens (i.e. the audience) in rhetoric and comedy, but in relation to other cities (often the rival Thebes) in tragedy; cf. Parker (1983), 15, and, with different emphasis, Classen (1962) who uses the metaphor of ‘clothing’ or ‘dressing’ to describe the change that occurs to philosophical ideas when they are given poetic form.
\(^{10}\) Versnel (2011), 83 (see also 143-4, and 473-4 on the ‘ludic’). Similar views can be found in studies on Roman religion, e.g., Rüpke (2007); Davies (2005), 12-13; Levene (1993); cf. Gunther (2009), on religious discourses in Demosthenes.
\(^{11}\) By '(the) god(s)' I refer to all non-mortal beings and forces however imagined, including Moira and Tychê (which are sometimes treated as divinities, sometimes as powers that are qualitatively different from gods). The purpose is to avoid more specific terms which will be appropriate in some contexts but not others (such as ‘the gods’, ‘Zeus’, ‘Heraclès’, ‘god’, ‘hero’, ‘the divine’, ‘a daimôn’, ‘Moira’, ‘the Fates’, ‘the wise element’, etc.), and likewise to avoid modern terms which are suitably general but carry connotations sometimes inappropriate in the technical analysis attempted (such as ‘theology’, ‘religion’, ‘pantheon’, ‘the supernatural’). The closest classical Greek comes to a general term denoting all things related to god(s) is perhaps a singular or plural abstract noun formed from the adjective θείος (‘divine’), i.e. τὸ θεῖον or τὸ θεῖον. But neither naturally refers to (for example) the somewhat abstract notion of ‘god’ in the Ionian philosophers as well as individual divinities as they appear, say, in Homer. The object of this study is all of these different conceptions in Herodotus.
If we look for the opinions of an individual author on all the areas which fall within our concept of ‘religion’ our quest is liable to throw up strange results—much as if we sought the attitude of one of our contemporaries on a category she does not typically treat as a discrete area of experience. Take ‘science’ for instance.\textsuperscript{12} Science can refer to an intellectual process (hypothesizing, testing, and theorizing according to the scientific method), it can designate various areas of education and work whose primary activity is associated with that process (‘the sciences’), and it can act as a label for various ideas and objects that are considered to derive from that process (computers, cars, and quantum theory might be considered the fruits of science). But to conduct a detailed study of someone’s behaviour and statements with a view to discovering their view of ‘science’ might yield odd results: one can, without any sense of self-contradiction, dislike the iPhone, support the tenets of evolutionary theory, and think that biology should not be compulsory at A-level. This analogy will only go so far but it illustrates that the angle from which we approach—in this case, singling out all behaviour connected in any way with the existence of supernatural beings—might create a false expectation of unity.

It seems probable that Sophocles, for example, would have altered the way he talked about the gods when performing his religious duties as general of the Athenian army, when bringing a prosecution before the Areopagus, when writing a tragedy for the City Dionysia, and when asked to give a rationalizing account of the nature of the gods and the origins of Greek religion. It may be that Xenophanes’ epic poems on the ‘founding of Colophon’ engaged to a greater degree with Homeric and Hesiodic theology than the more polemical fragments on theology that have survived.\textsuperscript{13} One difficulty with such conjectures, however, is that we have only Sophocles’ tragedies, and none of Xenophanes’ epic poetry: there is no instance in which we can compare extensive writing by a single individual from the classical period in more than one

\textsuperscript{12} The parallelism between science and religion, two competing, mainstream explanatory systems in modern society is also made by Davies (2005), 10-13; For the use which scientific and academic theory makes of numerous incompatible explanatory systems see Horton (1993).

\textsuperscript{13} Diogenes Laertius 9.20, mentions two longer poems by Xenophanes: the \textit{Κολοφόνος κτίσις} and τὸν εἰς Ἑλλάν τῆς Ἰταλίας ἀποκατόκτων. On the relationship between Xenophanes’ theological views and his sympotic fr.1 DK see Ford (2002), 56-66, who resists a reading in terms of theological dogmatism.
fully distinct genre.\textsuperscript{14} To this deficit the \textit{Histories} is a partial exception. Herodotus, as scholars have long noted, appropriates stylistic and narratological elements from diverse literary and oral sources. By cherry-picking the most pronounced examples of each writing style it would be possible to observe differences as great as those that distinguish many ancient genres from one another. The narrator of the \textit{Histories} is sometimes a fallible enquirer into the past, at other times an omniscient storyteller with unproblematic access to the thoughts of characters.\textsuperscript{15} The work contains dramatic plots structured around prophecies of inevitable doom, sustained logical argumentation, catalogues apparently modelled on Homeric epic, vivid and pathos-laden dialogues on the nature of human life, careful evaluation of oral sources by reasoned argument, stylized rhetorical debates, ethnographic reports, battle scenes, detailed descriptions of physical objects and places, brief summaries of the reigns of entire dynasties, and a host of anecdotal curiosities. From a narratological point of view it is possible to chart Herodotus' stylistic variation, revealing that he narrates his work in several partially distinct modes, which borrow elements from other literary and oral genres.\textsuperscript{16} Even after such a cursory summary, we might expect context to have a great impact upon what Herodotus has to say about ideas as protean and all-pervasive in Greek society as god(s). As such, the \textit{Histories} affords us the opportunity of observing what otherwise can only be inferred about the operation of classical Greek religion.

Although brief comments by Scullion and Mikalson have pointed towards this sort of explanation, no study has attempted to chart the effect of generic or stylistic variation on Herodotus’ treatment of (the) god(s) in detail. Scullion, for example, considers the

\textsuperscript{14} Potential exceptions are Euripides (Satyr plays and tragedies) and Xenophon (philosophical reminiscences against ‘historical’ writings—although the generic categories here are fairly fluid).

\textsuperscript{15} De Bakker (2007), 7-9 & 21-2, argues that Herodotus uses two narrative personae, one resembling the Homeric narrator the other resembling the Hippocratic narrator; De Jong (2004), 107, concludes that ‘the Herodotean narrator has the persona of a historian, poses as an epideictic speaker, and allows himself the liberties of an epic singer’. See also Griffiths (1999), Marincola (1987), 131-6, and Ellis (forthcoming).

\textsuperscript{16} Throughout this chapter I use the term ‘genre’, for want of a better word to refer to a particular confluence of narratological and linguistic conventions, usually tied to particular performance contexts. I do not on every occasion mean to imply the existence of completely discrete traditions of authorship or performance: in the mid fifth century there is much overlap and borrowing, and all pre-Herodotean prose genres (e.g. ‘ethnographic enquiry’ or the ‘Ionian novella’) are largely hypothetical and uncertain (see De Jong (1999), 242-51; (2002), 257-8; De Bakker (2007), 20-21 & n.27).
difference between ‘the divinity’ and individual named divinities to be ‘a difference in idiom between Herodotus and the poets’. But the most common approach to Herodotean theology and religion since the nineteenth century has been to consider statements about god(s) as isolated theological propositions and to directly compare them—usually on a fairly literal interpretation—with others, without paying much attention to the literary context (cf. §2.10). If theological ideas from various parts of the work appear to conflict, the scholar may either deploy his own theological reasoning (dismissing one or another idea, arranging them into a hierarchy, or inventing methods of reconciliation), or admit that Herodotus had no coherent theology. But if, as I shall argue, Herodotus was employing various conventionalized modes of theological representation which he and his audience would have understood as such, the methodology of decontextualizing individual theological ideas and then generalizing them to the rest of the work must be re-examined, along with the relatively common tendency to interpret all theological statements literally.

This chapter, therefore, aims to deepen our understanding of the all-pervasive phenomenon of ‘inconsistency’, and to explore what it can tell us about the mind of a well-travelled, apparently pious, elite Greek from fifth-century Halicarnassus. A recurring question will be the following: How did Herodotus relate to the different discourses observable in the work, in particular to the often explicitly theological oracular texts which he cites frequently and whose truth he explicitly avers on one occasion (8.77)? As an Anglican relates to Genesis? As Jehovah’s Witness to Revelation? As a Renaissance Humanist to Plato? As a secular poet to Old Testament psalms? As the Derveni author to Orpheus? As Apollonius of Rhodes to Homer?

This array of paradigms is intended to open up our minds to the many types of relationship a writer can have with texts they admire, cite, or imitate, and consider to contain inspired or valuable truths about god or humanity. If each of the above individuals were asked to describe their relationship with the text in question, only a few would choose to describe the text as ‘literally true’ or ‘completely false’. Most

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17 Scullion (2006), 197: ‘Solon and Artabanus use Herodotus’ own idiom, but when reporting oracles or violations of sanctuary or retailing stories or events Herodotus often allows the routine language of Greek polytheism to emerge’. Cf. Mikalson (2003), 7, on genre and religion in relation to Herodotus.
would place it somewhere in between these two poles, and those that did not would probably be using a good pinch of rhetoric. Too often Herodotus has been considered to be a religious sceptic or alternatively deeply religious and thus essentially undiscriminating between a vast quantity of incompatible religious ideas, all of which he believes to be equally true. This latter position is a natural corrective to the construction of Herodotus as an entirely secular historian during the twentieth century, but it is rare for people to relate to texts and ideas in such a straightforward way. More often we place them on various types of continuum between ‘true’ and ‘false’ (between ‘literally true’ and ‘allegorically true’, for example) or alternatively we say that their ideas are true in one situation but not another. If bothered by the discrepancy between our own views and tradition we can invent explanations that rationalize the differences. If of a polemical bent we can criticize traditional beliefs and (if we follow our convictions) withdraw from those parts of society that we consider to be connected with such errors. While the availability of so many different types of relationship greatly complicates the task of analysing how authors such as Herodotus interact with, for example, the hexameter oracles they cite, to ignore the question by operating with a model that admits only literal endorsement and total scepticism will lead us to conclusions that will inevitably be inadequate. We must, however, be prepared to accept that we will often be unable to draw any certain conclusions about what exactly someone thinks about the gods only from their repetition of a formalized prayer, performance of a ritual, or use of a theological trope from the literary genre in which they are working.
When asked a direct question—whether about grand ideas (like the nature of god) or simple ones (like the pronunciation of a word)—we often give an answer that does not accord perfectly with what can be observed in our ‘normal’ practice (the ‘observer’s paradox’, bane of linguistic and anthropological fieldwork). The last chapter argued that operating with numerous vocabulary registers and conceptual paradigms is an ordinary part of any human’s navigation of his inevitably fragmented social world, and that this is to be observed even in the case of topics on which people hold considered, reasoned beliefs (§1.8). It is striking that when Herodotus theorizes explicitly about the nature of god(s) at various points in Book 2 he presents a number of ideas that are not explicitly integrated with his comments about god(s) elsewhere. It is thus worth our while looking at these views as a discrete set. These will form a background against which to compare the discourses he uses elsewhere.

Much contemplation of the divine by thinkers before and contemporary to Herodotus asserted the universality of the gods and the impossibility of attaining sure knowledge about their nature or names. Xenophanes’ criticisms of anthropomorphic notions of the gods survive from the early sixth century:

\[\text{ἀλλ’ ει χείρας έχον βόες <ἵπποι τ’> ἢ λέοντες ἡ γράψαι χείρεσσι και ἔργα τελεῖν ὑπὲρ ἄνδρες, ἵπποι μὲν θ’ ἱπποισι, βόες δὲ τε βουσίν ὀμοίας καὶ <κε> θεών ιδέας ἔγραφον καὶ σώματ’ ἐποίουν τοιαθ’, οὖν περ καύτοι δέμας έίχον <ἐκαστοί>}.\]

Xenophanes stresses the impossibility of clear knowledge about the gods:

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18 See, e.g., Labov (1972), 43.
19 Fr. 15 DK, cf. frs. 14 & 16.
καὶ τὸ μὲν οὖν σαφὲς οὕτος ἄνηρ ἵδεν οὐδέ τις ἔσται εἰδῶς ἀμυρὶ θεῶν τε καὶ ἂσσα λέγω περὶ πάντων· εἰ γάρ καὶ τὰ μάλιστα τύχοι τετελεσμένοι εἰπών, αὐτὸς ὁμος οὐκ οἴδε· δόκος δ᾽ ἐπὶ πάσι τέτυκται. (fr. 34 DK)

Herodotus’ contemporary Protagoras pronounced himself unsure of the existence or the nature of the gods, a theological scepticism rarely attested in what survives of sixth- and fifth-century thought.20

περὶ μὲν θεῶν οὐκ ἔχω εἰδέναι, οὕτῳ ὡς εἰςίν οὐθ᾽ ὡς οὐκ εἰςίν οὐθ᾽ ὅποιοι τινες ἴδεαν· πολλά γὰρ τὰ κωλύοντα εἰδέναι ἢ τ’ ἀδηλότης καὶ βραχὺς ὡς ὃς τοῦ ἄνθρωπο

Concerning the gods I have no way to know whether they exist or do not exist, nor what they are like in form. For there are many things that prevent one from knowing, both the lack of clarity, and the brevity of human life.

Many Heraclitean fragments seem to revel in the difficulty of finding a simple and comprehensible formulation of the nature or the names of god(s) (e.g. frs. 32, 76 DK),21 and he appears to directly criticize aspects of contemporary cult practice (fr. 5) and theology (fr. 15). This more polemical approach to theology seems to coexist with a more flexible mode of expression, whereby novel conceptions of divinity are expressed by means of traditional labels, be it Zeus (fr. 32), Thunderbolt (fr. 64), the Erinyes (fr. 94), Apollo (fr. 92), ὁ δαίμων (fr. 79), ὁ θεός (frs. 92, 67, 102), τὸ θεῖον (fr. 114) or οἱ θεοὶ (frs. 5, 30, 53, 24).

There has been much debate about how Herodotus relates to these (to varying degrees) ‘radical’ ideas about the gods: whether, and to what extent, he questions ‘traditional’ notions of divinity.22 As we saw in the last chapter, many Christianizing

20 Protagoras, fr. 80 B 4 DK. Scullion (2006), 201 n.34, however, thinks Protagoras’ scepticism is focused on ‘the normative Greek pantheon, rather than “divinities” or “divinity” of any kind’.

21 Compare A. Ag. 160-3; E. Tro. 885, Bacch. 275-6; Pl. Crat. 400e, Phlb. 12c (Socrates), Xen. Symp. 8.9. (Socrates). Unlike Scullion (2006), 202, I see no categorical difference between statements about the limits of human knowledge of the gods by philosophers like Xenophanes and by dramatists like Aeschylus.

22 On Herodotus and the pre-Socratics generally see Thomas (2000); A. Lloyd (1975), 154-70; Dihle (1962b); Pohlenz (1937), 102-7; Wells (1923), 188-94; Nestle (1908); Diels (1887); Baehr (1830/5.2), ad 3.108. Rentzsch (1892), 15, and Wipprecht (1902), 34, stress Herodotus’ rationalizing attitude towards myth. On the striking but little-discussed similarity between the Socratic doctrine of divine providence and the anthropocentric nature of creation (as reported by Xenophanes) and Herodotus 3.108.2 see §2.12, below.
and Platonizing interpreters since the late eighteenth century have portrayed Herodotus as an enlightened elite thinker who transcends traditional belief in amoral, plural, anthropomorphic gods and moves towards a more moral and allegedly Judeo-Christian conception of divinity (often noting his use of single, generalizing, or abstract terms for divinity, see §2.8). During the same period others have characterized Herodotus as an adherent (or partial adherent) of various ‘traditional’ and ‘popular’ beliefs that are to be contrasted with the more recent, purer, abstract, or moralized vision of divinity that developed in the course of the sixth and fifth century, be it in ‘moralizing’ poets like Aeschylus and Plato, or ‘philosophical’ authors like the Sophists and pupils of Socrates.\(^{23}\) The debate continues, but rarely in the same developmental terms: although some— invariably emphasizing Herodotus’ radical theological statements in Book 2— see Herodotus as a religious sceptic to be contextualized in pre-Socratic philosophy,\(^ {24}\) many studies of Herodotean religion— invariably focusing on his more dramatic narratives, oracles, and direct affirmations of belief— view Herodotus as working with a set of traditional views about god(s) that he deploys subconsciously, while himself having few coherent or self-conscious views on the nature of divinity.\(^ {25}\) Scholars advocating the former position have

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\(^{23}\) See §1.6.2 & n.148.

\(^{24}\) Linforth (1924), (1926), (1928) (e.g. (1924) 286: ‘There can be little doubt that Hdt. must plead guilty to a charge of scepticism in religion’); Classen (1962), 6-7 (Herodotus ‘refrains as much as possible from metaphorical expressions which could make a reader or listener imagine the gods in any particular form’); Burkert (1985) & (1990), 27; Lateiner (1989), 189 (Herodotus not a ‘cracker-barrel apostle for popular religion’); Scullion (2006), 195 & passim, considers Herodotus a radical religious sceptic (e.g. “‘The god’ is cognate with chance in that he is in effect chance rationalised or moralised”). Further §2.12.

\(^{25}\) See §1.6.1-2. Influential have been: Macan (1895.1), cxiv-v (in the final revision Herodotus did not expunge ‘the lower anthropathetic and least defensible descriptions of the divine nature’); Jacoby (1982 = 1913), 28-9 (urges comparison with Sophocles not the Sophists: ‘Weder findet sich bei [Herodot] auch nur ein Spur des sophistischen Skeptizismus oder gar des Atheismus noch irgendwelche nähere Beziehung zu den Anschauung eines oder eines Anaxagoras. Er ist vielmehr von einem festen Glauben beseelt... Die Götter sind reale, persönliche Mächte und greifen unmittelbar in die Geschicke der Menschen ein’; likewise Herodotus’ conception of fate (i.e. 1.91.1) is a ‘ganz naiver Glaube, der... nicht über die homerische Vorstellung hinausgeht’); Lloyd-Jones (1971), 64 (neither Herodotus’ comments on the traditional Greek divinities nor his tendency to talk in generalized terms about the divine ‘prove him to be a sceptic’ or ‘a disbeliever in the personal gods of legend’—Herodotus’ use of various singular terms for ‘god’ is a licence employed when the individual divinity is not known, and in later writers used ‘out of respect’, even when the god responsible was known); Harrison (2000), 192 (Herodotus’ attribution of the invention of Greek beliefs about the gods to Hesiod and Homer ‘seems in no way to devalue those traditional sets of attributes’; contrast Harrison’s more central positioning of Herodotus between skepticism and credulity elsewhere, e.g., 243-7); Mikalson (2003), 139 & n.8, criticizes scholarly assertions of Herodotean ‘skepticism’ and ‘criticisms of Greek beliefs and practices’ (but he also eloquently
observed that one Herodotean passage closely echoes the Protagorean fragment cited above;\textsuperscript{26} others have noted that, when it comes to the validity of prophecy, the narrator directly rejects sceptical positions that also sound distinctly Protagorean.\textsuperscript{27} It has long been realized that the non-anthropomorphic notion of divinity which, Herodotus conjectures, underlies the Persian derision of Greek religious customs (1.131), recalls Xenophanes’ reflections on anthropomorphic\textsuperscript{28} and zoomorphic conceptions of divinity (cited above).\textsuperscript{29} Others have seen reflections of Heraclitean criticisms of traditional cult (cited above) in Herodotean stories and rationalizations.\textsuperscript{30}

One cause for disagreement over Herodotus’ relationship with theological tradition is the lack of consensus about what constitutes ‘normal’ or ‘traditional’ belief, and consequently what is to be considered ‘sceptical’ or ‘non-traditional’. Is one a sceptic if one believes that ‘Greek’ ideas about the gods were invented several centuries

summarizes a great number of Herodotus’ criticisms of Greeks beliefs and practices, e.g. (2003), 139-40.) Fornara (1990), 33-4.

\textsuperscript{26} Burkert (1990), 26, observes the verbal similarities between Protagoras’ doubt about the ‘forms’ of the gods and those of Herodotus: ὶθεν δὲ ἐγένετο ἐκάστος τῶν θεῶν, εἴτε δὴ αἱ ἄμεν πάντες, ὡς ἐκ τὸν ῥήσει, οὐκ ἦσαν μέχρι οὐ πρώην τε καὶ χθές ὡς εἰσεν λόγοι. (2.53.1).

\textsuperscript{27} Cf. 8.77, where Herodotus says he would not ‘say in response’ that oracles are not true, or wish to ‘cast down’ those oracles that speak clearly (Χρησιμοῦσι δὲ οὐκ ἔχω ἀντιλέγειν ὡς οὐκ εἰσὶ ἄμειν, οὐ βουλόμενος ἐναργεῖς λέγοντας πειράσαθα καταβάλλειν) perhaps echoing the titles of two Protagorean works, the Ἀντιλογίαι (DL 9.55) and Ἀλλήκα ή καταβάλλοντες. Nestle (1908), 16, also notes the resonance between Artabanus’ words at 7.10α.1 and Protagoras’ famous statement (απὸ DL 9.51): δότο λόγους εἶναι περὶ παντὸς πράγματος ἀντικειμένους ἄλληλος (cf. the premise and title of the Δισσο Λόγοι).

\textsuperscript{28} Herodotus’ word (see next note) is neither ‘anthropomorphic’ (preferred by modern scholars) nor ‘anthropopathic’ (preferred in antiquity, cf. Nünlist (2009), 278)—terms which refer to the gods having human form and emotions respectively—but anthropophaeous (having ‘human nature’, otherwise only at DS 4.69.1) which leans towards ‘anthropopathic’, but may be a broader term. The criticism that the Persians are imagined to make could, of course, simply refer to form (logical given the reference to ‘statues’ immediately before), but it is not clear why the building of temples and altars should be linked with the notion that the gods resemble humans at all; the underlying reasons for this link—unless we assume that this is simply related information—remain unexpressed.

\textsuperscript{29} 1.131.1-2 (οὐκ ἄνθρωποφυής ἐνόμισαν τοὺς θεοὺς κατὰ περὶ οἱ Ἑλληνες εἶναι), commonly considered Herodotus’ own view. This is supported by the fact that Herodotus takes responsibility for this conjecture, does not contradict it, and that it matches so well with the distance he often seems to keep from Homeric and Hesiodic (i.e. ‘Greek’) notions of the gods. Pohlenz (1937), 105, sees expressions like τὸ θεόν as evidence for Herodotus’ belief in the all-encompassing, Xenophanean ‘divinity’ (Gottheit). On the connection between the two authors: Nestle (1908), 8; Burkert (1990), 20-2; Scullion (2006), 201-2; Thomas (2006), 62. On the possible connection between 1.5.4 and Xenophanes fr. 26 DK see §3.7 n.160.

\textsuperscript{30} On Heraclitus (fr. 5 DK) and Herodotus: Nestle (1908), 9 (on 2.172); Pohlenz (1937), 104 (on 2.49), with discussion below (§2.6). For reflections of Heraclitus’ notion of perpetual flux (B 12 DK) in Herodotus (esp. 1.5.4, 1.207) see Immervahr (1966), 152-3, 311-14.
earlier by fallible poets, that the gods do not resemble humans in their emotions and forms, and that the genealogies implied by most myths about the gods are demonstrably false? Is one anti-traditional if one believes that the names of the gods came from Egypt, or if one can entertain the possibility that Poseidon is not responsible for earthquakes? Or is one only anti-traditional if one believes that cult worship is not efficacious, that the gods do not care for mortals, or that they may not exist at all? Scholars take different positions on such questions and this affords considerable latitude to construct him as an unreflective credulous fabulist or a radical religious sceptic.

From a non-religious perspective it is all too easy to take anything that looks like an affirmation of the existence of the divine or an individual divinity and its involvement in the everyday world as a sign of a general adherence to ‘traditional’ beliefs or, at the other extreme, to take every statement that seems theologically ‘non-traditional’ as signifying a barely concealed but total atheism.\(^{31}\) The naivest of atheist conceits is that there is no middle ground between rational, sceptical atheism and indiscriminately credulous religiosity: that every socially-accepted explanatory schema which incorporates ‘gods’ differs qualitatively from every schema which relies upon hypothesized and unseen quantities that are not gods (e.g. atoms) whose existence is uncritically accepted (by all save specialists or radical sceptics) on the basis of authority alone and play a fundamental role in our mental representation of the world. If we wish to pronounce on how theologically ‘traditional’ or ‘sceptical’ Herodotus is, we must distinguish between subtly different theological positions, and our conclusions must rely upon comparison to the ideas of Herodotus’ contemporaries.

There can be no doubt that, by his own direct statements on divinity in the Egyptian logos, Herodotus presents himself as holding a radically anti-traditional understanding of ‘Greek’ religion, if (as Herodotus does) we take Hesiod and Homer to be the spokespersons for Greek religion. Herodotus argues that all that is distinctive about Greek understandings of the gods was borrowed from the Egyptians

\(^{31}\) For this important point (and many examples of scholars who ignore it in 20th-century Herodotean scholarship) see Harrison (2000), 4-7 & 13-17, and his discussion of scepticism.
or made up by Homer and Hesiod about four centuries before his time (2.50-3). According to this theory the forerunners of the Greeks, the Pelasgians, at first used the collective term θεοί to refer to the gods because they were the ones who ‘put and kept in place’ (θέντες... εἶχον) all things and customs. When the names (οὐνόματα) of the individual gods started to arrive from Egypt the Pelasgians consulted the ancient oracle at Dodona whether they should accept them, and received an affirmative response. (This much of the theory is, Herodotus tells us, the story of the priestesses of Dodona; what follows is his own.) Later, once these Egyptian names had been adopted, Hesiod and Homer crafted a ‘theogony’ of the gods for the Greeks, gave them their ‘epithets’, divided up their ‘honours’ and ‘skills’, and communicated their physical ‘forms’. Herodotus’ comment at the start of the Egyptian logos would seem to suggest that he does not consider these traditional Greek beliefs to have any universal authority or truth.32

Τὰ μὲν νῦν θεία τῶν ἁπηγημάτων οία ἦκουσον, οὐκ εἰμὶ πρόθυμος ἐξηγέσθαι, ἡξο ἡ τὰ οὐνόματα αὐτῶν μοῦνον, νομίζων πάντας ἄνθρωπος ἵναν περὶ αὐτῶν ἐπιστασθαι:

The divine things which I was told I am not keen to relate, other than their names alone, for I think that all men know the same amount about them.

Herodotus hereby announces a policy (restated in a different form at 2.65.2) of only relating the ‘names of the gods’—a term which seems to mean ‘distinctions between the gods’ rather than any particular phonetic pattern33—and ignoring ‘theology’ per se.

Having claimed that the Greeks learnt the names of the gods from the Egyptians, Herodotus attempts to explain some of the more awkward differences between traditional Greek and Egyptian chronologies for the gods (cf. 2.145.1). According to

32 2.3.2, interpreting αὐτῶν as referring to τὰ θεία (rather than οὐνόματα), the more convincing interpretation I think, preferred by, e.g., Schuler (1869), 47-8 n.5, Linforth (1924), 286, Mikalson (2003), 144 & n.25.

33 On the meaning of the word οὐνόμα in this context see Linforth (1926), 10-11, whose interpretation remains the most persuasive: that Herodotus considers the (different) Greek and Egyptian sounds to be equivalent, like the common nouns ὕδωρ and ὕδωρ, and feels free to use either; his position is largely followed by Lattimore (1938). See also discussions in Burkert (1985b), Hartog (1988), 241-8, Scullion (2006), 198, and for an alternative view see Harrison (2000), 251-64.
the Egyptian priests, the gods had not walked the earth for at least 345 generations, which conflicts with the much shorter time-scale of traditional Greek theology, especially that used by aristocratic elites who traced their lineage back to relatively recent divine or semi-divine ancestors. Based on superior records of the past shown to him by the Egyptian priests, Herodotus makes it clear that Greek genealogies (such as those given by Hecataeus to the Egyptian priests, 2.143), which feature gods only sixteen generations previously, are unequivocally disproven. In supporting his diffusionist theory Herodotus attempts to explain the most obvious discrepancies in the ages which Greeks and Egyptians ascribe to Dionysus, Pan, and Heracles. He argues that the Greeks, unlike the Egyptians, consider Pan and Dionysus young gods because they have confused their real age with that of their arrival in Greece from Egypt (2.144-6, 52.3). While they have no precise explanation for Pan’s birth, ‘the Greeks’ say that Dionysius was born from the thigh of Zeus (implicitly the kind of groundless story invented by Hesiod and Homer to explain the god’s arrival). Herodotus’ investigation into the nature of Heracles takes a different approach: there were two divinities called Heracles, one a relatively young hero, the other one of the ancient twelve gods, known as such to the Egyptians (2.43-5), which the Greeks conflated.

Visible amongst this collection of ideas is a struggle for coherence—precisely what Herodotus is often said to lack—and a clear theoretical statement of the limits of human understanding of the divine in general (his own included), of the sort observable from Xenophanes to Aeschylus.

An area that merits closer examination is what Herodotus has to say about Hesiod and Homer’s ‘invention’ of Greek theology and genealogy:

"Ὄθεν δὲ ἐγένετο ἐκαστὸς τῶν θεῶν, εἴτε δὴ αἰεὶ ἔσαν πάντες, οἷκοι τέ τινες τα εἶδε, οὐκ ἡπιστεῖτο μέχρι σιν ἡ πρώην τε καὶ χθες ός εἰπέν ὁ λόγῳ. Ἡσιοδον γὰρ καὶ Ὄμηρον ἥλικὴν τετρακοσίσιον ἔτεσι δοκεῖ μέο προσβυτέρους γενέσθαι καὶ οἱ πλέον· οὕτω δὲ ἐστὶ οἱ ποιήσαντες θεογονίην Ὀλληνος καὶ τοῖς θεοῖς τὰς ἐπωνυμίας δόντες καὶ τιμᾶς τε καὶ τέχνας διελόντες καὶ εἶδος αὐτῶν σημῆναντες· οἱ δὲ πρότερον ποιηται

34 Herodotus is our first source for this myth alongside a fifth-century red-figure vase (Boston 95.39, soon followed by E. Ba. 242-5, 286-7; cf. DS 5.52.2, Gantz (1993), 112).
Whence each one of the gods came into being, whether they all have existed forever, and what forms and shapes they have, the Greeks did not know (epistasthai) until yesterday or the day before, so to speak. For Homer and Hesiod are, I think, no older than four hundred years before my time. These two were the ones who made (poiein) the theogonies for the Greeks, giving (didonai) them their names, dividing up (dihairein) their honours, and skills, and communicating (semainein) their forms. For the poets that are said to be older than these men were, I think, later. Of these statements, the former is what the priestesses at the temple of Dodona say, but the latter about Hesiod and Homer I myself say.

The interpretation of poiein and the other verbs given in brackets above (semainein, didonai, dihairein, epistasthai) requires consideration, given the relationship of epic poetry (poiêsis) with divine inspiration by the Muse, and the authoritative tone of the term seemainein (‘to communicate’), especially in light of the semi-mystical authority ascribed to the word by many recent scholars. The privileged status of Homer in Greek society—evident from the many attempts to co-opt Homeric authority for completely different belief-systems from Theagenes to the Stoics—raises an important question: is Herodotus referring to what we might term a fabulous invention or inspired discovery?

When we explore Herodotus’ evaluations of the truth-status of epic poetry as a source for facts it becomes clear that the statements found in the poiêmata of Hesiod and Homer are not considered ‘inspired’ truths to be literally believed. In considering the notion of ‘Ocean’, the mythical river that surrounds the world, Herodotus says: ‘I have never known of a river called ocean that exists and I think that Homer or one of the poets (poiêtês) before him invented (heuriskein) it and put it into (espherein) his

35 There is a considerable recent scholarly literature on the word σημαίνω (usually featuring Heraclitus B 93 DK). See, e.g., Nagy (1990), 237-40; Hartog (1999), 193 (‘Semainein introduces, I suggest, the point of view of the god... The oracle seemainein, and the first historian presents himself as the one who seemainein, who “signifies” the past’).

36 Wesseling argued influentially that by the verb poiein Herodotus did not intend to suggest that Homer and Hesiod ‘invented’ these distinctions out of nowhere, but that they first described the consensus of their contemporaries in verse: see (1763), ad 2.53 (‘primos versibus descripsiisse atque ornasse’). The meaning of the terms was much debated by the time of Baehr, whose note provides a brief summary of earlier positions (1830/5.1) ad 2.53, cf. Hoffmeister (1832), 6.
When the evidence of Homer conflicts with Herodotus’ opinion on Helen’s sojourn in Egypt, Herodotus argues that Homer knew of this tradition, but that ‘he did not consider it equally fitting (euprepês) for Epic (epopoiiê)’ and so used another version (2.116.1). Herodotus thus clearly suggests that his own research (historiê) provides a higher standard of veracity than epic poiêsis (interpreted at face value) when the two come into conflict: for Epic features pure inventions and is crafted according to generic rules of ‘what is fitting’. 

This conclusion must be slightly complicated for a full appreciation of Herodotus’ view of Homeric veracity, since Herodotus seems, at points, to be familiar with the idea of Homeric omniscience (or interpretation by hyponoiai), and occasionally calls upon Homeric testimony to support his own claims (further §2.11). Yet there is no suggestion that he considered Homer a source of unquestionable or divinely inspired truth. This is, indeed, what we might expect from a man who professes to believe that all people worship the same gods, that they worship them in quite different ways, under different names, and tell different stories and theogonies about them, who considers Hesiod and Homer to have created the canonical Greek versions, and yet believes that all men know (epistasthai) the same amount about

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37 Herodotus is more open in ridiculing the notion of Ocean in the fourth book (4.36.2): ‘I laugh when I see the many people who have written a "circumnavigation of the earth", and relate it without any sense, drawing/describing Ocean running around the earth, like a circle from a compass’; cf. 4.8.

38 Interestingly, Herodotus himself claims to be guided by the principles of what is ‘fitting’ in his own theological descriptions: in telling why pigs are generally abhorred in Egypt, but are sacrificed in one particular festival he says ‘although I know it, it is not fitting for me to tell it’ (ἐµοὶ µέντοι ἐπισταµένω οὐκ εὑρεχάστηρός ἐστι λέγεσθαι, 2.47.2). But Herodotus, at least in this instance, gives a self-conscious praeteritio rather than telling an ‘untrue’ version.


41 4.29-30.1, where a citation of the Odyssey is used as support (µαρτυρεῖ δὲ µοι) for Herodotus’ views about why cattle lack horns in cold climates; the passage is, in turn, judged to be written ‘correctly’ (ὀρθῶς).

42 So much are the conclusions of Graziosi (2002), 116-17; Ford (2002), 148; Sammons (2012).

43 The Persian ‘theogony’ is mentioned, without description, at 1.132.3. Egyptian holy stories are mentioned or alluded to on occasion (e.g. 2.42, 45, 63, 156), and obviously tackled en masse in the discussion of Heracles, but are, by and large, actively avoided in accordance with Herodotus’ stated policy (2.3.2, 65.2). For general discussion of ‘mythology’ in Herodotus: Linforth (1928).

44 To know (epistasthai) is clearly used with a different sense at 2.3.2 (all men know the same about the gods) and at 2.53.1 (of what the Greeks ‘know’ from Homer and Hesiod). This is not surprising—the word ‘know’ is used equally flexibly in English. For the qualification of epistasthai in the evaluation of sources cf. 2.145.3 (ἀτρεχέως φασι ἐπίσασθαι).
divine things (*ta theia*, 1.3.2). Sure human knowledge about the gods is, in Herodotus’ express statements at least, very limited.

This emerges very clearly from Herodotus’ discussion of the gorge in Peneus. The narrator says:

Αὔτοι μὲν νον Θεσσαλοί φασι Ποσειδέωνα ποιήσαι τὸν αὐλώνα δι’ αὐ’ ῥεῖ τὸ Πηνεῖος, οἰκότα λέγοντες· ὡστε γὰρ νομίζει Ποσειδέωνα τὴν γῆν σείνην καὶ τὰ διστεθητὰ ὑπὸ σεισμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦτον ἔργα εἶναι καὶ ἃν ἑκεῖνο ἱδὼν φαίη Ποσειδέωνα ποιήσαι· ἔστι γὰρ σεισμοῦ ἔργον, ὡς ἐμοὶ ἐφαίνετο εἶναι, ἡ διάστασις τῶν ὀρέων. (7.129)

The Thessalians themselves say that Poseidon made the trench through which the Peneios flows, speaking reasonably. For whoever thinks that Poseidon shakes the ground, and that the results of the quakes are the work of this god would say that Poseidon had made it, when they saw it. For the trench between the hills is, it seems to me, the work of a quake.

This passage has focused disagreements over whether Herodotus doubts or endorses ‘traditional’ Greek divinities. It is significant that Herodotus carefully separates two positions: what cannot be doubted from the evidence (that which can be seen) is that the cleft is the result of a ‘shaking’. What is less visibly apparent is a separate, theological question: is Poseidon the god who shakes the earth? That Herodotus should directly confront such doubts about the relationship between an individual divinity and his sphere of action is easily comprehensible when we recall his statement that Hesiod and Homer gave the gods their epithets, honours, and skills (2.50-3), and remember that ‘earth-holder’ or ‘earth-shaker’ (γαιήοχος, ἐνοσίχθων) are Poseidon’s epithets in epic (e.g. *Il.* 7.445, 13.43), lyric (e.g. *Pí.* O. 13.81), and tragedy (e.g. *S. OC.* 1072). Herodotus airs the idea that Poseidon is responsible for quakes in an unpolemical fashion, and perhaps even lends to it a rather performatively intellectualized support. As Scullion and Burkert have stressed, Herodotus’ statements about the equal ignorance of all people about ‘divine things’ (1.3.2), and the insanity of mocking the customs of another people (3.38) bespeaks much more tolerance, in most cases at least, than Xenophanes’ fragments.46

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45 On the ‘visible’ and the ‘invisible’ in Herodotus see 2.33.2; cf. Thomas (2000), 200-212.
46 Scullion (2006), 201-2; Burkert (1990), 21-8, mentioning both Herodotus’ tolerance and the points where it breaks down.
It is notable that Herodotus relates (and accepts) euhemerist accounts told by the Egyptians, which trace the origins of some minor Greek divinities to legends constructed around ancient Egyptian kings. How exactly the Egyptian king Memphites—whose Greek name is Proteus, and who has a temple in Memphis (2.112.1)—came to receive divine honours and play a role in Greek mythology is not explained, but we might assume that in the course of the diffusion of the names of the gods from Egypt to Greece some confusion took place. The mythical figure of Linus—who, for Hesiod, was the son of Urania (fr. 305 M-W)—is likewise rationalized away: Herodotus accepts, on Egyptian authority, that the dirge attributed to him was originally sung for the son of an Egyptian king who died an early death (2.79).

In a comparison of African traditional thought and western science Robin Horton has argued that there is an essential difference between societies in the ‘closed predicament’ and those in the ‘open predicament’. It is an important feature of any system of thought, he argues, that it recognizes itself as a system of thought, and notices that it is in competition with other ways of thinking and classifying the world. Horton outlines three conditions that typically characterize the ‘open predicament’: 1) the existence of literature that preserves earlier modes of thought; 2) the development of culturally heterogeneous communities; 3) the development of trade, travel, and exploration. Each of these, he contends, confronts an individual with unavoidably foreign ways of thinking, and as such leads to the sense of plurality that characterizes the open predicament. While I am sceptical about the possibility of a fully ‘closed’ culture—how small must a society be to admit only one view on a given topic?—Horton provides a useful framework through which to view the society into which Herodotus seems to have been born. All of his three features apply to a curious, itinerant, elite Greek raised in fifth-century Halicarnassus. Herodotus was, of course, familiar with the competing religious and

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49 Horton (1967b), 179-85.
50 See further Goody & Watt (1963).
theological ideas of earlier literature. He describes the variation in ritual practice and stories about the gods that divides the Greeks from one another and from foreign nations. Due to his mixed Greek/Carian background he himself would presumably have been particularly aware of cultural differences in religious practice, although it is questionable whether the Greek/Carian divide in Halicarnassus was always greater than the Greek/Greek divide in the case of, for example, Athens and Rhodes. Finally, Herodotus was also clearly aware of explicitly theological debates of the sort attested in fragments of Xenophanes and Protagoras.

Herodotus describes traditional Greek ideas about the gods as a discrete theological system—Hesiodic and Homeric elaborations of an Egyptian substrate, altered in the course of diffusion. He reasons in detail about the direction and mechanisms of this process (2.43.3, 49-50). His theological and religious world, then, was not one in which a single set of ideas dominated, but rather one of pluralism, debate, and controversy. In the course of the Histories Herodotus mentions a people (the Thracian Getae) who think that only their own (single) god exists, and another (the Persians) who consider the setting up of statues, altars, and temples to the gods ‘foolishness’ on the grounds (so Herodotus conjectures) that the gods are not anthropomorphic in the way the Greeks imagine them to be. He also mentions beliefs that we would describe as ‘religious’ although not specifically related to god(s), such as the doctrine that the soul is eternal and enters humans every three thousand years or so after cycling through animal life, a belief, Herodotus informs us, that originated in Egypt and was borrowed by various Greeks at different times (who passed it off as their own, 2.123, cf. §1.5 n.95). Although Herodotus’ work

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51 Herodotus’ comments on Carian customs (1.173.4), gods (5.119), and language (1.172, 8.105.2) reveals a good deal of familiarity (cf. 5.88.1) but no remarkable interest, although he does inform us that the they are the only people who offer sacrifice to Zeus Stratios.


53 Thracian Getae who recognize only Salmoxis (4.94.4: οὐδένα ἄλλον θεὸν νομίζοντες εἶναι εἰ μή τὸν σφέτερον), and throw spears into the sky when it thunders and ‘threaten the god’ (ἀπειλέοντα τὸ θεόν). This brief statement is fairly opaque. It may convey two only loosely connected pieces of information: that the Getae threaten the sky god when he thunders at them, and that they recognize only this god. Or it may be that ‘they threaten the god’ is the narrator’s gloss referring to the sky-god (whom the Getae do not recognize), as suggested by Hartog (1978), 39. It seems unnecessary to assume, with Harrison (2000), 218-19, that this is a ‘contradiction’ which reveals that Herodotus ‘has difficulties understanding...monotheists’, or that it is a ‘censure’ of the ‘monotheistic’ Getae that Macan sees (1895.1), cxi n.3. Cf. Fahr (1969), 42-3.

54 Above n.29.
rarely focuses on these issues, I shall argue that they are essential for a full understanding of his theological and religious outlook.

It is thus hard to agree with Gould’s claim that the Histories give no convincing indication that Herodotus ‘had any grasp of what we might call the differing “ideologies” or world-views of different religious traditions.’ Gould bases his judgement on Herodotus’ emphasis on the description of ritual rather than belief, but the brief mentions we have seen shows that Herodotus is very much aware of diversity in ‘theological’ belief, although he self-consciously banishes this from his work as a topic of discussion (2.3.2, 65.2). Herodotus refuses, in fact, to enter into the type of comparative theology that would so greatly interest the scholar of modern religion.

It can, however, certainly be said that not all areas of his theological thought show the same degree of ‘openness’ and self-consciousness. While Herodotus knows that different people have different views about the plurality of the gods, divine anthropomorphism, divine genealogies and chronologies, the efficacy of divination (8.77), and the relationship between fate and the gods (1.91, §2.9), other ideas do not appear: we hear nowhere, for example, doubts about the existence of the gods (like those of Protagoras fr. 4 DK) or about the inevitability of divine retribution for injustice (although 2.120.5 might easily be read as an emphatic reaffirmation of the principle in the face of doubt). These ideas seem to be so fundamental to Herodotus that they are not questioned, and, indeed, they are beliefs towards which it could be argued that Herodotus shows an unselfconsciously ‘protective’ attitude (further §2.10).

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56 For the exceptions to this declared policy, see Linforth (1924).
2.3. Terminology: Polytheism, Monotheism, etc.

Several issues will arise again and again in the course of this chapter: whether Herodotus refers to god(s) by individual or generalized names, whether he presents it/them as divided or unified in purpose, whether and how god(s) are arranged into hierarchies of power, whether there exists such a thing as a ‘fate’ that is distinct from god(s), and (if there does) whether god(s) are masters of this fate or bound by it. At issue are a number of questions traditionally addressed using the terms polytheism, monotheism, henotheism, and monism (among others). Harrison has joined a long-standing consensus in concluding that Herodotus was ‘no closet monotheist’. To my knowledge only one scholar in recent decades, Edward Hussey, has argued that Herodotus was a monotheist (on what definition I do not know, since the paper is unpublished), although numerous translators render Herodotean terms like ὁ θεός with the English ‘God’, and several scholars of the last century claim to have entertained the idea but rejected it in the final analysis.

The question of how many gods Herodotus believed in seems to have first seriously preoccupied scholars in the early/mid nineteenth century. From this point on scholars often note the superficial plausibility of Herodotus’ being a ‘monotheist’ on

57 Gott, Gemüt und Welt, v.23-4.
58 Harrison (2000), 179 & n.79. For the same view see Munson (2001c); Lachenaud (1978), xi & 193; Linforth (1928), 218; Nestle (1908), 8 n.19 (focusing particularly on 2.45.3). Mikalson (2003), 131, cites Linforth (1928), apparently in agreement. Classen (1962), 7, sees a ‘tendency towards monotheism’.
59 Hussey is cited by Gould (1994), 94 n.7. For the argument that Herodotus could, on a common (if arbitrary) definition of the term, can be seen as a monotheist, see appendix 4b. Abich (1869.1), xiii, attributes to Herodotus an ‘unius dei notionem’, with plurals used only out of respect for his audience.
60 Rawlinson (1888), ad 1.31-2; Greene (1944), 84-8; Fornara (1971), 64, 77. English editing conventions unfortunately require any divinity under discussion to be assimilated to one of two patterns—the upper-case monotheistic ‘God’, implicitly sole and supreme, and the lower-case polytheistic ‘god’, implicitly one among many. I use the lower-case ‘god’ for all deities to avoid begging the question, except in focalization, where I use ‘God’ in tandem with ‘monotheism’.
61 Jones (1913), 252, and François (1957), 7.
62 Markschies (2010), 109, suggests that the term 'monotheism' was popularized by Schleiermacher’s Glaubenslehre in 1830-1. Schleiermacher was also, according to Van Nuffelen (2010), 19, the likely inventor of the term ‘monolatry’, on which more below.
the basis of his generalizing (and often singular) vocabulary for the divine (common to much Greek literature: cf. §2.8), only to quash it by observing (first) that Herodotus refers to ‘the gods’ in the plural and to individual named divinities in all seriousness (further §2.5-6), (second) that one can generalize about ‘god’ without denying the existence of other gods, and (third) that, in the Dodonan reconstruction of the development of Greek religion reported by Herodotus, the undifferentiated θεοί initially worshipped by the Pelasgians are a plural not a single entity (2.53).

Hoffmeister saw in the religion of Herodotus and his contemporaries a polytheistic culture with ‘monotheistic elements’, arguing that an undeveloped (‘unentwickelt’) concept of the single God (‘die Vorstellung des Einen Gottes’) was common amongst the educated elite and an important factor in explaining the success of Christianity. Although the notion of a single God lay deep in Herodotus’ soul, Hoffmeister argued, Herodotus remained devoted to the folk conception of the gods (Volksvorstellung). At the end of the nineteenth century Macan’s position was fairly similar: ‘Herodotus was a polytheist’, but he shows ‘a monotheistic, or monistic tendency’. Yet ‘the onus probandi lies’, he says ‘with those who consider Herodotus to have been emancipated from the average theology of his time and folk.’ As the last two sections make plain, the burden is easily discharged, if, as Macan does, we take literal interpretation of Hesiodic and Homeric anthropomorphic theology as representative of most fifth-century Greeks. For most of the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century Herodotus appeared to waver between elite progress towards an abstracted proto-Christian celestial unity and popular devotion to a more traditional, anthropomorphic plurality of gods. As we saw in the last chapter, the competing characterizations of Herodotus as, on the one hand, a naïve fabulist and, on the other, a radical intellectual enquirer, tended to polarize discussions of Herodotean theology and religion in a scholarly community dominated by developmental theories of religious change and development.

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63 E.g. Macan (1895.1), cxii n.3, cf. cx n.2.
64 Just as one can talk about ‘the tree’ with no particular tree in mind and yet not deny the existence of the forest. The argument is Hoffmeister’s (1832), 9-10, repeated (with the better example of ‘the doctor’) by Linforth (1928), 222-3 (further §2.8).
65 Meuss (1888), 4-5.
66 Hoffmeister (1832), 7-11 (cf. §2.9).
67 Macan (1895.1), cxii n.1 & ad 6.27.
68 See §1.5, §1.6.2, esp. Schuler (1869), 46-7; Döllinger (1857), 257-8; Runge (1856), 6.
Before the nineteenth century, by contrast, scholars comparing Herodotean theology seem to have shown little interest in the number of Herodotean gods—they were often quite content to paraphrase Herodotean terms for divinity by the singular form of the word ‘god’, often capitalized. The comparisons or contrasts drawn between Herodotus and Christianity focused, instead, on features like divine omnipotence, morality, benevolence, and relationship with fate. The terms monotheism and polytheism are thus relative newcomers, and it is not clear that they are useful conceptual tools.

In Herodotean scholarship one rarely finds detailed discussion of what it would entail for Herodotus to be a ‘monotheist’, closet or flagrant. But, as is becoming clear from an increasingly sophisticated body of scholarship on ancient ‘monotheism’, the word is a slippery one, largely because the labels monotheist and polytheist are somewhat misleading if taken at face value. Defining monotheism on the basis of whether someone believes in one God or in many gods is harder than it might first appear, because the question immediately arises: What is a ‘god’? Since most religious systems feature more than one supernatural being, we are forced to ask: What criteria elevate some of these beings to the status of a ‘god’ (thereby making the belief polytheistic) in contrast to those supernatural beings that are not ‘gods’ (e.g. the saints, angels, demons, the devil, in those forms of Christianity typically considered ‘monotheistic’)? Likewise, under what circumstances can a single god have numerous manifestations, each with its own personality, name, iconography and so on, and yet remain the single divinity of a ‘monotheistic’ religion (e.g. God, Jesus, and the Holy Ghost)? Although monotheism and polytheism masquerade as simple numerical terms, as they are used in popular and academic discussion, one seems to be a ‘monotheist’ not by virtue of the number of supernatural beings in

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69 The Abbé Geinoz, for instance, is quite uninterested in number when he compares the Herodotean τὸ θεῖον—he takes this abstract, singular substantive to represent Herodotus’ views and those of the Greeks more widely—with his own notion of the Christian ‘Diēu’: see §1.5 (esp. n.66). Larcher (1802), likewise makes no comment on Herodotus’ monotheism or polytheism.
70 Further Schmidt (1985).
71 Neither Harrison (2000) nor Gould (1994), 94 n.7, explain the terms; Linforth’s definition focuses on the number of gods, but gives few clues as to what constitutes a god (cf. appendix 4).
72 Discussion of the complexities of the terminology in Frede (1999), 41, 43-4, 58; (2010), 56-62; Assmann (2003), (2004); Markschie (2010); Fürst (2010).
whom one believes (few of the religions typically called ‘monotheistic’ recognize only one), but rather about the nature of these supernatural beings, the way that they relate to one another, the worship they should receive, and the metaphysical ‘reality’ behind their diverse manifestations. Scholars define these allegedly comparative terms with such diversity that it remains possible to attach the label 'monotheist' or 'polytheist' to Xenophanes, Augustine, John Paul II, and Herodotus, but to do is often as performative (indicating one's own religious allegiances) as it is descriptive of the individual in question, for without extensive elaboration these terms convey no precise information about theological belief or ritual practice. Since these issues go far beyond Herodotus and concern the conceptual tools used in the study of Greek religion, I discuss it separately in appendix four, which looks at the meaning of the terms ‘monotheism’ and polytheism, and the way that these categories have historically influenced the way scholars approach Herodotean theology.

Due to the lack of clarity on what the terms ‘monotheism’ etc. mean and the confusion they can introduce when used without definition, I shall conduct the following analysis using plain-language descriptions. I propose to examine statements about god(s) in the Histories with a number of criteria in mind: the number of divine beings, the process of their creation, the unity of divine purpose, the balance of power amongst the gods, their relationship with mortals, and their relationship to fate (if it exists). A study on these terms reveals that there are strikingly and systematically different conceptions of the god(s) in Herodotus’ ethnographic study of religion, in the oracles cited in his text, and in the philosophical musings on the nature of humanity by the narrator and the characters (to cite the clearest examples).73

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73 Conclusions below, §2.10. In considering monotheism etc. unhelpful for clear thinking I follow Ahn (1993); B. Lang (1993); Moltmann (2002); Assmann (2003), 49, & (2004); MacDonald (2004); Fürst (2010), 99; Markschies (2010), 103-4.
2.4. Oracles
Part 1. Divine Unity or Divine Division?

Oracular literature permeates Herodotus’ work. Its nature is diverse, much more so than is often acknowledged. In this section I focus primarily on those oracles cited in hexameters (as well as one prose oracle that shares many of the characteristics of oracular hexameters) for the simple reason that these contain particularly interesting theological statements and assumptions that are not at all harmonious with what the narrator says elsewhere.

Several of Herodotus’ hexameter oracles describe scenes of interaction between distinct divine powers reminiscent of other hexameter verse, particularly Epic. In the Wooden Wall oracle delivered to the Athenians, desperately seeking advice on the impending Persian invasion, Pallas (Athena) is said to have attempted to propitiate (ἐξιλάσασθαι) Zeus Olympios, ‘begging him with many words and shrewd wisdom’ (λισσοµένη πολλοίς λόγοις καὶ µήτιδι πυκνῆ). Ultimately she appears to have little success, but is able to offer the Athenians some helpful advice (7.141.3). Intercession with the father of the gods by a lesser deity is, of course, a trope familiar from Homer, recalling Thetis’ supplication of Zeus on behalf of Achilles early in the Iliad (1.495-530).

The Delphic oracle’s response to Croesus’ accusatory questioning at 1.91 (henceforth the ‘Moira oracle’) provides a different perspective on the relationship between the gods and fate, one unique to the Histories. Croesus is full of reproach for ‘the god of the Greeks’ because his many generous offerings to Apollo were ‘requited’ by deceptive oracles which prompted him to campaign against the Persians, a campaign that resulted in his defeat and the capture of his capital, Sardis. In response the Pythia states that even (a) god cannot alter ‘preordained fate’ (πεπρωµένην µοίραν). Loxias (Apollo) was not able to persuade (παραγαγεῖν) the

74 Common misconceptions are that oracles are always (or even mostly) ambiguous, and that prophecy always or generally provides advice intended to help the consultant (cf. §1.9, §4.2, appendix 7).
75 An oracle from Bacis, 9.43.2 may use moros in a similar way: many Persians will fall ‘beyond lot (moros) and portion (lakhesis)’. Herodotus more usually uses moros, literally ‘portion’, in the sense of
Moirai (the Fates) to postpone the preordained sack of Sardis to the generation after Croesus—but he was able to delay it by three years. Again parallels for these ideas can only be found outside the Histories: in the Iliad Hera talks of a fate (aisê) that is predetermined (peprômenos) and likewise apparently formed independently of divine will. Here Hera reminds Zeus, who is pondering whether to rescue his son Sarpedon from death, of the consequences of changing fate: if he does so, the other gods might follow suit and chaos will ensue. Zeus decides to respect the status quo and allows his favoured son to die in accordance with his ‘lot’ or ‘fate’ (moira). The situation is different from that described by Herodotus’ Moira oracle, since Homer’s Hera is clear that the gods could override fate if they chose, but voluntarily avoid doing so out of custom. (Of course, the will of the gods and fate are not always depicted in opposition to one another within the Iliad, especially in the words of the mortal characters—when Patroclus says to Hector ‘destructive Moira and the son of Leto (i.e. Apollo) killed me’ no such division is in sight.) The idea is not confined to epic: in Pindar’s sixth Paean for the Delphians ‘Zeus, watcher of the gods, does not dare to loose what was fated’. It was, in fact, ‘necessary’ (χρῆνυ) for Troy to be destroyed. For Apollo’s intercession on behalf of mortals we can also compare Aeschylus’ Eumenides, where the Erinyses rebuke Apollo for his aid of Admetus, by misleading the Moirai (Eum. 723-8).

Returning to Herodotus, the Moira oracle reaffirms the relationship of reciprocal kharis between Apollo and Croesus. In the face of Croesus’ charge that Apollo is

‘death’ (e.g. 1.43.3): the meaning ‘allotted portion’, or ‘fate’ is only found here. Lakhesis, with a basically identical sense, occurs only here in the Histories. For examples of moira and peprômenon outside this oracle see §2.9.

66 Il. 16.439-49. For bibliography and discussion of whether the Homeric picture of ‘the gods’ is a construct for literary convenience, or whether it represented an earlier ‘real belief’, see Cairns (2001b), 19; Yamagata (1994), 105-120.

67 A related but slightly different system appears in Euripides’ Hippolytus (1328-34), where Artemis is prevented from saving her favourite mortal not by the ‘impossibility’ of overruling fate but by some kind of divine protocol preventing individual divinities from obstructing the plans of others (a system seemingly regulated by Zeus).


69 Pi. Pa. 6.92-4 (μοίρασμ’ ἀναλώνι Ζεὺς ὁ θεὸν σκοτοῦσ’ οὐ τόλμα) & 96 (χρῆν). As Greene (1944), 71-2, observes, Pindar opposes μοίρα/αίσθα and ‘the gods’ elsewhere (Pa. 2.40-1; I. 8.29-52) but more commonly aligns them or else uses them interchangeably (e.g. O. 2.21 θεὸν μοίρα; fr. 1.1: σὸν θεὸν αἴσθα).
akharistos (1.90.4), the Pythia explains that, despite the disaster he suffered, Croesus’ generous gifts to Delphi did win Apollo’s good will, and that this good will did bring tangible benefits. The giving was not, as Croesus had believed, one-sided and the pattern of reciprocal divine/mortal kharis is upheld.\(^80\) An independent fate which the gods cannot change (by much) is of course a neat way of reaffirming the efficacy of divine favour when a generous devotee suffers misfortune. The explanation seems to serve the role of reconciling (and leaving intact) two conflicting visions of how man relates to the unseen divine powers.

The oracles Herodotus cites often make gods out of abstract qualities—another standard feature of Greek poetry, but again quite foreign to the rest of the Histories. Bacis’ hexameter prophecy of the outcome of the battle of Salamis (which Herodotus cites at 8.77) bristles with abstract nouns, personified as divinities and linked to each other genealogically. The battle is between the broad-browed son of Kronos (euruopa Kronidês), Justice, and Victory on one side and (the personifications of) Satiety and Insolence (Koros and Hubris) on the other. The same can be seen in the hexameters which the Pythia speaks to Glaucus in a monitory story related by the Spartan Leotychides to the Athenians: ‘The son of Horkos (‘Oath’) has neither name, nor hands, nor feet. Yet he follows swiftly, until he has caught and destroyed the perjurer’s entire race and house’.\(^81\) The combination of genealogy and personification which some Herodotean oracles contain recalls the Hesiodic Theogony,\(^82\) and remained an important part of religious discourse, albeit one with

\(^80\) Croesus’ assumption of a quid pro quo relationship between mortal and god might seem ‘crude’ to those familiar with a Christian concept of χάρις or ‘grace’—see, e.g., Harrison (2000), 43; Kurke (1999) 152; Barker (2006), 11—but this seems to be a cultural difference about how man relates to god. Better described by the looser phrase do ut des, this principle underlies all Greek religious practice, and Croesus’ outrage seems quite justified, as noted by Pelling (2006b), n.162 n.77. The answer of the Pythia (denial that the principle has been violated, 1.91.3) shows that Croesus’ assumptions are not flawed, but that things are more complex than he had suspected—due to Gyges curse. The idea is more delicately put by Tecmessa in S. Ai. 522: χάρις χάριν γάρ ἐστιν ἡ τίκτουσ’ ἀεὶ (‘one favour is ever the begett of another’). But complaints were not uncommon either, see, e.g. Od. 19.363-9, S. Tr. 993-5, E. Phoen. 1758-63. On reciprocity and kharis see further §4.3, and Parker (1998).

\(^81\) 6.86.γ.2. The speed and irresistible nature of Horkos is evocative of that of Atê in the Iliad (9.502-7), although here her speed derives from the soundness of her feet (cf. 19.91-4, where Atê, daughter of Zeus, floats along with soft feet). For the misfortunes of perjurers cf. Hes. Op. 282-5.

\(^82\) Hes. Th. 230-1 (Atê is daughter of Eris); on divine personifications in Hesiod: Fränkel (1975), 96-105. Cf. Il. 19.91 (Atê is the daughter of Zeus);
which (as we shall see) Herodotus seems not to creatively interact—it’s only place in this *Histories* is in verse citations.\(^83\)

Some oracles evoke the Olympian gods as a group in a way naturally suggestive of divine unity and harmony rather than conflict. The hexameters sung by the Pythia to Lycurgus proclaim him ‘friend of Zeus and all who have Olympian dwellings’ (1.65.3), just as the city of Argos, consulting about whether to join the Persians or not, was said to be ‘friend to the immortal gods’ (7.148). But Zeus alone is named in several oracles: the trimeters given to the Cnidans announce that ‘Zeus would have made [Cnidos] an island, if he had wanted to’ (1.174.5). Other gods, particularly Apollo (unsurprisingly, perhaps, given the predominance of Delphic oracles), seem to act on individual initiative. When the Spartans consult Delphi over the conquest of Arcadia the response runs: ‘You ask me for Arcadia? You ask a great thing, and I shan’t give it… I shall give you Tegea to dance in with stamping feet, and a beautiful plain to measure with rope’ (1.66.2). On various other occasions, too, Apollo speaks through the Pythia’s hexameters in his own voice, proclaiming his actions: ‘I shall shake Delos, which was before unshaken’ (6.98).

Together these oracles describe various metaphysical worlds which do not share a static theological vision. On several occasions the divine realm appears fragmented—different powers with different desires or agendas trying to achieve their different goals: Loxias intercedes with the Moirai, Pallas with Zeus Olympios, and Insolence and Satiety strive with Justice, Zeus and Victory. In one oracle from Delphi the Moirai seem to hold ultimate power (1.91), in another an individual god—Zeus (7.141,\(^84\) 7.174.5) or Apollo (1.66.2, 6.98)—disposes the world, and there is no suggestion that fate or any other god might restrain him from carrying out his will (but equally no profession of omnipotence). There is no reason to think that the theological details of these oracles ultimately derive from a single source, but we do not need to accept all of Herodotus’ attributions to individual manteis or oracular

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\(^83\) The elegiacs Herodotus cites under the name of Simonides feature the personified Kēres (goddesses of death, 7.228.3 = fr. 83 Diehl).

\(^84\) De Jongh (1833), 30: ‘Quo loco eandem plane Jovis vim esse cernimus, quae in Croesi historia Parcis tribuitur’. For Pohlenz (1937), 98, the view of divinity at 1.91 is genuinely Delphic, and the idea at 7.141 communicates the same idea.
institutions to explain the movement between divine unity and division. This is not, in fact, uncommon within a single work.\textsuperscript{85}

It will become plain that such fragmentations of the divine world into numerous powers with competing individual interests is quite alien to the metaphysical world assumed by the narrator and characters of the \textit{Histories}. The ultimate power of Zeus or the Moirai, like the nature of the power-balance between the numerous personified gods, belongs to the oracular world which Herodotus cites, but this is not a world with which the characters or narrator ever engage (beyond occasional citation). We shall return to consider the question of how these theological visions relate to belief of the author at the end of this chapter.

\textsuperscript{85} Aeschylus’ \textit{Oresteia} is a prime example of this common phenomenon. See Winnington-Ingram (1980), 66, and above n.79 on the relationship between ‘gods’ and ‘fate’ in Pindar.
2.4. Oracles

Part 2. Names and Epithets

Not only the vision of divinity, but also the vocabulary used in oracles belongs to a theological register that can only be found in the Histories within oracles and poetic inscriptions. Notably, even Herodotus’ prose oracles draw their vocabulary from this register, one of a number of signs that these oracles are from a non-Herodotean source or are self-consciously focalized through the Pythia—that is, intended to be elevated prose that draws on the language of epic hexameter. At 1.91 the Pythia refers to Apollo thrice by the title Loxias, common in tragedy and oracular poetry but otherwise only appearing in the Histories in another prose oracle from Delphi (cited verbatim, 4.163.2). Personified Moirai, too, occur only in the Moira oracle. In other oracles gods are associated with traditional epithets, the building blocks of the hexameter: we meet Zeus as ‘the wide-eyed (or perhaps ‘far-sounding’) son of Kronos’ (eurô pa Kronidês, 8.77.2; he is eurô pa also at 7.141.2), and as Zeus Olympios (7.141.3). Athena is simply Pallas in the Wooden Wall oracle (7.141.3), and in an inscription from the Athenian Acropolis, cited verbatim (5.77.4). In oracles the Olympian gods often stand by metonymy for things associated with them—Demeter is corn (7.141.4), and ‘bitter Ares’ is ‘war’ (7.141.2). The Pythia names the gods ‘those who have Olympian houses’ (1.65.3).

It will become clear from the following sections that along with the move from prose narrative into hexameter oracular poetry (or paraphrased oracles) we can observe a

86 Λοξίας appears some 84 times in tragedy (e.g. 17 times in the Oresteia, 4 times in the OT), and in Pindar (P.3.29, 11.5; I. 7.49; Pa. 6.60). For the possible etymology of Loxias as ‘crooked’ or ‘curved’ (referring to his oblique mode of speech): Dempsey (1918), 66 n.4, Parke (1939), 38, Plut. Mor. 511b.

87 See, e.g., De Jongh (1833), 30. The poet of the Iliad may have considered moira a deity, and if this interpretation is accepted he talks once of the ‘Fates’ in the plural (Moirai, Il. 24.49). (However, Dodds (1951), 6-7 & n.29, citing Wilamowitz (1931/2.1), 360, thinks moirai are the ‘lots/portions’ of many people.) They are also termed ‘the spinners’ (Klôthes) in the Odyssey (7.197), an idea also implied in the metaphor of the ‘thread’ spun by Moira (Il. 24.209-10). They first become three in Hesiod (Th. 905), and frequently appear in tragedy.

88 The epithet is commonly used of Zeus in Homer (e.g. Od. 14.234 & II. 8.206, 16.241), and can be found in the Homeric hymns (23.4), and Pindar (Pa. 6.134, 8.24).

89 Cf. e.g., II. 2.385 (‘hateful Ares’ stands for war), 426 (‘Hephaestus’ stands for fire), 17.210 (if the ‘Ares’ that enters Hector’s limbs is simply the ‘spirit of war’). For a more sinister example of this tendency, S. Trach. 1276-9; cf. Heracl. B 67 DK.

90 A stock epic expression. This, or a similar variant, can be found at line end (as in this oracle) at II. 2.484, Hes. Th. 75, 114, 783, 804, 963; Op. 8, 110, 128.
shift with which contemporary Greeks were familiar: to the use of epithets and cult titles, the deification of abstract concepts, divine intercession, and (on occasions) distinct divine powers pursuing discrete and often conflicting goals. The move into this divine world is at once lexical, rhythmic, and ideological—vocabulary, metre, and theological imagery are bound together. It is a world into which the Greeks were initiated in their early education, with its focus on Hesiod and Homer, and which they occupied in performances and poetry, in the theatre or temple. It is a varied theological world that was admired, emulated, and re-interpreted for over a millennium and a half by people from a variety of religious and philosophical backgrounds. If we are to consider the religious beliefs of Herodotus, who (as narrator) suggests that the Greeks borrowed the distinctions between individual gods from the Egyptians (2.4, 43, 146), that Homer and Hesiod first ‘created’ or ‘composed’ (poiein) the names and epithets of the gods (2.53), and claims that all men know the same about the gods (2.3.2), we should certainly not take his citation of such oracles as the sole or last word on the author’s beliefs about the nature of the gods and fate. Oracles are, however, often considered to afford us a privileged insight into Herodotus’ religious views, and scholars frequently compare the details of oracular presentations directly with the religious statements made in dialogues and ethnography, attempting to find a unified theology. The failure to recognize that we are dealing with a largely separate discourse has, I shall argue, led to a good deal of confusion.

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91 Cf. below n.199.
92 Further §2.10. The dangers of automatically ‘universalising’ the theological propositions of oracles are noted by Scullion (2006), 193-4.
2.5. On ‘Foreign’ Gods

Herodotus provides us with description of the religious practices of numerous foreign peoples: Persians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Massagetae, Ethiopians, Egyptians, Arabians, Scythians, Thracians, and Libyans, amongst others. His investigation into foreign religion has been the subject of a number of excellent studies, and it will suffice here to recall the main points to demonstrate the assumptions and vocabulary which underlie these parts of the Histories.93

Underlying Herodotus’ discussion of non-Greek gods is the assumption that the gods of the Greeks and all other peoples can be identified with one another on a one-to-one basis, the principle often known as the interpretatio Graeca.94 There are many reasons to think that Herodotus inherited both this basic approach to understanding foreign worship of the gods and most of the equations between individual Greek and non-Greek divinities from his contemporary society and earlier writers, rather than innovating them himself. One indication is internal: if Herodotus were explaining a new concept to his listeners we would expect him to justify this assumption, and to provide some explanation for thinking that gods who differ from one another in ritual observance, genealogy, name, and iconography are the same god. Herodotus never does this, and only seems to innovate in his naming of divinities on two occasions.95

The second indication is external: although no surviving pre-Herodotean work consistently applies the interpretatio Graeca (probably because Herodotus’ is the first complete example of ethnography we possess) a surviving fragment of the description of Egypt by Herodotus’ predecessor Hecataeus of Miletus identifies a temple of the Greek goddess Leto (mother of Apollo and Artemis) on the floating island of Chemmis in Egypt.96 Herodotus repeats this claim, and there is no indication that this is a Greek-built temple—it seems rather to be an Egyptian god

93 The subject of three articles by Linforth, an article by Burkert (1990) and a chapter in Harrison (2000).
94 Herodotus’ equations between Greek and foreign divinities can be found in Linforth (1926), 6-7, and Harrison (2000), 210-11.
95 The point is Linforth’s (1926), 14, discussed below.
96 FGrHist 1 F 305.
who, in Hecateus, was already assimilated to Leto.97 This evidence, scant though it is, implies that the assumption that the same gods were worshipped in all countries was not at all new to Herodotus’ audience, and the equations go back at least as far as the early ethnographers of the sixth century.

It seems that the belief that two particular cults in different countries worshipped the same divinity might originally have been prompted by any of a number of similarities in iconography, function/area of interest, or in the sound of their names.98 Only twice does Herodotus suggest that he is innovating in giving the Greek identity of a foreign divinity or temple: in the case of Aphrodite Xeniê in Egypt, whom he equates with Helen (2.112), and in the case of Heracles (2.43-5). It is important to appreciate the similarity between two fundamental assumptions: first, that foreign gods and Greek gods were in essence the same, and second, that the many different Greek cults of an individual deity worshipped the same gods. The identification of an Egyptian god with a Greek god involved similar assumptions to those deployed in everyday life with ‘Greek’ divinities.99 We might well feel incredulity at the flexibility of Herodotus’ identifications between foreign and Greek gods, where he links two deities who resemble each other in neither cult practice, mythology, iconography, or the sound of their names.100 How can Herodotus believe he knows that Zeus and Ammon are the same divinity? But precisely the same lack of correspondence can be found between different Greek cults which are thought of as worshipping ‘the same’ god. The many cults of Zeus also differed from one another in function (or area of interest), iconography, epithet, and sometimes genealogy—yet Herodotus, like his contemporaries, considers these too to be the same god. Herodotus’ statement that the Egyptian god Ammon is the same as Zeus is no different in principle from his statement that the three Zeuses upon whom Croesus calls after the death of Atys are ‘the same god’.101

97 2.155-6. Burkert (1990), 5-6, compares Pindar (fr. 91 M), and observes that in Homer—as in the ancient Near- and Middle-East as a whole—the principle of identification dominated.
98 Cf. Linforth (1926), 16-22.
99 On this subject see the excellent first chapter of Versnel (2011), esp. 60-87 & 143-9.
100 The incongruities are stressed by Harrison (2000), 213-14 (who argues that the identifications were long established), and Linforth (1926), 10-13. Cf. Mora (1985), 185-6.
101 Hdt. 1.44. ἐκάλεε μὲν Δία καθάρσιον, μαρτυρόμενος τὰ ὑπὸ τοῦ ξεῖνου πεπόθαις εἰς, ἐκάλεε δὲ ἐπίστιον τε καὶ ἑταίρημον, τὸν αὐτὸν τοῦτον ὄνομαξων θεόν, τὸν μὲν ἐπίστιον καλέων, διότι … For
We do find occasional references to ‘foreign gods’ or ‘the Greek gods’ within the *Histories*, and these are mostly confined to the speech of characters in moments of nationalistic feeling or anger.\(^{102}\) Croesus’ charge against ‘the god of the Greeks’ (1.87.3, 1.90.2-4) is made in anger and seems specifically intended as an insult.\(^{103}\) It is also atypical for Croesus, who uses inclusive terms elsewhere, including ‘god’ (1.87.2, ὁ θεός),\(^ {104}\) ‘the gods’ (1.89.1, οἱ θεοὶ), and ‘Zeus’ (1.207.1). A number of other references to ‘the Greek gods’ occur in rhetorical speeches where, as Linforth observes, the emphasis is on ‘national solidarity and loyalty’.\(^ {105}\) On two occasions, however, the narrator himself appears to make a similar distinction. Herodotus talks of the ‘Greek gods and Greek temples’ in the Egyptian city of Naucratis (2.178), and of the temples of the ‘Greek gods’ worshipped by the Budini in Gelonus in Scythia (4.108). It has been suggested that in these cases Herodotus temporarily ‘forgets’ the principle of identification.\(^ {106}\) But there is, I think, a more plausible interpretation.

In the context of ethnographic reports into religious practices in foreign lands the adjective ‘Greek’ in the phrase ‘Greek gods and Greek temples’ seems to refer to the way in which the gods are imagined and worshipped, rather than to the divine reality that lies behind the local conception of the gods (both of which can legitimately be referred to as the ‘gods’). To illustrate by a modern example: a Catholic with universalist tendencies might talk of Allah as ‘the Lord’ or ‘God’ (considering them to be the same divinity), but might equally talk of ‘the Islamic God’ and ‘the Christian God’ (referring to the various conceptions of that divinity) if wishing to

\(^{102}\) But Burkert (1990), 24-5, is incorrect to say that they appear ‘nur in Reden, d.h. in der naiven Perspektive des jeweiligen Akteurs’ (my italics; see below).

\(^{103}\) As persuasively argued by Harrison (2000), 166-8, cf. 4.79.3-4 (Dionysus called daimôn by the Borysthenites, perhaps a pejorative focalization), 94.1 (the narrator calls Salmoxis a daimôn).

\(^{104}\) θεός with the definite article sometimes indicates a specific god (e.g. 1.31.4, 1.90.3), sometimes a generalized ‘divinity’ (e.g. 1.31.3; 7.46), further §2.8. I read ὁ θεός as generalizing here, but one might argue that this means ‘the god’ (i.e. Apollo).

\(^{105}\) Linforth (1926), 20, cf. 16-22. As when Aristagoras asks the Spartans for aid (5.49.3), when Corinthian Socles asks the Spartans not to inflict tyranny on their fellow Greeks (5.92.η), when the Athenian ambassadors request support in fighting the Mede/Persian/Barbarian (9.7.α1-2), and when Hegesistratus exhorts the Greek forces before the battle of Mycale (9.90.2). cf. Linforth (1926), 20-1; Burkert (1990), 24-5; Harrison (2000), 215.

\(^{106}\) Linforth (1926), 20-22, sees this as ‘perfectly inconsistent’, and (25) the sort of contradictions which should be expected from people ‘operating within the concepts of religion’. Harrison (2000), 214-16, takes a similar line.
focus upon differences in the way these two religions conceive of their supreme deity. The Herodotean passage on the religious customs of Gelonus is particularly suggestive of this reading: ‘there are temples of the Greek gods furnished in the Greek style with statues and altars and wooden shrines’. Rather than betraying a shift in metaphysical attitude to a world in which there are suddenly 'Greek gods' and 'foreign gods' who are not to be equated, the expression ‘the Greek gods’ seems to point to the entire complex of what makes a god Greek rather than, say, Scythian: ritual, name, iconography, genealogy, and so on.

This also suggests that the use of the same expression in nationalistic speeches need not mean that the speaker should be understood as forgetting or suppressing the ‘principle of identification’. There are, of course, local deities who have no counterpart in other lands (it is largely the Panhellenic Olympian deities who are found in foreign countries), but references to ‘the Greek gods’ might merely be encouraging nationalistic solidarity by recalling the ‘common temples’ and ‘similar manners of sacrifices’ (rather than worship of different divine beings). That the principle of identification is compatible with shield-clashing nationalism is clear from the Athenian speech to the Spartans in their famous ‘definition’ of ‘Greekness’ (to hellēnikon) at the end of Book 8 of the Histories, which references the communality of Greek sacrifices and temples (rather than to Greek gods).

Likewise Herodotus notes that ritual practice acts as an indicator of another ethnic group, the Ionians, this time distinguishing them from other Greeks: ‘All those who are descended from the Athenians and celebrate the festival of Apatouria are Ionians’ (1.147.2). Once again, to distinguish absolutely between ‘local’ and ‘national’ religious difference seems anachronistic.

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107 The only three non-Greek deities who are not equated with Greek gods are all termed ‘epichoric’ by Herodotus (Salmoxis, 4.94; Kybebe, 5.102; Pleistorus, 9.119), see Linforth (1926), 23, Mikalson (2003), 129-31. Likewise, Greek heroes and demi-gods do not feature in Herodotus’ equations with foreign gods. See also the list in Harrison (2000), 210-11. For a recent discussion of 8.144 see Polinskaya (2010).

108 8.144.2-3, whence the expressions ‘common temples’ and ‘similar manners of sacrifice’.
In describing foreign religions Herodotus seems primarily interested in foreign cult practice (rather than the ‘beliefs’ of others). There are a few exceptions (discussed in §2.2): the Getae, who think that only one god exists (Salmoxis, 4.94.4), and the Persians, who, Herodotus says, do not consider the gods to have human form (1.131).

The discussion of Herodotus’ view of foreign religions offers an opportunity to examine a formula voiced by several non-Greek characters that implies that the gods are responsible for putting ideas into the minds of individual thinkers. In conversation with the Greek sage Bias or Pittacus, the Lydian king Croesus says ‘If only the gods would put it into the minds of the islanders’ to campaign against the sons of the Lydians’. A similar expression occurs on two other occasions, each time voiced by a character: Croesus’ Lydian adviser Sandanis, and the Ethiopian king in conversation with Cambyses’ spies. Several things make it clear that this expression is an idiom adding dramatic and archaic colour, rather than an insight into how Herodotus or any of his speakers conceive of decision-making. The notion of the gods directly putting an idea into someone’s head is found only on these three occasions, always in this rather formulaic (counter-factual) form, and each time associated with other epicisms and archaisms, rare in the Histories. Just as Croesus calls his people ‘the sons of the Lydians’, so the Ethiopian king talks of ‘the sons of the Ethiopians’, an expression which the giant of early Herodotean scholarship, Heinrich Stein, speculated had an oriental as well as archaic feel.

This might tempt us to view this divine implantation of ideas into people's heads as characteristic of non-Greek speakers. Telling against Stein’s view, however, is the presence of the same expression (‘the sons of the Greeks’) in a Herodotean oracle (5.77.4), Aeschylus’ Persae (from Greeks to Greeks), as well as the expression ‘sons of the Achaians’ throughout the Iliad. It is an elevated poeticism. In this context

110 1.27.3: Δὲ γὰρ τοῦτο θεός ποιήσεις ἔπι νόον νησιώτητι, ἐλθέιν ἐπὶ Λυδῶν παῖδας σύν ἔποισι.
111 1.71.4: ‘Εγὼ μὲν τὸν θείαν ἔχω χάριν, οὐκ ἐπὶ νόον ποιήσεις Πέρσῃ στρατεύεσθαι ἐπὶ Λυδοῦς.
112 3.21.3: μέχρι δὲ τούτου θεία μία ἔδειχνε χάριν, οὐκ ἐπὶ νόον τρέψοις Αἰθιόπων παισὶ γῆν ἀλλὰ προσκτάσθαι τῇ ἱερωτίᾳ.
113 Stein (1883/94.1), ad 1.27: ‘Λυδῶν παῖδας, altertümliche, wahrscheinlich dem Oriente entlehnte Ausdruckweise.’
114 5.77.4; A. Pers. 402-3; Il. 1.162, 237, 240, 276 etc.
115 Also used by the narrator in the highly worked story of Croesus on the pyre, where Croesus arranges ‘twice-seven sons of the Lydians’ on the bier next to their king (1.86.2).
Croesus also employs the expression ἂν γὰρ (‘if only’), using the Homeric (originally Doric/Aeolic) variant of the Ionic εἰ, an epicism only here in the *Histories*. It seems, then, that in these moments of direct speech some characters embrace a stylized manner of speech and expression.

What are we to make of this particular vision of divine action? If we were to analyse this in ethnographic terms we might be tempted to see an attempt faithfully to represent Lydian and Ethiopian religious ideas. But, aside from the absence of any suggestion of this sort in the *nomoi* of the Lydians and Ethiopians, it is, I think, literary factors that are at work. Along with poetic diction comes a snippet of Homeric ideology, the mechanism referred to by Homer’s Odysseus when he says: ‘Zeus himself put this thought [the supplication of the Egyptian king] into my *phrên* (heart/mind)’.

Leslie Kurke has recently suggested that Croesus’ Homeric-sounding inclusion of the gods in human motivation at 1.27 is one of several elements that crafts an opposition between the high-flown language of Croesus and the colloquial and straightforward tone of the Greek sage (Bias/Pittacus), which recalls Aesopic traditions of advice giving: ‘The Eastern potentate Croesus speaks the language of martial epic, but his Homeric pretensions are immediately deflated by the pragmatic response of his Greek interlocutor’. While this seems plausible enough in the context of the conversation at 1.27, the other occurrences of this formula (i.e. ‘the gods did not put x into the mind of the sons of people y’) suggest that Herodotus did not consider this Epic tone itself to be risible or pompous. Neither Sandanys nor the Ethiopian king are pretentious—they are rather full of sage wisdom in contrast to their interlocutors. While Kurke’s identification of the Homeric tone is clearly right, her interest in opposing ‘high’ and ‘low’ forms of speech leads to an overly absolute contrast between ‘Homeric’ and ‘Aesopic’ linguistic discourses and narrative patternings.

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116 For ἂν see also 4.157.2 (oracle); for ἂν γὰρ compare: *Il.* 7.132, *Od.* 3.205 (with optative), 7.311 (with infinitive).
117 *Od.* 14.273. ἀντίρρ ἐμοὶ Ζεὺς ἀντὸς ἐνι φρεσίν ὅδε νόημα ποίησιν.
Likewise, in contradiction of a general ‘rule’ that Flory has claimed, Croesus’ pleasure at Bias/Pittacus’ words (1.27) is not an ominous sign, but is associated with the acceptance of good advice and a sound decision. Kurke suggests that Croesus’ pleasure is not ‘ominous’ in this instance because there is ‘another discursive pattern informing this anecdote... Aesopic fable in performance’, where laughter has different signification. But Xerxes exhibits classically ‘ominous’ laughter and pleasure in his conversation with Demaratus, which Kurke considers Aesopic and fabular in style. Neither august Homeric diction nor 'ominous' pleasure and laughter can be neatly correlated to these putative Homeric or Aesopic discourses, at least as identified by Kurke, and the same holds for the vision of divinity. The divine implantation of ideas into people’s heads is an elevated Homericism that adds an epic flavour. Theology, here, is a tool used by the author for the ends of characterization.

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120 Kurke (2011), 130-1.
121 Kurke (2011), 408-11, esp. 411. For more laughter that seems not at all ominous see Cyrus’ amusement at Croesus’ request (γελάσας, 1.90.3).
2.6. The Universal Gods of Cult

From the outset the narrator of the Histories guides us to and fro in a world populated by many Greek cults, with the temples and shrines of individual deities, whose goodwill is sought by prayer and sacrifice, whose enmity is incurred by attacks upon their property, whose festivals constitute the calendar, and who guide mortals by means of oracles. It is this composite of cultic beliefs and practices that forms the background and occasional focus of many Herodotean stories. A recurrent assumption is that the gods punish those who abuse their temples, the social institutions they represent, or oaths sworn in their name. One means of expiating punitive divine anger caused by such transgressions is to take appropriate purificatory action (often under oracular guidance). Expiation relies on a similar assumption of reciprocity that underlies the notion of divine kharis (‘grace’), which can be expected in return for sacrifices and offerings to the gods. In many contexts the gods repay like with like.\textsuperscript{122}

Early in the narrative Herodotus tells the story of the Lydian king Alyattes, whose troops accidentally burnt down the temple of Athena Assêssiê (1.19). Alyattes was consequently afflicted with an illness which endured until he rebuilt the destroyed temple (and also built a second, 1.22). The story of Cleobis and Biton revolves around a mother’s attempt to get to the local festival of Hera (1.31.1)—her response to the heroic piety of her sons, who dragged her cart to the festival, is to enter Hera’s temple and pray to the goddess that her sons should meet the appropriate reward. Her sons are rewarded by an early death at the height of their prowess and good fortune.\textsuperscript{123} On hearing that Adrastus has killed his son, Atys, the Lydian king Croesus invokes Zeus Katharsios, Zeus Epistios, and Zeus Hetaireios, using the god’s three titles because each corresponds to one aspect of his relationship with Adrastus, whom he received as a suppliant, purified, and then sent as a companion to guard Atys (1.44.2). Zeus could be expected to take an interest in punishing Adrastus in any of these roles, for Adrastus’ violation of these sacred institutions. The Persian

\textsuperscript{123} 1.31. See §2.8 on changes in theological ‘register’.
general Otanes, having slaughtered the inhabitants of Samos—irrespective of whether they were inside or outside the temples (3.147.2)—was visited by a genital affliction and a dream, and subsequently repopulated the island (3.149). We assume he recovered.

Similar episodes of impiety and purification are described with particular religious terms. Seven hundred men of Aegina were awaiting execution by their fellow islanders after a bloody class conflict, when one slipped free and held fast to the doors of the temple of Demeter Thesmophoros. Unable to drag him away, his captors chopped off his hands and left them clinging to the handles of the temple doors as they led the captive off to be executed. ‘From this they incurred a pollution (agos), for which they were not able to atone (ekthusasthai), although they tried; instead they were defeated and kicked off the island before the goddess [i.e. Demeter Thesmophoros] was hileos (gracious/propitious) towards them’ (6.91). Although described in rather different vocabulary (hileos, ekthusasthai occur infrequently in the Histories), the pattern of impiety/propitiation (whether successful or not) closely resembles the examples discussed above.

The same can be said of the wrath (mênis) of Talthybius, the herald of Agamemnon and patron of messengers who received hero-worship in Sparta. This emotion is attributed to only two divinities in the Histories, Talthybius and Zeus Laphystios. Talthybius’ mênis is ‘awoken’ (ἐπηγέρθη) by the murder of the Persian heralds by the Spartans and the Athenians on the eve of Darius’ invasion of Greece. His wrath with the Spartans is manifested in their inability to make sacrifices at his temple (7.134). Attempting to make amends, the Spartans send two brave volunteers, Sperthias and Bulis, to offer their lives to Xerxes in recompense for the murdered heralds. Xerxes magnanimously refuses the sacrifice and the young men return

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124 ἀλεος only here and 4.94.3. Otherwise in the Iliad (1.583), Hesiod (Op. 340, Th. 782), and in both tragedy and prose; ekthuein is found in both middle (as here) and active forms in tragedy (middle: Eur. Fr. 912.12 K; active: S. El. 572; E. Cyc. 371).
125 It is an impiety against Demeter Thesmophoros, at the incitement of the priestess Timo, that seems to cause the death of Miltiades (6.134, 136.6).
126 For the mênis of Zeus Laphystios, aroused by saving a human victim from being sacrificed to him (7.197.3), see ch. 4. On mênis as a emotional term in the Iliad, and the question of its restriction to divine beings (which he disputes), see Cairns (2003b), 31-3, contra Müllner (1996), who considers it ‘the cosmic sanction against taboo behaviour’ (133). See also Frisk (1946).
home, and the divine anger is allayed for the time being. But much later the sons of both men die, an event in which Herodotus sees the unmistakable hand of the divine:

"ὅτι μὲν γὰρ κατέσκηψε ἐς ἀγγέλους ἢ Ταλθυβίου μὴνς σὺδὲ ἑπαύσατο πρὶν ἢ ἐξήλθε, τὸ δὲ σχήμα νῦν ἔφεξε: τὸ δὲ συμπεσεὶν ἐς τοὺς παῖδας τῶν ἁνδρῶν τούτων τῶν ἀναβαύστων πρὸς βασιλέα διὰ τὴν μὴν, ἢ Νικόλαν τὸν Βουλίος καὶ ἢ Ανήριστον τὸν Σπερθίεω, ὡς εἶλε Αλίας τοὺς ἑκ Τίρυνθος ὅλκαδι καταπλώσας πλήρεῖ ἀνδρῶν, δὴλον ὅν μοι ὅτι θείον ἐγένετο τὸ πρήγμα ἐκ τῆς μήνιος: (7.137.2)

That the wrath of Talthybias should fall upon messengers, and that it did not rest until it was satisfied, was quite just; but from the fact that it fell upon the children of those very men who went to see the king because of that anger—on Nikolaos son of Boulios, and Aneistos son of Sperthias, who took the men of Haliess from Tiryns by putting in with a merchant ship with a full company of men—it is clear to me that the affair was divine and a result of this wrath.

The pattern of impiety against a specific divinity leading to affliction (which then requires some form of expiation) is similar to those above, even if those who ultimately atone in this case are the descendants of the original volunteers, rather than the descendants of those who committed the deed.128

These passages tell against the idea that Herodotus ‘speaks of divine anger only in exceptional circumstances, and clearly found the concept inappropriate’.129 If Herodotus were implicitly to criticize the appropriateness of various types of divine anger—be it kholos, mēnis, or orgê—this would be important and perhaps suggestive of a belief in divine apatheia or morality, both of which were important in the theological thought of the fifth and fourth centuries.130 Harris calls the story of Zeus

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127 Inherited guilt is a standard feature of Herodotus’ theological world, otherwise occurring in the story of Gyges and Croesus (1.13, 91) and Glaucus (6.86); as the examples of Alyattes and Otanes indicate, the ruler can also be punished for the behaviour of his troops.

128 For inherited guilt see also 6.86γ-δ, Solon 13.29-32 W, and Lyc. Leoc. 79-80. How and Wells (1912), ad 137.3, call the wrath of Talthybias a ‘striking example of the doctrine of Nemesis’. The attempt to interpret all divine action according to a single principle (cf. §1.5, §1.6.2) seems least suited here: divine mēnis resulting from impiety has little to do with the phthoneros nature of ‘the divine’ which prevents mortals from acquiring extremely great happiness or fortune (1.32.1, 7.46 etc.), and also from the divine nemesis mentioned by the narrator (1.34) that takes Croesus for thinking himself to be the most blessed of men (further §3.5.2).

129 Harris (2001), 176 & n.81.

130 In the Ajax Sophocles’ Athena feels orgê (777) and mēnis (565, 757) at Ajax’s ‘big thinking’ (761-777), while Euripides’ Cadmus argues that gods should not imitate human orgai (Ba. 1346, recalling Hipp. 120). Cf. the doctrine of divine goodness in Plato (see ch.1.2-3, esp. n.62). Herodotus, as often, seems closer to Sophocles.
Laphystios an ‘exception’ (‘does it make a difference’, he asks ‘that it was only a self-serving local logos?’), but, as we have seen, mēnis is used repeatedly in the story of Talthybius. Talthybius, of course, was once the mortal herald of Agamemnon and might more naturally be considered a hero than a god; however, the narrator himself concludes from the precision with which Talthybius’ mēnis fell on the descendants of the original volunteers that the event is particularly ‘divine’ (7.137.2). Herodotus the narrator, then, explicitly recognizes that supernatural or ‘divine’ mēnis, resulting from a human impiety, can be a force in human events.

This brief survey of numerous vignettes of divine action indicates that one of the constant but unformulated assumptions of Herodotus’ ethnographic enquiries—that different nations worship the same divinities under different names—is borne out in the description of divine action in the rest of the Histories. It is not the gods themselves that vary between different peoples, but the way that humans imagine and worship them. The connection between impiety and divine punishment, like the connection between propitiation and divine favour, can be seen in stories unfolding in numerous places and attributed to numerous sources. This assumption about the way gods and mortals interact is unaffected by nationality or borders. The divine response to sacrilege and propitiation is relatively constant (although its severity and ‘expiability’ seem somewhat variable), no matter whether it is a Persian attacking an Egyptian god in Egypt, a Lydian burning a Milesian temple outside Miletus (i.e. Alyattes), Persians killing Samians in Samian temples (i.e. Otanes), or Spartans killing Persian heralds in Sparta. This last example would suggest that, if it is normally the foreigner who suffers the consequences of impiety, this is simply because invaders are the most likely to commit sacrilege, by damaging places of worship in the general plunder and destruction. The narrator himself explicitly suggests on three occasions that the anger of an individual deity, Demeter, is to be identified, and it is intriguing (though perhaps no more than a coincidence) that Demeter’s vengeance is so often and so unambiguously identified (only that of

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131 Talthybius’ µήνις is mentioned five times—7.134.1, 137.1, 137.2 (3 times)— Zeus Laphystios’ is mentioned once (7.197.3), and the verb µηνίω is used once of Minos (7.169.2).
132 See Harrison (2000), 158-64, for the overlap between the hero and the god.
133 See Cambyses stabbing of the Apis calf, 3.29 & 64.3.
134 Contra Immerwahr (1966), 314.
Talthybius is given anything like a comparable treatment).\textsuperscript{135} Herodotus states that it is a wonder (\textit{thôma}) to him that the bodies of Persian troops were not found in the temple of Demeter at Plataea, despite the fact that the fighting was thickest in this area, and he links this to a prior Persian impiety:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Δοκέω δὲ, εἰ τι περὶ τὸν θείων προγμάτων δοκέειν δὲι, ἢ θεὸς αὐτή σφεας οὐκ ἐδέκετο ἐμπρήσαντας [τὸ ἱρὸν] τὸ ἐν Ἑλευσίνῃ ἀνάκτορον.} (9.65.2)
\end{quote}

I think that, if it is necessary to think anything about divine matters, the goddess herself did not receive [into her sanctuary] those who had burned her temple in Eleusis.\textsuperscript{136}

In this section and the last we have seen Herodotus use the language of contemporary Greek cult.\textsuperscript{137} The existence of individual deities, worshipped across the known world—albeit under different names—who act in accordance with the general principle of reciprocity is often a basic assumption of the narrator and many of the stories he relates.

Wilhelm Nestle once argued that Herodotus echoes Heraclitean criticisms of contemporary cult worship. Herodotus narrates a story in which Amasis, to indicate to his people why he was fit to be king despite his lowly origins, melts down a golden footbath and makes from it the idol of a god (\textit{ἄγαλμα δαιμονος}), which he persuades his people to worship (2.172). Nestle interprets this as an indication of Herodotus’ reservation over the validity of idols.\textsuperscript{138} While not implausible in the context of Herodotus’ comments in the context of Persian religion (the Persians criticize the Greeks for their use of idols (\textit{ἀγάλματα}), temples, and altars, 1.131), in the examples discussed above the narrator endorses the notion that the abuse of cultic

\textsuperscript{135} It is tempting to posit a connection between Herodotus’ membership of mystery cults (the Samothracian or Eleusinian mysteries, 2.51.2) and the frequency with which Demeter recurs in Persian war stories.

\textsuperscript{136} See the similar report of the temple of Demeter in the battle of Mycale, 9.101.1.

\textsuperscript{137} Older attempts to explain away references to individual divinities as remnants of or lip-service to folk belief typically neglect these episodes: Hoffmeister (1832), 7-11 (esp. 8 n.10), 14, draws a hard distinction between the language of Herodotus’ characters and countrymen and the narrator’s own words suggesting that Herodotus’ references to individual gods are laboured (either focalizations or lip-service), cf. Schuler (1869).

\textsuperscript{138} Nestle (1908), 9; cf. Heraclitus fr. 5 DK. A similar criticism is urged by Pohlenz (1937), 104: the phallus-procession which Heraclitus criticizes is identified by Herodotus as unhellenic (2.49).
property (e.g. an ἄγαλμα of Poseidon, 8.129.3) constitutes a religious offence that brings retribution. Indeed, the very point of Amasis’ story, like the fragment of Epicharmus which Nestle also cites, is that something venerable has in fact been made from something of much lesser value. Nestle’s observation, however, raises an interesting issue: the superficial disconnect between Herodotus’ recognition of the limited theological validity of, for example, Greek forms of worship, and his conviction that their cultic rituals and places are invested with real power, as manifested by the deaths of Persians and Greeks who commit impiety at sanctuaries.

As we have observed, it is a general principle in the Histories that impiety will be punished. This has often been interpreted, in those instances in which it concerns the desecration of Greek cultic sites (as it most often does), as a sign of Herodotus’ belief that the gods, as conceived by these cults, are real: the ‘polytheistic’, ‘anthropomorphic’, or ‘popular’ gods of traditional Greek religion. This seems, however, to be mistaken, because exactly the same principles apply to impieties in foreign religious systems—indeed to foreign notions of piety whose very foreignness is being stressed in the narrative, as when the Persian Cambyses ridicules the ‘foreign’ religious customs of the Egyptians (3.38). Cambyses was clearly ‘quite mad’ (ἐμάνη μεγάλως), Herodotus tells us, because he mocked (καταγελᾶν) the holy rites and customs (ἱροῖς τε καὶ νομαίοις) of a foreign people. After relating Cambyses’ actions Herodotus goes on to cite the famous Pindaric line: ‘nomos (custom) is king of all’.

Contrary to what we might expect from Herodotus’ rather open comment at 2.3.2 (‘all people know the same amount about the divine’) this principle of theological relativity does not deny the Egyptian and Greek gods the power of revenge, but quite the reverse—one does not mock the religious rites of foreign peoples because their religious practices, like those of all people, have power. It is clearly as part of a divine punishment for killing the Egyptian god Apis (incarnate as a calf) by stabbing

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139 E.g. Athena Assêsiê (1.19-22), Talthybius (7.134.1 & 137.1-2), Poseidon (8.129.3), Demeter (9.65.2; 9.101.1).

140 See, e.g., Lloyd-Jones (cited n.25). This is implied by Scullion’s discomfort at these references to ‘named’ Greek gods in the narrator’s voice (including 2.45.3), which are treated them as ‘exceptions’ in need of explanation (2006), 198.
him in the thigh that Cambyses is later accidentally cut by his own sword as he jumps into his saddle (on exactly the same point on his thigh, as the narrator stresses) and dies from the wound (3.64.3).\footnote{Contrast 3.33 where the murder of Apis is one of two causes for Cambyses’ madness, urged particularly (as we might expect) by the Egyptians.} The examples of the divine punishment of sacrilege, which certainly occur most conspicuously in the Persian invasion of Greece, would seem no more to indicate Herodotus’ conviction that the representation of Demeter in the Greek literary and cultic tradition is literally and wholly ‘true’ than his description of Cambyses’ death implies his belief in the literal bovine incarnation of the Apis calf in the sixth century BC, or the Egyptian ‘holy stories’ about Heracles (2.42).
2.7. The Catalogue

As the Persian army prepares to cross into Europe, there comes a catalogue of the army and navy that Xerxes has assembled at Abydos. The inclusion of a catalogue in the buildup to battle is a device borrowed from Homer, who lists the ships and men of the Greeks immediately before the attack on Troy in the *Iliad* (2.494-759), although Herodotus presumably is drawing on a wider tradition of catalogues in epic, now lost, such as that in the *Cypria.* Both Homer and Herodotus move through the different contingents of the army with an eye for a particular set of features (though their interests differ), and both authors vary the format and language so as to break the monotony of a long and unvarying list.

Herodotus’ departures from the Homeric model are as significant as his borrowings. Homer describes the origin of each contingent (often with numerous epithets describing their homeland), its leader, and the number of ships he brings. Digressions are not infrequent, generally concerning the leader’s appearance or martial prowess, or a brief story about his ancestry. Herodotus typically begins by naming the people in question and describing their dress and weaponry, before finally naming their Persian commander. Where Homer explicitly sets out to list the leaders of each contingent (rarely describing the dress or weaponry of the troops themselves), Herodotus’ focus is much more ethnographic, his primary interest being clothing and arms of the rank and file (cf. 7.96). As in Homer, digressions from the basic pattern are not infrequent, but Herodotus’ are mostly ethnographic in nature, particularly on the name of the people in question: its origin, other variants, previous names, and the original place of abode.

Herodotus’ catalogue of the Persian army features little religious material, but interaction with the Homeric background and the stylized format seems to explain a striking theological anomaly. Elsewhere in the * Histories* the narrator frequently

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142 Allen (1921), 22, discusses both surviving and lost catalogues in Greek literature.
143 Exceptional are 2.542-3 (Abantes have their hair long at the back, and carry ashen spears) and 2.848 (Paeonians have curved bows).
expresses his scepticism of the notion that gods sleep with mortals.\footnote{Harrison (2000), 88. This scepticism is often noted by those who consider Herodotus to incline towards a non-anthropomorphic conception of divinity, e.g., Hoffmeister (1832), 7; Schuler (1869), 44-5; Meuss (1888), 5-6; Burkert (1990), 20-2; Scullion (2006).} These statements typically occur in his nomoi of foreign people, where Herodotus is at his most rationalizing, scientific, and (often) polemical. Thus, in the Babylonian nomoi, Herodotus states his disbelief of the claim by the priests of Zeus Belus that the god sleeps with local women who lie in the temple over night (1.182), and in the Egyptian logos he rebuts Hecataeus’ claims to be descended from a god sixteen generations previously by citing the priests of Thebes (whose records stretch back 345 generations) in which no mortal had divine ancestry (2.143.4). In describing the various claims about the origin of the Scythians, the narrator gives the Scythians’ own account: that the parents of Targitaus were Zeus and the river Borysthenes (4.5.1), but states that he does not believe this (ἐμοὶ μὲν οὖ πιστὰ λέγοντες, 4.5.1), and later gives his preferred version (4.11.1). Once Herodotus explicitly acknowledges his unwillingness to ascribe immortal parents to Perseus (6.53.1):

This disapproval or disbelief in the notion of divine/mortal sex (which can be mirrored in surprise at the notion outside the Histories)\footnote{Harrison (2000), 88, cites as parallels E. Ion 338-58, Her. 1340ff.; cf. Ar. Av. 556-9; Xenoph. DK 21 B 1.21-4, B 11-12.} is directly contradicted in Herodotus’ description of the Persian contingent in the army catalogue, for which no explanation has (to my knowledge) been offered other than carelessness.\footnote{This is the only exception, noted by Linforth (1928), 210-11, Pohlenz (1937), 103 n.4 (‘[Herodot] gibt nur die vulgäre Legende wieder’). Parker (2005b), 47, calls the anomaly a ‘careless expression’; Harrison (2000), 89, notes that Herodotus is ‘almost consistent’ in denying mortal/divine sex.} After relating the clothing, weapons, and commander of the Persian contingent, Herodotus discusses their name: the Persians were originally called ‘Kephenes’ by the Greeks, and ‘Artaioi’ by their neighbours. When Perseus, ‘son of Danae and Zeus’, married Andromeda, the daughter of Kepheus, son of Belus, the Persians took their name
from their child, ‘Perses’ (7.61.3). The equation had already been made by Hecataeus (fr. 21 FGrHist), and the story is not unusual within Herodotus’ catalogue—the names of several nations are etymologized back to heroes from early stories: the Medes, originally called the Arians, were later named after Medea the Colchian (7.62.1), and the Lydians after Lydius, son of Atys (7.74.1). The style of ethnography that Herodotus engages in here is quite different from that which he uses elsewhere in the Histories: in the catalogue Herodotus provides brief asides on the origin of a name rather than an analysis of competing stories and reconstructions. The format is stylized and curt. The contrast can be clearly felt by comparing Herodotus’ discussion of the origin of the Scythian race at the beginning of Book 4, mentioned above, where Herodotus gives three variants: the Scythian story (replete with eponymous individuals and divine/mortal sex), the Greek story (involving Heracles), and a third which Herodotus himself prefers.

In the catalogue, Herodotus does, on occasion, cite a source for certain names (the Macedonians, for example, are given as the authority for the original name of the Phrygians, 7.73), but the catalogue neither gives competing versions of stories, nor suggests that the information provided may be incorrect, in contrast to debates in other ethnographic investigations. The ethnography of the catalogue serves a stylistic role: rather than an in-depth report on all variants and possibilities of the sort Herodotus gives elsewhere this ethnography is largely an ornamental summary. It is in the context of the stylized, Homeric-style catalogue that we should understand Herodotus’ description of Perseus as son of Zeus and Danae. Herodotus temporarily engages with a strand of Greek thought in which the heroes were descended from anthropomorphic gods. In the Catalogue of Ships Homer, too, lists two of the commanders as first- or second-generation descendants of gods: the leaders of the Orchomenians, Ascalaphus and Ialmenus, are said to be the sons of Ares, (whom their mother Astyoche conceived in secret to the god in the palace of Actor, 2.511-15); the leader of the Thessalians is Polypoetes, son of Pirithous, himself the son of Zeus (2.740-6). In the catalogue, I suggest, Herodotus switches his theological code, and talks according to different rules to those elicited in rationalizing contexts.

147 Cf. 7.74.2 (Mysians named Olympieni after Mt. Olympus); variant names: 7.63, 72.1, 7.74.2.
elsewhere in the work. In doing so he appropriated the rules that later commentators, including Isocrates and Aristotle, would describe as ‘poetic’.


Cf. Thuc. 1.21.1 (who may, however, be imagining Herodotus as a logographos here); Isoc. Evag. 8-11; Arist. Met. 1074b1-14.
2.8. The Herodotean ‘Divinity’

We have discussed individual divinities whom Herodotus names in the context of ethnographic reports and stories of relationships of kharis or vengeance between an individual mortal and a particular divinity—Demeter, Talthybius, Apollo, and so on. We now come to a quite different set of ‘divine’ vocabulary, particularly associated with generalizations or speeches which discuss the nature of the divine and its involvement in human life, views which will be analysed in themselves in chapter three.

It has long been observed that when the narrator or the characters refer to (the) god(s) in the course of generalizations they tend not to specify an individual deity, but instead use a range of terms that designate the divine as a whole: ‘the gods’, ‘god’, ‘the divine’, ‘some god’, ‘a daimón’, or ‘the daimonic’. On several occasions a character uses ‘Zeus’ in a similarly generalizing fashion (although the narrator does not). More surprisingly, perhaps, these terms seem to be used completely interchangeably.

Thus, in dialogue with Croesus, Solon talks of τὸ θεῖον (‘the divine’, 1.32.1), and ὁ θεός (‘god’, 1.31.3 & 1.33) without apparent distinction. Artabanus, in conversation with Xerxes, uses various terms which a twenty-first century reader might naturally expect to have quite different meanings or indicate different theological attitudes: θεός (‘god’ 7.15.3 & 7.16.γ1), ὁ θεός (‘(the) god’, 7.10.ε & 7.18.3: four times), θεός τις (‘some god’, 7.16.β1, which naturally acknowledges the existence of numerous divinities). The narrator uses τὸ θεῖον (‘the divine’, 3.108.2),

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150 E.g. Hoffmeister (1832), 8 (Herodotus uses these terms ‘wenn er eine Begebenheit auf einen höhern Ursprung zurückführt’); Baehr (1832), 413; De Jongh (1833), 26; Runge (1856), 5; Schuler (1869), 46; Linforth (1924), 286-7; West (1999), 38; Harrison (2000), 169.

151 Thus Croesus, in conversation with Cyrus, refers to Zeus as having put him in Cyrus’ power (1.207.1), where previously this had been ascribed to ‘(the) god’ (1.87.2: ὁ θεός (narrator speaking), apparently in this context Apollo) and ‘the gods’ (1.89.1: οἱ θεοί (Croesus speaking)). Similar is 9.122.2 (Artembares to Cyrus). That Darius, too, makes a prayer to Zeus (5.105.2) might suggest that this is characteristic of Persians (a nod to the Persian customs described at 1.131?), but they are not the only ones to focus on Zeus (cf. 7.56.2).

152 On translating ὁ θεός as ‘god’ or ‘a god’, see below.

153 Amasis, whose discussion of divine phthonos echoes Solon closely, also uses τὸ θεῖον (3.40.2).
oi θεοί (‘the gods’, 4.205) and ὁ θεός (‘(the) god’, 8.13 & 6.27.1-3). The variety of terms used by Solon, Artabanus, and the narrator testify their basic equivalence in meaning, as do several swift variations between different generalizing terms for the divine agent of a single action. The narrator, for example, when arguing that the destruction of Troy was a demonstration of the principle that the gods punish great crimes with great punishments says:

Ἀλλ’ οὐ γὰρ ἔλεξον Ἐλένην ἀποδοθῆναι οὐδὲ λέγουσι αὐτῷ τῇ ἄλλῃ θεοίνες, ὡς μὲν ἐγὼ γνώμην ἀποφαίνομαι, τοῦ δαίμονιος παρασκευάζοντος δόκος πανολεθήρῃ ἀπολόμενοι καταφανεῖς τοῦτο τοῦτι ἄνθρωποι ποιήσωσι, ὡς τὸν μεγάλον ἀδικημάτων μεγάλαι εἰσὶ καὶ αἱ τιμωρίαι παρὰ τῶν θεῶν. Καὶ ταῦτα μὲν τῇ ἐμοὶ δοκέει εἴρηται. (2.120.5)

But [the Trojans] didn’t have Helen to give back and the Greeks did not believe them when they told the truth, because—to give my own opinion—the daimonic [element] brought it about that, by being utterly destroyed, the Trojans might make it plain to mankind that in return for great injustices the punishments from the gods are also great. What has just been said is my own opinion.

Likewise it seems that two expressions used by Artabanus (‘a daimonic impulse’ and ‘a god-driven destruction’) are little more than doublets (7.18.3). I would dispute the claim that τὸ θείον (‘the divinity’) differs from Herodotus’ other generalizing terms in that it is used ‘in the context of a deduction, by a character or by Herodotus himself, that a certain event is the result of miraculous intervention’. This seems to conflate the use of the adjective θείον (‘divine’) with the substantive τὸ θείον (‘the divine’), but they differ significantly—the adjective can certainly be linked with deductions (since to call a particular event ‘divine’ necessarily involves proposing some kind of divine involvement for an event), but the substantive use (‘the divine’) is not: it occurs only three times, in contexts entirely analogous to ὁ θεός or oi θεοί, where the general nature of ‘the divine’ is under discussion.

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155 Harrison (2000), 176-7, followed by Mikalson (2003), 131 n.70; cf. Pohlenz (1937), 105 & n.3.
156 Compare the narrator at 3.108.2 (τὸ θείον ἕ τε προνοίη) and 8.13 (‘Εποιεῦτο τε πᾶν ὑπὸ τοῦ θεόδ δόκος ἀν…)
157 Compare Amasis at 3.40.2 (τὸ θείον… ἐστι φθονερόν), Artabanus at 7.46.4 (ὁ δὲ θεός…φθονερός), and the narrator at 4.205 (αἱ λήπην ἴσχυρα τιμωρίαι πρὸς θεόδ ἐπίφθονοι γίνονται).
The almost ubiquitous use of the definite article with a noun in fifth-century Greek makes the ‘translation’ of ὁ θεός into English problematic. English confronts us with a choice between ‘a god’, ‘the god in question’ (which automatically suggests one of the several divinities of a ‘polytheistic’ system) and ‘God’ (suggestive of the supreme and unique creator God of a ‘monotheistic’ system). This is built into the fabric of the modern English language. Herodotus’ Greek, of course, lacked capitalization, and it used the article with proper names of both men and gods. Moreover theos is used by thinkers to refer to divine beings as diverse as local river nymphs and unique supreme creators of the universe (further appendix 4). As such it difficult to distinguish those points when the phrase ὁ θεός might indicate a ‘generalized’ divinity (‘God’) and when ‘the god (in question)’. In several passages, however, we can be sure that Herodotus moves from talking about an individual cultic god or goddess to a generalized notion of ‘divinity’, because the cultic divinity in question is female, and thus, in such instances ὁ θεός seems most unlikely to mean ‘the goddess in question’ (for this sense Herodotus clearly writes ἡ θεός, e.g. 1.31.4). 158

A striking example occurs in Solon’s conversation with Croesus. The rich Lydian king asks Solon whom he judges the happiest (ὁλβιότατος) man in the world, to which Solon first replies with the name an Athenian citizen, Tellus. When Croesus, irked at not being chosen, asks after the second happiest, Solon names two young Argives, Cleobis and Biton, who were rewarded for their great filial piety by an early death at a moment of great glory. Solon introduces the story of their premature death with the statement ‘through this (the) god ὁ θεός demonstrated that it is better for mankind to die than to live’. Solon relates how the youths, on realising that the oxen which were supposed to pull their mother’s cart to a religious festival would arrive back from the field too late, themselves donned the yoke and dragged her cart to the festival. On arrival they and their mother were greeted by general adulation, and their mother was so thrilled that she entered the temple of Hera and prayed to ‘the goddess’ τὴν θεόν, i.e. Hera] to give the youths ‘the best that a mortal could meet

158 See Harrison (2000), 174, rightly disregarding Linforth’s suggestion (1928), 232-3, that ὁ θεός can be used as a ‘mere professional title’ of divinities of either sex. This claim is linked to Linforth’s conviction of Herodotus’ ‘fundamental polytheism’ (on which appendix 4).
with’. Cleobis and Biton then entered Hera’s temple and fell asleep, never to wake again. Croesus’ response to the story is one of annoyed incomprehension. Solon explains his choice thus: ‘O Croesus, you ask me about mortal affairs, when I know that the divinity [or ‘the divine (element)’: τὸ θεόν] is entirely grudging and meddlesome’. Solon moves between three words for god(s): two apparently generalizing terms (ὁ θεός and τὸ θεόν) and one reference to a specific divinity whose temporary role in the story seems due to the cultic impetus. This situation is paralleled at 6.82.1-2, and—in some versions of the text—at 1.105.4, 6.61.3, 6.91.1.

In discussing Herodotus’ terminology for the gods, Harrison and Fornara suggest that there is no rhyme or reason to Herodotus’ usage which could support a meaningful distinction between the many terms for divinity we have seen so far. This is quite true of the generalizing terms which, as we have seen, are quite interchangeable with one another. But the occasions which prompt a generalizing term and an individual term do seem to differ, and this affords us some important insight into Herodotus’ shifts in theological perspective. At those moments in which narrator and characters generalize about the nature of the world, the gods are described as a unified entity, whether by singular, plural, or abstract forms of the word θεός or δαιμόν, or occasionally a term like ‘some god’. Only when specific details point to a particular

\[\text{159} \] Cleomenes makes a sacrifice in the Ηέραιον (Hera’s temple, 6.81) to see whether ‘the god’ (ὁ θεός, 6.82.1, 82.2) was favourable to his advance. However, ‘the god’ could conceivably refer to Apollo, whose prophecy had caused Cleomenes concern (6.82.1; see Linforth (1928), 25). The fact that it is only in the context of female deities that we can distinguish between ‘the god in question’ and ‘the divine’ is, of course, a good reason to avoid supplying the ‘appropriate’ divinity in the way often does (see below), as observed by Linforth (1928), 221 n.15, and Harrison (2000), 173.

\[\text{160} \] 1.105.4: The Scythians are punished with ‘the female disease’ by ὁ θεός (codd.) for plundering the temple of Aphrodite Urania, but POxy 18 & 1244, and citations by Ps.-Long. and Tib. read ἡ θεός, which would avoid the inconsistency (but is the lectio facilior). 6.61.3: an ugly child is taken by her nurse to the temple of Hera where she prays that τὴν θεόν (‘the goddess’) might free her from her ugliness. Manuscript C (Laurentian family) reads τὸν θεόν (‘the god’), which would present us with the same variation—although unsupported, this is an odd error to have generated. 6.91.1: the Aeginetans are expelled from their island for dismembering a suppliant at the temple of Demeter Thesmophoros (discussed above), before they are able to propitiate (σφίξα θεόν κενέσθαι) ‘the goddess’ (τὴν θεόν), but manuscripts DRSV read τὸν.

\[\text{161} \] Harrison (2000), 158, citing Fornara (1983), 78 n.36: ‘“It would be ingenuity misspent”, Charles Fornara has written, “to seek for real distinctions within the broad range of [Herodotus’] terminology.” It is important to state at the outset that no clear patterns or distinctions are possible; no imposed theology can be detected or distilled from the pages of the Histories. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the contradictions in Herodotus’ thought, rather than to attempt to rationalize or to reconcile them.’
divinity—e.g. a temple or divinely protected institution—is an individual divinity specified. The only exception is the use of ‘Zeus’ in direct speech as an alternative to the generalizing form.

It might seem natural that, in attempting to see patterns, people should talk in terms which attribute a single disposition to the heavenly powers. This is, however, by no means a given within the Greek literary tradition, for other visions of divine causation were common. To indulge in a few illuminating counterfactuals, Herodotus’ Solon, in outlining his vision of the ephemeral nature of human fortune, might—instead of talking of the nature of τὸ θεῖον—have presented men as feeble beings caught between the competing desires and egos of different divine powers—like Homer’s Odysseus, who subsists for most of the Odyssey between the favour of Athena and the persecution of Poseidon, or Euripides’ Hippolytus who was destroyed by Athena’s anger at his exclusive devotion to Artemis (Hipp. 1416-23). Solon could have envisaged man’s limited good fortune as ordained by fate, but largely immutable for the divinities that stand subordinated to it—the theological world the Pythia outlines to Croesus after the fall of Sardis, which has attracted a significant scholarly following (further §2.9). Yet neither Herodotean characters nor the narrator ever voice such an opinion. In every instance the nature of human life and history is explained by a disposition attributed to ‘the divine’ as a whole.

But the Histories follow in a long tradition of using generalizing terms for divinity.162 When Homer’s Achilles speaks of the ‘two jars of Zeus’ (Il. 24.524-47) he outlines a very similar vision of human happiness to that which emerges from the Herodotean speeches of Artabanus, Amasis, and Solon on the ‘grudging’ or ‘resentful’ (phthoneros) nature of ‘the divine’ or ‘god’. Homer’s Achilles, like Herodotus’ Solon, also moves without change of tone or meaning between numerous terms that describe a seemingly unified divine agency: it is ‘(the) gods’ (θεοί: 525-6) who have woven misery for wretched mortals, but the jars from which mortal fortunes are dispensed lie on Zeus’ floor, and it is ‘Zeus who delights in thunder’ who gives out good and ill (ἐν Διὸς οὖδέτε... Ζεὺς τερπικέραιος: 527-30). It is again

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162 As observed by, e.g., Hoffmeister (1832), 10-11; Harrison (2000), 179-80.
‘the gods’ who do not honour mortals who receive only ill (οὔτε θεοίσι τετιμένος: 533), and who gave great gifts to Achilles (θεοί: 534), but later ‘god’ (θεός) is the dispenser of ill (538). Finally, the divine powers are referred to as ‘the heavenly ones’ (Οὐρανίωνες: 547). The availability of such a theological discourse for philosophical statements, which explain the world and human life by the unified disposition of the divine, is attested in numerous sources outside Epic and Herodotus. Pindar’s tenth Pythian Ode likewise vacillates between singular, plural, and abstract nouns in discussing the limits of human fortune (in remarkably similar terms to those used by Herodotus, further §3.5): he talks of ‘the grudging reversals from the gods’ (φθονερα ἐκθεῶν / μετατροπίαις), as well as ‘god’ (θεός), and ‘excessively strict Nemesis’. We can find similar examples in Athenian tragedy, and in the Xenophonic Socrates’ conversations on the nature of ‘divinity’, some of which show phenomena which parallel Herodotus very closely both in vocabulary and flexibility. It is this flexible generalizing discourse that Herodotus employs in the passages discussed above. To observe that it is also, to some degree, present in Homer is not, of course, to suggest that it is indistinguishable from—or necessarily sits comfortably alongside—Homeric portrayals of Olympian politics and strife. But as Harrison has argued, the ubiquity of this discourse cautions us against assuming that Herodotus’ use of a generalizing singular term like θεός is specifically an adoption from early Ionian philosophy, or that it necessarily imports, for example,

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163 II. 24.524-47, see discussion in François (1957), 7-55 (esp. 23-6, 49-50) who argues that this is a feature of the language of Homeric characters, but not the narrator, who always talks of specific divinities. See also Dodds (1951), 11-12.
164 Pi. P. 10.20-2 & 43. There is potential for confusion in transliterating the Greek term νέμεσις: I capitalize the cult title (‘Nemesis’); the English word, with its quite separate connotations is not capitalized (‘nemesis’), while the ancient Greek emotional term is italicized to indicate transliteration (‘nemesis’). Where it is unclear whether a personification (Nemesis) or a more abstract cosmic process (nemesis) is at issue (originally both ΝΕΜΕΣΙΣ, of course) I transliterate.
166 Xen. Mem. 4.3.13-16: Socrates initially talks about ‘the gods’ (οἱ θεοί), but seamlessly moves to ‘he who arranges and maintains the entire kosmos’ (ὁ τὸν διὸν κόσμον συντάττων τε καὶ συνέχειαν), notes that the soul of man ‘shares in the divine’ (τοῦ θείου μετέχεια), and concludes that it is necessary ‘to honour the daimonic’ (τυμέν τὸ δαίμόνιον). When his conversant, Euthydemus, confirms that he will honour τὸ δαίμόνιον, but doubts the possibility of full requital, Socrates mentions the commands of ‘the god in Delphi’ (ὁ ἐν Αἴτιος θεός).
the connotations of the ‘monotheistic’ Xenophanean fragments, which use θεός to refer to a single, supreme, unmoving, all-seeing god.\textsuperscript{167}

\textsuperscript{167} Harrison (2000), 179 n.84, resisting the pre-Socratic links urged by Else (1949), 35, and Pohlenz (1937), 105 (above nn.29, 30, 138). For Xenophanes and Herodotus as ‘monotheists’ (or not) see appendix 4.
2.9. ‘Fatalism’ in the Histories

The Histories contains many variations on the pattern ‘it was necessary for X to happen’ (where X is invariably disastrous). Both narrator and characters describe numerous unavoidable events as ‘what had to happen’. It is often assumed that such ‘fatalistic’ talk belongs to a category of ‘fate’, which is opposed to a distinct concept of ‘the divine’, a view clearly derived from the Pythia’s response to Croesus after the fall of Sardis (henceforth the ‘Moira oracle’), which opens with the words:

Τὴν πεπρωμένην μοῖραν ἀδύνατά ἔστι ἀποφυγεῖν καὶ θεό.

It is impossible—even for a god—to escape a preordained fate.

Scholars have long viewed the Delphic oracle—and this one in particular—as a mouthpiece which Herodotus uses to express his own theological views with greater authority than his own narratorial voice (deprived of the epic Muse) could command. Perhaps due to the reassuring clarity and universality of the rules the Pythia lays down, this oracle has played an important role in the interpretation of other Herodotean expressions which look, to modern eyes, ‘fatalistic’. This is true not only of the words the Pythia uses—moira and peprômenos—but also the

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168 1.8.2, narrator: ‘it was necessary (χρὴν) for Candaules to end badly’; 2.133.3: in response to Mycerinus’ complaint at the poor lot prophesied to him the oracle of Buto replies that ‘he did not do what it was necessary to do (τὸ χρὴν ἦν ποιέαν). For it was necessary (δεῖν γὰρ) for Egypt to suffer…’; 2.161.3, narrator: ‘it was necessary (ἔδειξε) for [Apries] to end badly’; 3.43.1, narrator: after failing in his attempt to save Polycrates, Amasis learns (ἐξωθέ) that ‘it is impossible (ἀδύνατον) for a man to extricate another man from what will happen (τοῦ μέλλοντος γενέσθαι πρήγματος)’; 4.79.1, narrator: ‘since it was not necessary for [Skyles] to end badly (ἔδειξε οἱ κακῶς γένεσθαί), it happened for the following reason’; 5.33.2, narrator: ‘since it was not necessary (οὐ γὰρ ἔδειξε) for Naxos to be destroyed by this expedition’ (perhaps better translated as ‘it was necessary that the Naxians were not defeated’); 5.92.1, narrator: ‘it for was necessary (ἔδει) for bad things to befall (ἀναβλαστεῖν) Corinth from the son of Hetion’; 6.64, narrator: ‘but it was necessary, so it seems, (ἐδόθε, ὡς οἶκε) for these things to become known and Demaratus to be deposed from the kingship’; 6.135.3, the Pythia: ‘it was necessary (δεῖν) for Miltiades to end badly (μὴ εἶδο)’; 8.53.1, narrator: ‘in time, however, an escape for their difficulties appeared to the Barbarians, for it was necessary, in accordance with the oracle (ἔδειξε γὰρ κατὰ τὸ θεοπρόπιον) for all of mainland Attica to fall to the Persians’; 9.109.2, narrator: Artaûnte asks Xerxes for the robe Amestris had woven, ‘for it was necessary (ἔδειξε) for her to end badly, along with her whole house’. See also 9.16, 7.17.2, discussed below.

169 For the Delphic oracle as a source of theological authority on which Herodotus, bereft of the inspiration of the omniscient muse, could draw, see Kindt (2006), 44, 48-9; cf. E. Barker (2006), 28, and below.

170 These occur less frequently, as follows. Moira: 1.121, Astyages speaking to Cyrus; 3.142.3, Maeandrius of the demise of Polycrates; 4.164.4, the narrator on the death of Arcesilaus. Peprômenos:
common expression ‘what was going to/had to happen’, which this oracle does not use.¹⁷¹ This oracle is generally assumed to be the key to the interpretation of the religious meaning of the Croesus logos as a whole,¹⁷² and it has been argued that the Pythia’s words on the immutability of fate to both god and man constitute the central theological lesson of the Histories.¹⁷³ But, as we shall see, more often than not in the Histories ‘the gods’ and ‘fate’ seem to work side by side rather than being simply arrayed in the strict hierarchy laid out by the oracle. This dissonance has recently been described as one of the ‘blatant and irreducible’ contradictions that characterizes Herodotus’ belief in fate,¹⁷⁴ rendering it, as Antonio Maddalena says, ‘philosophically absurd’.¹⁷⁵

This is not the only view that scholars have taken of this difficulty. In the early nineteenth century Karl Hoffmeister, classical philologist and former theology

³.64.4-5, Cambyses on realizing the true interpretation of an oracle and dream. Outside Herodotus it is found mainly in poetry, e.g. A. Ag. 68; Pi. N. 4.6.1; E. Rhes. 634-5.

¹⁷¹ De Ste Croix (1977), 140-1, discusses all instances of the ‘it had to happen’ type under the heading of ‘fate’ (along with examples of tisis and moira), and concludes that, for Herodotus, the gods are ‘subject to the supreme decrees of Fate or the Fates’. ‘Amoral’ fate (as opposed to ‘moral’ and ‘immoral’ divine causation) is one of the three incompatible notions between which De Ste Croix’s Herodotus ‘jumps...without realizing what he is doing’. Versnel (2011), 187-8, dismisses objections to ‘clustering moira, to peprômenon or to mellon ginesthai by subsuming them under one heading “destiny” or “the predestined”’, when the author himself twice combines the first two in one expression and twice uses the third as a variant.’ This approach has a long tradition—De Jongh (1833), 27-30, treats together (under ‘fatum’) oracular references to the will of the fates (1.91) and of Zeus (7.141), expressions of the ‘what has to happen’ type, and the expression ‘what must come from god’ (9.16). Ranulf (1933), 37-40, translates phrases of the ἔδεε γενέσθαι type as ‘by the decree of Fate’ and so on.

¹⁷² The moral Gould draws from the story of Croesus is that of the Pythia (1989), 68-9. For the tendency to assume that all sources of authority in the Histories (especially wise advisers and oracles) share a single set of theological views: Kirchberg (1965), 20, 26, 116; Löfler (2008), 36-7. There is, as we shall see in the next two chapters, almost no overlap in theological or metaphysical terms.

¹⁷³ Döllinger (1857), 257; Kirchberg (1965), 27 (the opening words of the Pythia at 1.91 are ‘Herodotus’ central expression of his worldview’ according to which ‘all expressions about necessary occurrences (χρήν γενέσθαι etc.) should be understood); Calame (1996), 153; Hartog (1999), 188-91 (oracles function ‘as an organizing pattern of the narrative, as a reservoir of meaning and as a principle of intelligibility”).

¹⁷⁴ Harrison (2000), 16.

¹⁷⁵ Maddalena (1950), 65-7, takes this view on the grounds that Herodotus talks in fatalistic terms on some occasions (i.e. expressions with χρήν or ἔδεε which mean ‘era inevitiblile, era fatale’) but not on others, where he talks of divine causation. Similarly low evaluations of Herodotus’ intellect on this basis are made by De Ste Croix (above n.171), and Harrison (2000). Cf. (2009), 379, where the availability of alternative explanations such as ‘the gods’, ‘fate’, ‘chance’, and ‘daimones’ provides ‘the necessary flexibility whereby the belief in the possibility of divine retribution can be maintained.’ Two of the many inconsistent ideas which Versnel (2011), 186-8, sees are ‘the working of predestined and inescapable fate’ (including ‘it had to happen’ etc.), as opposed to the ‘the will of the gods in general’. 
student in Strasbourg, took the Moira oracle as the basis of a rationalizing synthesis that elucidated Herodotus’ conception of the relationship between ‘fate’, ‘the divine’, and ‘the gods’. Hoffmeister strives to fit this varied text into a single, consistent theological system, which he then attributes to the author—precisely the opposite approach to that taken by more recent classicists who refuse, on methodological grounds, to ‘make sense’ of an incoherent text.

In Hoffmeister’s view Herodotus’ metaphysical world is governed by a supreme fate (Schicksal/Verhängnis/Möra) that establishes the basic ground rule for humanity: the balance between good and bad fortune. The gods have the office (Amt) of regulating this balance, and can only operate only within the confines of the boundaries set by fate (as Apollo does in delaying the sack of Sardis by three years, but not allowing Croesus to escape his moira). The gods are entirely benevolent towards humans as long as they are free from guilt (Schuld). But as agents of fate the gods are also compelled to visit guiltless humans with bad fortune; they do this as agents, not on their own account, hence the rule of divine benevolence (deduced from Herodotus’ comment on divine pronoia, 3.108.2) is not contradicted. Hoffmeister invokes the gods’ position as agents of a supreme fate to explain why terms indicating the intervention of gods crop up alongside terms which he considers indicators of fate (i.e. δεῖ, χρῆ, μέλλει, or μοίρα and cognates). By borrowing the fate/divine hierarchy from the Moira oracle, displacing the responsibility for the limit on human good fortune from the phthoneros disposition of ‘the divinity’ (as in the speeches of by Solon, Amasis, and Artabanus) onto ‘fate’, and himself introducing the notion of the gods as agents of fate (nowhere in the Histories), Hoffmeister manages to incorporate many of Herodotus’ statements about (the) god(s) from

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176 The assumptions underlying this approach and the methods employed in schematizing have been observed and criticized by Skinner (1969), 7-20, and echoed by Classicists, e.g. Versnel (1990), 14-30, Rüpke (2007), 67, and Versnel (2011), 188-9.
177 For these views see Hoffmeister (1832), 1-32, esp. 3-4, 12-13, 16-17, 26-7.
178 Hoffmeister (1832), 21-2, ‘Zwar ist dem Menschen das Maß und Gesetz seines Erdenglückes im Großen durch die Möra bestimmt, aber der Möra Vollstrecker sind ja die Götter, und innerhalb dieser allgemeinen Grenze ist im Besonder dem alles den Göttern anheimgengegeben’.
179 Hoffmeister (1832), 13, citing, alongside other examples, Amasis at 3.40 (the rule of alternation stipulated by divine phthonos) and 3.143.1 (Amasis’ realization that Polycrates’ misfortune is ‘what is going to happen’); cf. n.184.
completely different narrative contexts into a single theological framework that incorporates wholesomely benevolent divinities.\footnote{180}

Readings like this seem to give us more insight into the theological world of a nineteenth-century German scholar than Herodotus.\footnote{181} But, despite the deeply unfashionable status of such syntheses today, one of Hoffmeister’s basic assumptions remains unquestioned: that the Moira oracle cited at 1.91, understood literally, provides the key to the interpretation of all statements in the Histories that sound ‘fatalistic’.

The only point where the Histories explicitly connect an expression of the ‘what has to happen’ type with some sort of non-human agency offers a very different perspective to the Moira oracle. (Significantly, too, the Moira oracle nowhere uses the ‘it had to happen’ formula.) In a banquet on the eve of the battle of Plataea a Persian explains to his Greek couch-fellow why he is resigned to the doom that awaits the Persian army:

\[\text{Friend, man is powerless to avert what must come from (the) god. For none like to believe those who speak the truth. Many Persians know this, but we follow, constrained by necessity. The greatest pain amongst mortals is this: to know much, but to be powerless.}\]

Here the phrase ‘what must happen’ is qualified by the words ‘from (the) god’, and there is no suggestion that the unqualified expression ‘it had to happen’ is synonymous with a fate determined entirely independently from the gods.

\footnote{180}{The notion of a malevolent fate independent of the gods is common in 19th-century scholarship on Greek religion (cf. §1.6-7): von Humboldt (1909), 121, for example, like many post-classical ancient authors (on whom see Aalders (1979)), prefers to talk of the ‘Neid des Schicksals’. For the drive amongst Hoffmeister’s contemporaries to exculpate Herodotus’ gods from Platonic criticisms: §1.2-3, §1.5, §1.9.}

\footnote{181}{For the enduring scholarly penchant for making a ‘single system’ out of all Herodotus’ ideas: §1.5, §1.9.}
By his ‘fatalistic’ words Herodotus’ anonymous Persian resigns himself to the divinely ordained doom that has been closing around the expedition from the moment that Xerxes and Artabanus reluctantly committed to it, compelled by the threatening dream vision (also ‘divine’) that likewise would not allow any escape from ‘what must happen’ (τὸ χρεὸν γενέσθαι).

The fact that the Histories’ only explicit connection between ‘what must happen’ and ‘(the) god(s)’ subordinates ‘what must happen’ to ‘god’ suggests that the apparent ‘fatalism’ of the narrator and some oracles is not to be considered as implying an independent, animate, fatalistic power that is opposed to the generalizing terms for ‘the divine’ (above, §2.8). We introduce a level of formalization that Herodotus does not if, with Meuss, we say that ‘what must happen’ is thus ‘the unified will of the gods’, but the frequent association of ‘what must/will happen’, moira, and to peprômenon with the actions and will of the god(s) throughout the work (in dialogue and narrative) shows that the rest of the Histories does not maintain the Moira oracle’s hard distinction between ‘fate’ and ‘divinity’. As we saw, Artabanus is told that Xerxes’ expedition is ‘what must happen’ (τὸ χρεὸν γενέσθαι) and concludes that it is a ‘daimonic impulse’ and ‘god-driven destruction’ (δαίμονι τις γίνεται ὁρμή... φθορή... θεηλατος). When Zopyrus realizes that a defender’s arrogant words contained a hidden truth and that he had spoken ‘with god’ (σὺν θεῷ) he concludes that the capture of Babylon is ‘fated’ (μόρσιμον). Amasis warns Polycrates of the phthoneros nature of ‘the divine’ (τὸ θεῖον Ὁς ἄστι φθονερὸν), and learns by the end of the story that he cannot save a man from ‘that which will happen’ (τὸ ὢν γίνεσθαι πρήγματος). Referring to this same incident Maeandrius says that Polycrates ‘fulfilled his lot/fate (moira)’ (ἐξέπλησε μοῖραν τὴν ἔωτον). Cambyses announces with moribund lucidity that it was ‘allotted’ (ἐστὶ πεπρωμένον τελευτῶν) for him to die where he was (at Ecbatana, as predicted by an oracle), as he bleeds from a sword-wound in exactly the same place that he stabbed the Egyptian god Apis. After the narrator tells us that Scyles ‘had to end badly’ (ἔδει οἱ κακοὶ γενέσθαι), he goes on to observe that ‘(the) god’ (ὁ

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182 As the dream puts it to Artabanus, 7.17.2. For the elaborate test which proves the dream’s divine origin see 7.15.3, 16γ.1 & γ.2, 18.3, where its divinity is concluded in explicit terms.

183 An idea also popular in the 19th century: e.g., Bötticher (1829), 6; Dittges (1842), 5-7; Runge (1856), 19; Schuler (1869), 7-8, 10-11; Meuss (1888), 6-7. Based on an analysis of Herodotus’ own usage Meuss argues convincingly against Hoffmeister's notion of a ‘selbständige Schicksalsmacht’.
θεός) threw his lightning onto Scyles’ house, a warning Scyles ignored.  

In none of these examples—in which we find all the terms which most scholars insist must refer to the independent fate described by the Pythia—is there anything remotely suggestive of a god/fate dichotomy. Indeed, the impression given is the opposite: gods and fate seem to work together. Nor is there any suggestion in the entire work that the gods are simply enforcing what has been decreed by fate/the Fates (Hoffmeister’s notion of ‘agency’).

Though many have refused to follow Hoffmeister in the construction of elaborate ‘Herodotean’ theologies, very few have challenged his assumption that terms like ‘it had to happen’, peprômenon (ordained), and moira (lot/portion) must be synthesized with the Moira oracle. Even the most vocal critics of the ‘consistent’ Herodotus forged by the nineteenth-century establishment to which Hoffmeister belonged share one of his most questionable assumptions: that the expressions and words of the whole work can be analysed according to the theological categories provided by a single oracle that Herodotus cites from a Delphic source, as a self-conscious ‘apology’ for Apollo's apparent failure to take care of his benefactors. Herodotus would surely have found this surprising, given his explicit comments on the limited validity of traditional Greek conception of the gods (see §2.2), for these are precisely the same gods that populate this oracle and others.

In understanding the Herodotean evidence, it is essential to note that in earlier and contemporary literature ‘fate’ and ‘the gods’ could be conceived of as working in tandem, or could be separated and opposed to one another. We might view this fluidity in terms of ‘get out clauses’—preserving a belief in the general efficacy of sacrifice when those who sacrifice are destroyed (e.g. 1.91)—or in literary terms: as when Zeus, dramatizing paternal concern, considers saving Hector, but is reproved by Hera (e.g. Il. 16.439-49). Herodotus explicitly presents the Moira oracle as

184 Artabanus (above n.182); Amasis: above n.179; Maeandrius: 3.142.3; Zopyrus: 3.153-4; Cambyses: 3.64.3-5; Scyles: 4.79.1-2.

185 An exception is Gould (1989), 74, 77, who argues that the phrase ‘it had to happen’, along with other variants: ‘is not the language of one who holds a theory of historical necessity’. Contrast, e.g., Pohlenz (1937), 108 & n.2.

186 E.g. Gorgias, Helen 4 (grouping ‘chance’, ‘the gods’, and ‘necessity’ together) & 6 (grouping ‘(the) god’ and ‘chance’); cf. n.79 on the various alignments of 'fate' and 'gods' in Pindar.
serving the former function: far from displaying the subconscious latitude that Greek religion could employ, it is an exercise in theological problem solving, presented as such (a piece of Delphic apologetics delivered in quotation marks), which is used to give closure to the story of Croesus, picking up on a theme elaborated at the start of his story (1.13).\textsuperscript{187} It is, however, a stricture to which Herodotus does not seem to confine himself in the rest of his stories (and it is in his most dramatic stories that these 'fatalistic' terms primarily occur).

Unlike many critics, Harrison notes the contrast between the Pythia’s ‘more theological’ statements and Herodotus’ own statements. Yet Harrison too points out numerous contradictions in Herodotus’ ideas about fate by comparing the implications of various oracles cited in the text, leading him to conclude that these statements were not the ‘product of lengthy theological reflection’ on Herodotus’ part, but were rather an ‘unrationalized collection of attitudes and responses’.\textsuperscript{188} If we think these oracles genuinely reflect original poetic oracles (as an analysis of their vocabulary and terminology suggests), then we would expect them to be just that: a collection of diverse and unrationalized attitudes, cited from various traditions, for different literary purposes, with no particular value as evidence for what the author would, if asked, profess as his own theological opinions. Harrison’s observations reveal a good deal about the flexibility of theological notions within the literary culture with which Herodotus engages, but they teach us less about the moral or theological views of the historical author than is often claimed.

The rest of this chapter puts Herodotus’ statements about divinity in the context of the theological views of his contemporaries, and of his own explicit statements on the nature of the gods.

\textsuperscript{187} Note the framing of this as a Delphic narrative—\textit{λέγεται} (91.1)... \textit{ἡ Πυθίη ὑπεκρίνατο} (91.6)—and differences in vocabulary (above §2.4) which mark the oracle as a verbatim report.

\textsuperscript{188} Harrison (2000), 228, noting the ‘contradiction’ between the Moira oracle (1.91) and the Persian (9.16.4); that between the Moira oracle and the Pythian oracle given concerning Timo and Miltiades (6.135); that between the Moira oracle (i.e. ‘Croesus’ story’) and the oracle concerning Evenius (9.93-4).
2.10.1. Genre and Theology in the *Histories*

The theological ideas considered so far in this chapter suggest that Herodotus is led by his engagements with different generic conventions to substantially change the way he talks about god(s). Differences can be observed in his basic conception of the nature of gods, his vocabulary, and his willingness to accept certain notions about how the gods relate to fate and to humanity. Absolute boundaries are generally lacking—unsurprising given that, in many cases, the move between different generic affiliations is partial and gradual—but the patterns are striking, particularly in Herodotus’ citations of oracles and poetry. Discord between individual gods (and sometimes an independent class of supernatural beings, the Moirai) and a hierarchical arrangement of divine powers are confined to the oracles Herodotus cites, and contrast with the unvarying unity of the divine world presupposed by the philosophical and theological generalizations in dialogues. Neither as unified as the latter nor as divided as the former are the actions of the individual gods that are mentioned, inevitably because the story in question makes a clear and obvious link between a supernatural occurrence and the temple, cult, or institution of a specific deity. Pious or impious acts towards a god, their holy property, or the institutions they patronize are characterized as leading (theoretically without fail) to certain types of reciprocal relationship (mutual *khari* or vengeance/punishment), and in this sense these gods, though unquestionably identified as *individuals*, follow a *uniform* mode of behaviour, rather than whim.

Particularly surprising, perhaps, is Herodotus’ willingness to engage in innovative speculation into the nature and age of the gods (e.g. the age of Heracles and Pan) and to suggest that traditional Greek genealogies of humans that claim descent from gods and heroes are mistaken—invited, apparently, by Homer and Hesiod (§2.2)—but then to employ these same features when his literary purposes are different, and to cite hexameters in which, for example, ‘Pallas’ begs ‘Olympian Zeus’ using her traditional attributes (‘shrewd wisdom’, and so on, 7.142).
An alternative explanation for the theological diversity noted in this chapter might be biographical. It has often been assumed that Herodotus’ writings on the Persian war postdate his travels and ‘field-work’. If this is accepted we might imagine that, after a period as a youthful, polemical free-thinker who questioned traditional theology, Herodotus sat down to write the catalogue of Xerxes' army, for example, as an older, ‘conservative intellectual’. Alternatively we might theorize that Herodotus became increasingly sceptical in the course of his ethnographic field research (a long-held view of Herodotus’ intellectual development) and we might then assume that the catalogue (written from an early and unexamined ‘Greek’ viewpoint) escaped revision by the later, more sceptical author. Such explanations, however, do not help to explain the variation between the divided theological world of hexameter oracles and the united theology used ubiquitously elsewhere. As noted, Herodotus’ generalizing terms for god(s) appear in both the rationalizing Egyptian logos (e.g. 2.120.5) and his most dramatic and philosophical tales (e.g. 3.40.2), and he cites hexameter oracles that feature traditional divinities with traditional attributes throughout the work. Context thus seems much a more plausible explanation than a developmental change, however much development presumably did play an important role in the historical author's thought.

All this suggests that Herodotus was a practised code-switcher, not only in his ability to tolerate different discourses (e.g. oracles), but also to actively engage with them. To recast Gibbon’s much-quoted analogy, Herodotus, in another age, might be imagined as a social scientist of religious inclination blending laboratory research, ghost-stories, dialogues in purple prose, citations from his holy text, and political polemic into a single work, adjusting his vocabulary and conceptual framework to suit. The comparison with ‘code-switching’ between linguistic registers is not an idle one: Herodotus’ tendency to switch important aspects of his language (reflective of a change in conceptual categories) as he changes his writing style and subject matter can be observed elsewhere. Comparison with Herodotus’ naming and

189 The view of Regenbogen (1930). For developmental views of the Histories see also Jacoby (1913), Powell (1949), (1967), esp. 34, and Fornara (1971), 1-23.
190 The phrase coined by Fornara (1990), 33-4.
191 See Bauer (1878), 47-60 (for whom Herodotus’ radical religious scepticism grew in Egypt).
conceptualization of non-Greeks (described in appendix five) shows much the same flexibility.
2.10. Theological Discourses in the *Histories*

The view of Herodotean theology proposed in this chapter moves in the same direction as much theoretical work on Greek religion, but differs from much that has been said on the variety of religious ideas in the *Histories*. In his analysis of the inconsistency of various visions of divinity in Greek religion Harrison concludes that:¹⁹²

The absence of any dogmatic certainty as to whether ill fortune comes from the gods, fate, chance or *daimones*—far from constituting a problem—provides the necessary flexibility whereby the belief in the possibility of divine retribution can be maintained.

Harrison’s approach to Herodotus’ religious inconsistency is grounded in anthropological studies, particularly those which explore how religious thought-systems cope with events which seem (to outsiders) to be obvious disproof of the religious assumptions concerned, but which only seem to confirm the believers in their belief.¹⁹³ Anthropologists and psychologists have observed several defence mechanisms, whereby the failure of reality to match up with the predictions of a given belief-system may result not in the *abandonment* of ideas which gave rise to the (unfulfilled) predictions, but in the creation of *ad hoc* explanations which serve to protect the underlying beliefs. Frustrated adherents might point to the corruption or incompetence of a priest, the impurity of a sacrifice, the anger of an ancestor, a curse from another individual, or punishment for an unacknowledged crime by a member of the group.¹⁹⁴

These protective mechanisms were systematically laid out for Zande culture in Evans-Pritchard’s influential study of 1937.¹⁹⁵ Known to Taylor as ‘blocks to falsifiability’, to Horton as ‘secondary elaboration’, and to Harrison also as ‘get-out clauses’, they have played an important role in the analysis of Greek religious

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¹⁹² Harrison (2007), 397.
¹⁹³ Harrison’s explanation of numerous phenomena seeks to answer how Greek beliefs about the divine were made ‘sustainable’ in the light of experience, (2000), 76, 78, similar to the questions asked by Festinger, Riecken & Schachter (1957).
¹⁹⁴ Horton (1967b), 167-72. The idea is also to be found in Nadel (1956), in his study on the Nupe, and Forde (1958), in his study on the Yakö.
¹⁹⁵ Evans-Pritchard (1937), 194, 338; see also (1956).
thought in the latter half of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{196} That the notion of ‘blocks to falsifiability’ is a useful tool in our analysis of a conceptual system is not in doubt.\textsuperscript{197} An effective example is when Herodotus looks for the effects of the retributive anger of Talthybius upon the Athenians and Spartans who killed the Persian messengers:\textsuperscript{198}

\textgreek{Ο τι δὲ τοῖς Ἀθηναῖοις ταῦτα ποίησαι τοὺς κήρυκας συνήνεικε ἄνεβηλητον γενέσθαι, οὐκ ἔχω εἰπαί, πλὴν ὁτι σφέων ἡ χώρη καὶ ἡ πόλις ἔδησθη, ἀλλὰ τοῦτο οὐ διὰ ταύτην τὴν αἰτίην δοκέω γενέσθαι.}

What unpleasant event happened to the Athenians who did this to the heralds I do not know, other than that their country and land was ravaged, but I do not think that occurred as a result of these deeds.

Herodotus’ approach to the question of divine retribution here seems classically ‘protective’ rather than empirical—his phraseology does not suggest that the retribution might not have happened, but rather that he does not know how it happened. It appears that not discovering any sign of divine vengeance is not taken as evidence against the idea that the gods punish impiety. We should note, however, that Herodotus is not professing a belief that divine punishment always results from sacrilege, but stressing that he does not consider the sack of Athens to be the punishment for this particular crime: we can only guess whether this is because he has another theological explanation in mind, or because the murder of heralds and the destruction of the city seem mismatched (perhaps in scale or in nature).

But this functional view of theological variety, predicated on the notion that religious belief is particularly empirically unsupportable—a dubious assumption in the ancient world, I suspect—has tended to crowd out other explanations, in which theological variety serves other purposes. Competing theological ideas are not necessarily unintended or even contradictory if their propositional content is analysed with an eye to various types of allegorical, literary, or conventionalized engagement with

\textsuperscript{196} Cf. Harrison (2000), 21, 110, 112; (2007), 376; §1.6.2 n.159.
\textsuperscript{197} It is possible, if impolitic, to analyse much of the scholarly theodicy carried out on Herodotus in similar terms: particularly the establishment of protective explanatory systems which explain all misfortune as ‘just punishment’ (irrespective of what the author actually writes in any particular instance). See §1.9, esp. n.218.
\textsuperscript{198} 7.133.2, cited by Harrison (2000), 103. See above n.113.
other theological paradigms. Rather than reflecting the author’s attempts to cling to theological notions in the light of empirical contradiction, I suggest that many of Herodotus’ religious ‘inconsistencies’ are the inevitable result of his literary project, which draws on multiple genres and styles (many of which themselves admit a great deal of variety), including citations of closed texts (e.g. hexameter oracles). We shall return to this topic again at the end of the next chapter (§3.7).

If we credit Herodotus with the ability to navigate various literary genres and discourses—an ability attested by his nuanced stylistic variation, extremely diverse modes of narration, and his frequent modulation of his prose as he changes focalization—the question of Herodotean ‘inconsistency’ that has occupied much scholarship of the last half century must be reformulated. The next section, therefore, will return in broader terms to the question of how Herodotus related to theological ‘tradition’.
2.11. Herodotus on Homer and Oracles

If he did not speak in allegory, Homer was entirely impious.


If, in the early fifth century BC, you found yourself in disagreement with the way Homer presented the gods in the Theomachy of the *Iliad*, at least three quite different options lay before you: you could interpret them at face value and criticize them; you could identify particular expressions or forms of speech as allegorical and reinterpret them so as to be amenable to your own views; or you could ignore his work entirely. All these paths seem, in fact, to have been well trodden in the Ionian intellectual tradition by the mid sixth century BC—perhaps eighty years before Herodotus’ birth—and they are different in detail, but not in kind, from the rhetorical choices that confronted Christian humanists in the Renaissance, whose responses to Herodotus were discussed in the first chapter. It is, however, unlikely that any ancient Greek, reared on Hesiodic and Homeric hexameter from early childhood, would have felt compelled to stick consistently to only one path.

The acceptance of Hesiod and Homer as the dominant educational texts and literary models for over a millennium does not imply the literal and unquestioning acceptance of Homeric- and Hesiodic-style theology by their reciters, imitators, or audiences. Even amongst their most fervent philosophical admirers, quite the reverse is true. Cicero describes the approach of the third-century Stoic Chrysippus to the texts of Homer, Hesiod, Orpheus and Musaeus.

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199 The role of Homer in education is attested from the 6th to the 1st centuries BC. Cf. Xenophanes (fr. 10 DK); Heraclitus (22 B 57 DK); Xenophon (*Symp.* 3.5); Plato (*Ion* 533d-e); ps-Longinus, *On the Sublime* (44.3: children are ‘virtually swaddled’ in Homer); Dion Chrysostom (*Or.* 11.308 R & 18.8: ‘Homer is first, middle and last, for every child man and elder’); ‘Heraclitus’ *Homeric Problems* (1.5-7).

200 Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods*, 1.41. Boys-Stones (2003b), 189, points out that the Stoics were quite conscious of this apparent paradox, and had arguments in response.
In secundo autem volt Orphei Musaei Hesiodi Homerique fabellas accommodare ad ea quae ipse primo libro de deis immortalibus dixerit, ut etiam veterrimi poetae, qui haec ne suspicati quidem sint, Stoici fuisse videantur.

In Book two [of his work *On the Gods*] Chrysippus wants to make the stories in Orpheus, Musaeus, Hesiod and Homer conform with what he himself has said in Book 1 about the immortal gods, so that even the most ancient poets, who wouldn’t so much have suspected any of it, would appear to be Stoics.

The earliest evidence for allegorical interpretations of Homer, of the sort Cicero attributes to Chrysippus, are later descriptions of two Ionian writers, probably working in the late sixth century: Theagenes of Rhegium and Metrodorus of Lampsacus.\(^{201}\) According to a Homeric scholion, Theagenes read the gods in the divine feast of *Iliad* 20 as metaphors for moral virtues,\(^ {202}\) while other testimonies record that Metrodorus read the Homeric heroes as metaphors for the planets and the gods as metaphors for internal organs.\(^ {203}\) Even before them, Pherecydes of Scyros, another shadowy figure whose work does not survive, seemed to use allegory in his cosmogony.\(^ {204}\) In the fourth century the Platonic Socrates, a vehement rejecter of what he termed ‘poetic lies’, argued that poetry which teaches lies about the gods is not admissible to the Republic, even if composed with *hyponoiai*, or hidden meanings, because it will mislead the young regardless. Xenophon, too, has Socrates allude to the interpretation of epic by *hyponoiai*.\(^ {205}\) The Derveni author approached Orphic texts armed with the tools of allegory, and in the third century AD Porphyry would claim that the battle of the gods in *Iliad* 20 were allegorical representations of the opposing elements.\(^ {206}\) Allegorical interpretations of traditional ‘Homeric’ theology, then, can be found synchronically throughout Greek thought.

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201 Brief discussions of the brief testimonies can be found in Most (1999a), 340-2, Obbink (2003), 180. Fränkel (1975), 106-7, suggests that the thought of the early epic writers was itself already ‘coded’; Most (1994) and Ford (2002), 69, likewise point to potential elements of allegory in epic itself (e.g. *Iliad* 21.6-7: ἡέρα δ᾽ Ἡρα / πίτνα).


203 See 61 B 3-4 DK.


206 Porphyry’s views, too, are reported in the same Homeric scholion (B ad *Il.*, 20.67), cf. Ford (2002), 68.
The opposite reaction was no less vibrant: attacks on the ‘lies of the poets’ imply a dismissal of these sorts of allegorical interpretations, and bring with them the cachet of surpassing tradition. Xenophanes is the first extant author to reject Homeric and Hesiodic theology, and echoes can be found, as we saw at the start of this chapter, in Euripides, Plato, Cicero and Augustine.\(^{207}\)

How, then, does Herodotus couch his departures from traditional Hesiodic and Homeric theology, and where (if anywhere) does he place himself on the rhetorical spectrum that ran from the scornful *refutation* of traditional Greek theology (literally interpreted) to the respectful *reclamation* of tradition by allegory? Herodotus shows much interest in allegorical exegesis, although he never uses any particular noun or verb to describe the process of ‘speaking non-literally’. We do not find *allégoriè*, *metaphora*,\(^ {208}\) or *hyponoia\(^ {209}\) in his text as terms to categorize his approach to ‘riddling’ speech although he does use the verb ἀἰνίσσομαι (‘to riddle’, of a dream’s words to Hipparchus, 5.56.1). The closest to verbs for allegorical exegesis are the rather general terms συνίημι, συμβάλλω and συλλαβάνω (‘put/throw together’), which can refer to all types of comprehension. But, although there is no specific vocabulary for this process, the approach is unquestionably present. The narrator, for example, rationalizes the aetiological story of the two talking black doves (told by the priestesses of Dodona) as an allegory for the enslavement of two Egyptian women (they ‘call’ (καλέω) the Egyptian women ‘black doves’ because they are dark skinned and speak an incomprehensible language resembling bird speech, 2.55-6);\(^ {210}\) characters also interpret oracular messages whose message is encoded in allegory (e.g. the ‘Wooden Wall’, 7.141-4; the whereabouts of Orestes’ bones, 1.67-8; the ‘mule’ who will rule Lydia, 1.55-6, 91). Likewise Herodotus depicts characters symbolically encoding and decoding complex messages (e.g. the Scythian message to Darius, 4.131-2, cf. 6.37.2). Characters even interpret oracles using traditional mythology relationships—the Athenians interpret an oracular reference to their

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207 See §1.1 nn.27-8; §2.1 nn.2-5. For the argument that allegorical interpretation of epic began as a defence against Xenophanean criticisms: Jaeger (1947), 67-8.

208 Μεταφορέω has no metaphorical sense in Herodotus (purely physical: 1.64.2, 2.125.4).

209 ὑπονοέω indicates suspicion of people with uncertain allegiances (only at 9.84.2, 88, 99.1).

210 The explanation is similar to the rationalization of the myth of Boreas’ rape of Oreithyia, given by Socrates in Plato’s *Phaedrus* (229c-e).
'brother-in-law' as referring to the wind god Boreas, recalling the mythical story 'amongst the Greeks' that Boreas had an Attic wife (7.189).211 The dream of Polycrates’ daughter likewise describes the future in allegory that is somewhat ‘theological’: she saw a dream in which her father seemed to hang in the air, washed by Zeus, and anointed by the sun. What happened, as Herodotus points out, is that he was crucified, washed by rain, and exuded moisture under the heat of the sun (3.124-5).

Herodotus, then, was no stranger to allegory, even allegory from sources of prophetic wisdom that used a god as a metaphor for rain (for example), or coded its meaning in traditional mythological relationships. Moreover, as Sammons has recently argued, the tradition of Homeric exegesis by *hyponoia* seems to underlie Herodotus’ claim that, although Homer’s narrative of the Trojan War did not send Helen to Egypt, Homer left signs in the work to show that he knew the true story (2.116-18).212 Homer’s writing, Herodotus suggests, might contain the traces that reveal the truth, but only if you know how to look for it, and are capable of looking past the generic distortions that affect the composition of epic poetry. Elsewhere Herodotus indicates that Homer says things which are clearly incorrect if taken at face value: witness Herodotus’ dismissal of the notion that the world is surrounded by Ocean, and that Ocean is the source of the Nile (the latter view is, Herodotus suggests, derived from ‘Homer or one of the earlier poets’ who ‘invented it and introduced it into his poetry’).213 The folly of interpreting Homer too straightforwardly is stressed elsewhere: those writers who mistake this poetic invention for an accurate description of the physical world and imagine Ocean running in a circle around the earth are so preposterous that they move Herodotus to laughter (4.36).214 That Herodotus’ ridicule is directed at Homer’s interpreters rather than the poet himself suggests, of course, that the fault lies with the overly credulous *audience*.

211 Referencing Boreas’ snatching of Oreithyia (cf. Soph. fr. 956 Radt), also the subject of rationalizing criticism by Plato’s Socrates (see n.210). Herodotus, however, equivocates (οὐκ ἔγω γινέω) on whether this piece of mythological deduction was the true cause of Boreas’ destruction of the Persian fleet, noting that the Athenians said that Boreas had helped them before (7.189.3).
212 Sammons (2012).
213 2.23, discussed in §2.2.
214 On the Hesiodic Ocean see *Th.* 242 (where Ocean is the ‘perfect river’, father of all other rivers); cf. Fränkel (1975),102 & nn.13 & 14.
Herodotus opines, as we saw above (§2.2), that Hesiod and Homer worked the Egyptian names for the gods into a theogony, and gave the gods their epithets, honours, skills, and shapes (2.53). The details related so far might suggest that Herodotus, were he pushed to clarify his view on the value of what Hesiodic and Homeric ‘created’ and ‘communicated’ about the gods, would have unleashed the forces of allegorical exegesis and explained the truths that these poets had dressed up in poetic garb. But it is hard to know whether Herodotus would have taken the route of allegorēsis (i.e. Hesiod and Homer systematically clothed a deeper truth in metaphorical expressions: calling rain ‘Zeus’, for example), or whether he would have chosen the route of Xenophanean rejection to which he elsewhere nods (Hesiod and Homer, like all men of limited theological knowledge, imagined the gods in the image of humanity and teach us nothing about the reality of the divine), or whether he would have explained Hesiodic and Homeric factual inaccuracies as the result of generic distortions (some deeper insight can be found in the text, but it is obscured by what is ‘fitting’ for epopoiiê and not immediately apparent to the uninitiated reader, i.e. 2.116.1-2).

When it comes to ‘tradition’, Herodotus seems to place himself neither in the Xenophanean camp of dismissive rejection nor in the camp of subtle exegesis, yet seems to be aware of all these exegetical approaches. There is, in fact, no particular reason why polemical rejection of and creative (or allegorical) engagement with ‘traditional’ religious thought should be considered exclusive of one another, provided they occurred in different contexts.

We have failed, then, to find any traces of a systematic method for extrapolating the true nature of the gods from the epic texts which, for some of Herodotus’ contemporaries, were the most authoritative teachings available. Although initiated

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215 Cf. Xenoph. frs. 1.22, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17 DK, and Hdt. 2.3.2, 1.131.2 (discussed above, §2.2).
216 Suggested by Sammons (2012), 63.
217 Rhetoric can push one into taking different and even contradictory positions towards tradition. Compare Augustine’s varied positions on the validity of Greek philosophy (§1.1), and the different approaches to be found in Melanchthon’s scholarly works (on world history or Greek tragedy), and his Christmas sermons (§1.4).
into many forms of exegesis that had been and would continue to be put to this very task, Herodotus conspicuously fails to allegorize epic theology. The lack of interest is, in itself, significant, and confirms what Herodotus implies elsewhere: that to attempt to read Homer as Theagenes or Chrysippus did would not be worthwhile.

We can, however, be sure that when it comes to hexameter oracles cited by Herodotus that deal in manifestly ‘Greek’ (i.e. ‘Hesiodic and Homeric’), anthropomorphic divinities—Pallas ‘begging’ Zeus Olympios ‘with many words and shrewd wisdom’ (7.141.3), for example—we are not receiving an unmediated insight into the most careful theological beliefs of our author. Just as it seems unwarranted to deduce, only on the basis of Euripides’ use of the traditional deus ex machina format at the end of the Orestes, that the playwright had a literal belief in anthropomorphic deities and the reality of divine epiphany in his contemporary world, there seems little reason to insist that Herodotus took as literal truth the oracular report that the goddess Athena interceded with Zeus with only partial success in 480 (7.141.3), that Loxias pleaded in person with the Moirai on Croesus’ behalf shortly before 550 (1.91.3), or that the divine personification of Koros fought the divine personification of Nike before the battle of Salamis (8.77.1) simply because he cites oracles which say so. Models of religious belief derived from anthropologists of the early twentieth century—often loath to admit complexity, sophistication, scepticism, and the self-conscious use of discourses in the objects of their study—seem insufficiently nuanced to cope with the theological or religious beliefs of someone writing within a society in which ‘understanding’ was such a complex and problematized business as it was in the circles in which Herodotus moved.

If this chapter has failed, so far, to identify any theological system, short of the critical dismantling of the assumptions that underlie the theology of Greek myth and epic, this is perhaps no surprise. Herodotus directly banishes all thought about the nature of the gods from his work. Yet both the narrator and the characters, at times, engage directly in theorizing about the nature of the divine and its disposition
towards humanity; the remainder of this chapter and the next will discuss these passages, particularly the statements of divine *phthonos* and divine *pronoia*. 
2.12. ‘Creation Myth’ in Herodotus?
Debates on the Nature of the Creator

Early in Plato’s Protagoras, Socrates calls upon the visiting philosopher to demonstrate the teachability of virtue. Protagoras begins:

\[ \text{ἀλλὰ πότερον ύμῖν, ὡς πρεσβύτερος νεωτέροις, μὴθον λέγων ἐπιδείξω ἢ λόγῳ διεξέλθων; (320c) } \]

But should I, as an old man to youths [children?], make my display by telling a fable (μῦθος) or an argument (λόγος)?

When the listeners bid him use whichever method he pleases, Protagoras elects to tell a mythos. ‘There once was a time (Ἡν γάρ ποτε χρόνος),’ he begins, ‘when the gods existed, but mortal creatures did not. When the time came that was allotted (εἰμαρμένος) for their beginning (γένεσις), the gods moulded them inside the earth...’.

Prometheus and his slow-witted brother Epimetheus are entrusted with distributing to each of the mortal creatures their powers (δυνάμεις), and agree between themselves that Epimetheus will allot the powers, and Prometheus will later check his distribution. Epimetheus gives strength to some creatures, and speed to the weak. He arms some, and gives some other faculty for preservation to the unarmed—wings for escaping, and so on—so that no race of creatures should be destroyed (ἀϊστωθείη). ‘But Epimetheus, not being entirely wise (οὐ πάνυ τι σοφὸς ὤν), did not realize that he was lavishing all the powers upon creatures who are alogos (‘irrational’ or ‘speechless’), and that the human race was left behind unadorned. He was at a loss as to what he should do’ (321b-c). When Prometheus comes to check Epimetheus’ work he proceeds to steal certain things from the gods to give to mankind, eventually suffering the well-known punishment. Afterwards Zeus, in fear that the human race would destroy themselves by their lawless manner of cohabitation, orders Hermes to administer δίκη and αἰδῶς to humans to enable them to live together. Hermes asks if he is to distribute these virtues in the same way that other skills are distributed among men, or to give them to all. They should be given to all, Zeus replies, ‘for there could be no polis if only a few were to have a share in
these things, as in the other arts.’ Protagoras concludes that political wisdom is therefore (οὗτο δή) shared by all and teachable (322d-323a).

This mythical aetiology is interesting, for our purposes, for two reasons. Like Aristophanes’ explanation of love in the Symposium, and like the retellings of myth in Athenian tragedy, traditional stories about the gods provided one forum for discussion and thought about human life, even within those types of display (ἐπιδειξις or ἀπόδειξις) in which the Platonic Protagoras and Herodotus engage. A literary author’s use of spontaneously created ‘myth’ can be explained in many ways other than by the author’s belief that they literally describe the nature of the gods. In Protagoras’ hands the mythos is characterized by poetic diction, and the use of expressions with metaphysical implications that are not expanded upon but give the story a familiar framework: ‘it was necessary’, or ‘the failed time’.

This mythos is also important because, like one passage in Herodotus and two in Xenophon’s Memorabilia, it is among the earliest evidence for a particular idea in late fifth- and fourth-century Greek thought about gods, which was to have an illustrious afterlife: the notion of a ‘wise’ (sophos) divinity who, using ‘foresight’ (pronoia) and ‘benevolence towards humanity’ (philanthrôpia), created or disposed the world to the advantage of humanity. The Protagorean mythos self-consciously plays on this tradition by presenting the present state of the world as the result not of ‘foresight’ (pronoia or ‘Prometheus’) but of Prometheus’ slow-witted brother ‘after-sight’ (Epimetheus), for which Prometheus then attempts to compensate by stealing attributes for humans from the other unwilling gods.

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218 I.e. ἐπιδείξις (P. Prot. 320c) and ἀπόδειξις (1.1.1); cf. Fowler (1996), 86-7.
219 For Plato’s use of myths see Zeller (1888) 160-4 (listing all examples at 160 n.23). Classen (1962), 17-22, makes the compelling case that the demiurge in the Timaeus, like the story of the Caves in the Republic, is ‘the product of philosophical mythology’, that is, a metaphor for what cannot easily be described without recourse to the kind of language ‘appropriate in poetry’. Recent discussions in Morgan (2000), Partenie (2009). Analogies from our own culture for the use of improvised stories to make serious points might be Locke’s ‘state of nature’, or the ‘just-so stories’ freely created as hypothetical ‘explanations’ for why evolution should prefer certain traits.
220 Ἦν γὰρ ποτε χρόνος ὅτε... χρόνος ἦλθεν εἰμαιμένος γενέσεως (320c)... ἡ δὲ καὶ ἡ εἰμαιμένη ἡμέρα παρῆν, ἐν ἣ ἐδει καὶ ἄνθρωπον ἐξέστη ἐκ γῆς εἰς φόν (321c); ἀυτός occurs only here in Attic prose (otherwise only in: PV 668; S. Aj. 515, Trach. 881, fr. 536; cf. Demont (1994), 154). On the mythos/logos dichotomy in Plato see Fowler (2011), who ultimately attributes this opposition to Protagoras.
In his discussion of the winged snakes of Arabia Herodotus says:

The Arabians say that the entire world would be filled with these [winged] snakes, if something did not happen to them which I know also happens to vipers. In some way the foresight of the divine—which, as is reasonable, is wise—has made all those creatures that are cowardly in soul and edible prolific in offspring, so that they might not go extinct when they are eaten, and all those creatures that are cruel and troublesome unprolific...

Herodotus goes on to make the infamous claim that lionesses can only have one cub, because the baby lion’s claws lacerate her womb irreparably during gestation, and that winged snakes destroy one another in the course of reproduction: the mother kills the father during the mating, and suffers retribution for this (τίσις) in the form of the child eating its way out of her belly, killing her in the course of its ‘birth’:

What has particularly struck commentators on the Herodotean passage is that Herodotus and Plato use the same pair of very rare words (ὀλιγόγονα and πολύγονα) in their discussion of the ‘providential’ disposal of the natural world. Since Nestle there has been debate whether they share a common source (Protagoras’ treatise ‘On the Original State of Things’?) or whether one might depend

222 See Aristotle’s criticisms, cited at §2.1 n.5, and, for speculation as to why Herodotus should make such an immediately disprovable claim, Redfield (2002), 32-3.

223 As observed by Stein (1883/94), ad loc, this seems to refer to birth from eggs.

224 Pl. Prot. 321b; Hdt. 3.108.2.
Thomas has recently argued that the terminology of *oligonia/polygonia* reflects contemporary thought more generally (with no neat intellectual lineage). But it also seems to stand in direct conflict with the theological idea that Herodotus’ places in the mouths of his ‘warners’: that god is *phthoneros* and *tarachôdês* (i.e. ‘grudging’ and ‘troublesome’, 1.32.1) as Solon puts it, and consequently that man is entirely *sumphorê* (‘chance’, ‘disaster’ 1.32.4). Herodotus, on the face of it, seems caught between the world of Socratic and

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225 περὶ τῆς ἐν ἀρχῇ καταστάσεως (DL. 2.55). That Herodotus and Plato echo a Protagorean original is the view of Nestle (1908), 16-17, and Legrand (1932/54.4), 118-19. Demont (1994) argues that this is one of a number of playful intertexts which Plato writes into the passage, in particular with the *PV* (through the verb ἀποτέλεω, see above n.220), with Hesiod (Op. 276-80: Zeus’ gift of ἀνθρώποισι men from animals), and with Herodotus (through the balance imposed via *oligonia/polygonia*, though by a ‘not entirely wise’ Epimetheus rather than by ‘wise pronoia’, a further jest). In the context of other probable allusions to Herodotus in Plato (compare Plato’s report of Solon’s genealogizing, cited in appendix 6 n.3), this strikes me as one of several plausible reconstructions.


227 pronoia is, of course, used in plenty of other contexts and was certainly not a specifically ‘theological’ term like modern ‘providence’ (cf. 2.151.3; 6.66.2; 8.144.3; Herodotus often uses the expression ἐκ προνοίας, ‘of set purpose’/‘intentionally’, e.g. 11.120.3, 159.3; 2.161.4; 3.121.2; 8.87.3). The passages listed by Demont (1994), 146 n.5, as parallels for *pronoia* referring to ‘divine designs’ (‘desseins divins’) are, I think, unlikely to be such. They seem to refer to human foresight which is ‘divine’, that is to say, ‘remarkable’ (rather than ‘the divinity’s foresight’), E. Phoen. 636-7: ἡς ἡ προνοία (or to (human) ‘foresight of what is fated’ (rather than ‘Fate’s foresight’, A. Ag. 681-5: προνοίας τῷ πεπρομένου). Objective genitives, in other words. In any case, as he notes, neither passage gives the sense of a providential divine care for humanity. Parker (1992), 87 n.17, also notes the use of the word at Pi. Paean 12.11; S. Tr. 823, Ant. 282-3; E. Or. 1179.

228 For attempts to trace the origins of the figure of the ‘demiurge’ and of divine ‘pronoia’ see Classen (1962) and Parker (1992). Classen (1962), 17-22, entertains the possibility that Socrates was the originator of the notion of a wise, good, and providential divinity, but prefers to credit this to Plato (although he implies that Herodotus has a similar notion of divinity). Parker (1992), esp. 94, suggests that the Herodotean, Platonic, and Xenophontic discussions of provident divine creation are all unlikely to represent the birth of the concept. Thomas (2000), 147-9, suggests that divine *pronoia* might be Herodotous’ contribution to a contemporary debate that took place in terms of *oligogonia* and *polygonia*. See also Gomperz (1924). Corcella (2007), *ad loc* (following Stein (1883/94), *ad loc*), links Herodotus’ comments with Xenophanes fr. 25 DK and Anaxagoras.
sophistic theology (with an anthropocentric and optimistic conception of divine providence) and the dark world of archaic pessimism.

A further observation reinforces the impression that the notion of a \textit{phthoneros} divinity, on the one hand, and of ‘the wise foresight of the divine’ working to make life ‘liveable for humans’, on the other, had quite different implications to Herodotus himself (lest subsequent theological and philosophical developments fool us into dissimilating two concepts that were initially framed so as to be compatible). Solon’s speech, which asserts that god is \textit{phthoneros} and man is \textit{sumphorê} (‘chance’ or ‘disaster’) is followed by the narrative of Atys and Adrastus, a paradigm of human \textit{sumphorê} (further §4.1). In the end Adrastus, who had already accidentally killed his brother, unintentionally kills the unfortunate Atys with a misthrown spear in fulfilment of the dream sent to Croesus as a result of the ‘nemesis of god’ (1.34, further §3.5.2). Adrastus recognizes that life was no longer ‘liveable’ (βιώσιµον) for him, and slaughters himself on Atys’ tomb, aware that he was the ‘most unfortunate man’ (βαρυσυµφορώτατος) of whom he knew (1.45.1-3). The link between divine \textit{phthonos} and human \textit{sumphorê} is one that recurs in the speeches of the warners (further §3.5). The vision of human life and divine nature that emerges from the narrative of Adrastus (for whom life in a world controlled by a threatening divinity is not ‘liveable’) seems in tension with Herodotus’ comments about god’s providential design of animals (to make life ‘liveable for humans’). This tension in the \textit{Histories} over the nature of divinity has, by and large, escaped remark and explanation (see below).\footnote{To my knowledge, Wells (1923), 193-4, is the only scholar to have pointed out this ‘contradiction’ without also attempting to ‘solve’ it by interpreting divine \textit{phthonos} as justice or benevolence.}

An examination of the Xenophontic Socrates’ conversations with Aristodemus (\textit{Mem.} 1.4) and Euthydemus (\textit{Mem.} 4.3) makes the point clearer. Socrates’ observations about the remarkably favourable condition in which humans find themselves elicit from Euthydemus multiple assertions that the divinity is ‘foresightful’ (\textit{pronoiētikos}) and has a benevolent disposition towards mankind
Aristodemus' notion of a single demiurge recurs in the dialogue with Euthydemus where we find a sentence, nestled in Socrates' speech about the nature of 'the gods', describing a divinity who 'arranges' and 'maintains' the kosmos 'in which everything is good and beautiful' (reminiscent of the demiurge of Plato’s Timaeus). Socrates introduces and disregards the notion of an 'arranging' divinity as casually as Herodotus implies the divine creation of animals by πεποίηκε. In some ways, however, this is not surprising. The implication of this verb, that the god has created animal life, is anything but radical — the creation of human life can be found in Hesiod’s Works and Days, where Zeus or the gods 'make' (ποιεῖν, 110, 128, 144, 158) the successive generations of men.

230 Mem. 4.3.7 (Ὑπερβάλλει... φιλανθρωπία, cf. 4.3.6), 4.3.7 (προνοητικόν); 4.3.12 (πολλὴν τῶν ἄνθρωπων ἐπιμέλειαν).
231 Herodotus, too, couches his statement about the 'wise foresight of god' in the language of probability and deduction (ὅσπερ καὶ οἰκός ἐστι, 3.108.2): in Herodotus it also seems to be a deductive point, not a point of dogma (contrast, e.g., the theological views of the Timaeus, cited §1.2). On how exactly to understand Herodotus’ words here see Demont (1994), 148 n.10.
232 Passim but particularly Mem. 1.4.11-14 & 4.3.14.
233 See also Mem. 4.3.12. Compare a similar Herodotean comment about signs as a forewarning of evil (6.27: Φιλέει δὲ κοις προσημαίνειν, εὔτ’ ἀν μᾶλλον μεγάλα κακὰ ἢ πόλι ἢ ἔθνει ἔσεσθαι). While Herodotus makes no divine agency explicit here, he does so at 6.98.
234 Mem. 4.3.13 (ὁ τὸν ὠλόν κόσμον συντάττων τε καὶ συνέχον, ἐν ὃ πάντα καλὰ καὶ ἀγαθὰ ἔστι) cf. Pl. Tim. 29e.
235 As stressed by Classen (1962), making living creatures is fundamentally different from making the entire kosmos, an act sometimes ascribed to the Platonic demiourgos, but not attested earlier.
The tradition of a wise and providential deity who ‘creates’ or ‘disposes’ the world or life in the interests of mankind and guides and warns humans by prophecy and portents seems to represent an important strand of Greek theological thinking that we see briefly reflected in Herodotus, and more substantially in Xenophon and Plato.\textsuperscript{236} Against such a context Protagoras’ myth of Epimetheus appears a playful inversion, suggestive of a raised ‘Protagorean’ eyebrow: unlike his brother Prometheus, Epimetheus is conspicuously lacking in pronoia, being ‘not entirely wise’ (οὐ πάντα σοφὸς ὄν), and has no particular concern for mankind (lavishing all the best gifts at his disposal on animals). If man is, in the end, granted superior gifts to animals, it is not through wise design, but rather a fortunate outcome of the fragmented actions and plans of a host of divinities who are variously grudging, benevolent, or inept.

Subsequent tradition has only exaggerated the dissonance already observable in Herodotus between divine pronoia and divine phthonos: the notion that god is phthoneros in his dealings with man is explicitly denied in Platonic dialogues by Timaeus and Socrates in favour of a good (ἀγαθός), wise (σοφός), and provident divinity (§1.2). But, since Baehr in the early nineteenth century, many have used Herodotus’ comments about τίσις and divine προνοία at 3.108 to elucidate the speeches on divine φθόνος, which they consequently interpret as a cosmic ‘balance’ imposed by a wise and benevolent divinity in the interests of maintaining order and checking human arrogance.\textsuperscript{237} As we shall see in the next chapter, the phthoneros

\textsuperscript{236} For other instances of the demiourgos in Plato, and its association with goodness, wisdom, knowledge or skill, and foresight or intelligence (i.e. ἀγαθός, σοφὸς, ἔπιστημη or τέχνη, and πρόνοια or νοῦς) see Classen (1962), 20-2.

\textsuperscript{237} Baehr (1830/5.1), ad 3.108 (on divine pronoia): 'coniunctum hoc est cum universa Nostri sententia de numine eiusque vi in omni rerum natura. Quae cum talis sit, ut in omnibus iustum modum valere velit, iam in rebus humanis mutuisque hominum rationibus aequabilitate quâdam continetur, quâ sua cuique tribuantur neque cuiquam liceat, modum illum aut fines positos transgredi, nisi numinis vindictam in se provocare velit. Nam deus ipse index quasi est eiusmodi ordinis divinitus in natura constitui (phthoneros ho theos, vid. Nott. Ad 1.32, 3.40) in quo omnia ab initio sunt ordinata, ut invicem sibi respondeant secumque conveniant ac iusto moderamine se mutuo conservent. Hæ ex Herodoti de divinâ naturâ sententia altera exoritur de divina, quæ dicitur, providentia. Ut enim a principio omnia divinitus sic creata sunt ac dispensa, ut iustus ille omnium rerum modus.’ (For an even more far-reaching syncretism see Baehr (1830/5.4), 410-11: the order established by divine providentia et iustitia is connected with the fatum described to Croesus by the Pythia (1.91), and the νέμεσις and φθόνος of God.) Herodotus’ comments on pronoia at 3.108.2 are, however, rarely discussed in 20th-century treatments of Herodotean thought and religion. Scullion (2006), 195, stresses the similarities in the abstract religious language at 3.108.2 and in the ‘set-pieces’ (i.e. the speeches of Solon and Artabanus), but does not discuss their differences—indeed, divine phthonos is entirely missing from the otherwise rigorous article.
disposition of god towards humanity that emerges from the speeches of Solon, Amasis, and Artabanus, like much of the divine action implied in the subsequent misfortunes, is patently irreconcilable with a divinity who always cares providentially for humanity, and disposes the world in the interest of humans. If we take Herodotus’ warners at their word, and if, as many do, we assume that they represent Herodotus’ own views, then it would seem that Herodotus is operating with two quite different traditions of theological thought. If this is the case, the question is, how and why he is doing so?

In order to enable us to answer these questions, the next chapter provides a close examination of the meaning of divine phthonos, its role in the Histories as a whole, and its origins in Greek literature and theology.
Chapter Three
The *Phthonos* of Gods and Men

3.1. Introduction

Ich kann nicht leugnen, daß ich den φθόνος τοῦ θείου allezeit gefürchtet habe. Wilamowitz.¹

We saw in chapter one that the ‘doctrine’ of divine *phthonos* was a site of controversy in the ancient world and, after a different fashion, in post-Renaissance scholarship. This chapter explores the meaning of divine *phthonos* in the *Histories* and in early Greek literature more widely. As we shall see, Herodotus associates the statement ‘god is *phthoneros*’ with a particular narrative register, which lends further support for the link between theology and narrative in the *Histories* proposed in the last chapter.

To avoid the difficulties encountered by earlier treatments of divine *phthonos* (reviewed §1.4-7), I begin with a study of the words *phthonos* and *phthoneros* in classical literature of the fifth century (§3.2), and in Herodotus (§3.3). This is only a starting point, for Herodotus inherited the idea of ‘the *phthonos* of the gods’ from earlier writers. As has often been suggested, the phrase ‘divine *phthonos*’ may have a life of its own that is, to some degree, independent of the meaning of *phthonos* in human contexts, just as the expression ‘God is jealous’ activates only certain senses of the word ‘jealousy’ in the context of a Christian sermon. I therefore look at the meaning of expressions like ‘the *phthonos* of the gods’ in pre-Herodotean authors (§3.4). There follows a detailed examination of Herodotus’ usage of divine *phthonos* and its role in various narratives (§3.5). I then discuss the literary origins of the

¹ Wilamowitz (1935), 70, to Theodor Mommsen.
notion that the gods have a ‘grudging’, ‘jealous’ or ‘envious’ disposition (§3.6) and the relationship of this idea with his approach to history (§3.7).

In the light of the claim at all periods of scholarship that Herodotus and other classical authors considered *phthonos* a justifiable and even laudable emotion (at least when used of the gods), I shall first present evidence that *phthonos* was neither typically understood in the fifth and fourth centuries as an emotion which reinforced the proper allotment of honour (*timê*), nor associated with justice or ‘retribution’, but was negatively regarded. We shall see that, within a human context, *phthonos* is always defined as an amoral emotion—the resentment of all success in rivals *irrespective of desert* that is associated with a wide range of negative behaviour—and is typically applied to those who, it is implied, resent the *deserved* success of their rivals or betters.

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2 See esp. §1.5, along with more recent and comprehensive studies, e.g., Konstan (2006), 127: ‘*phthonos* in classical prose could substitute for *nemesis* in archaic epic as the term for divine displeasure at human immoderation’; Bulman (1999), 1: ‘[the] *phthonos* of the gods is better understood as equivalent to *nemesis* and translated as the gods’ “retribution” or even their “right to veto”’; Ranulf (1933/4.1), 67: ‘Since Herodotos puts this characterization of the Hellenes [as ‘jealous’] into the mouth of their enemy without protest [i.e. 7.236-7], he can hardly have thought it derogatory. The word “jealousy” cannot to him and his contemporaries have had the same ugly ring as it had to us. No disparagement to the gods either is intended, when they are said to be jealous. The whole of Herodotus’ description of Xerxes’ defeat is written as a tale about the triumph of divine jealousy, told for the edification of the Hellenes’; 99-100: ‘the Greeks must have found gratification and edification in the very fact that the gods brought down ruin upon men, irrespectively of right or reason. Every case in which the gods triumphed over the guilty or innocent victims of their cruelty must have evoked a feeling of satisfaction among the spectators, not varying with the types, but identical for all types’; Meuss (1888), 19, ‘Der *phthonos* der herodoteischen Gottheit ist die besondere Form göttlicher Strafgerechtigkeit dem frevelhaften Verkennen menschlicher Glückesbeschränktheit gegenüber, genau entsprechend übersetzt durch Ungunst, das heisst nichtgönnen’. 

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3.2. Greek Phthonos: Good and Bad?

Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* introduces the debate *in nuce*. In his analysis of the ‘pain’ (λύπη) which people feel on observing the success of others, Aristotle discusses two emotions: *to nemesan* and *phthonos* (1386b). *To nemesan* is pain at the undeserved success of another (τὸ λυπεῖσθαι ἐπὶ ταῖς ἀναξίαις εὐπραγίαις, 1386b9-11) which, along with pity (ἔλεος: pain at the undeserved misfortune of another), is the sign of a good character (ἡθος χρηστῶν). *Phthonos* is also pain at the success of another, but it is not linked to desert and thus is not at all moral in nature—we feel it not because their success is undeserved, but solely because they are in some way similar to us: they are our rivals (λύπη μὲν γὰρ ταραχώδης καὶ ὁ φθόνος ἐστιν καὶ ἐπὶ εὐπραγία, ἀλλὰ οὐ τοῦ ἀναξίου ἄλλα τοῦ ἰσου καὶ ὦμοιου, 1386b17-20). *Phthonos* focuses not on bringing any benefit to those who feel it, but only on the success of the rival (in this overlapping with our notion of ‘spite’). To level the charge of *phthonos* was a sharp criticism in Aristotle’s eyes. It is characteristic of those ‘obsessed with reputation’ (philodoxoi) and the ‘mean-spirited’ (mikropsuchoi, 1387b33-4).

A distinction somewhat similar to that made by Aristotle between *to nemesan* and *phthonos* was apparently made by Hippias the Sophist (probably born in the 460s BC), but Hippias named these emotions ‘just phthonos’ and ‘unjust phthonos’:

Πλουτάρχου ἐκ τοῦ <Περὶ τοῦ> διαβάλλειν ἰ[ππιας]. λέγει δὖο εἶναι φθόνοις τὸν μὲν δίκαιον, ὅταν τὶς τοῖς κακοῖς φθονῇ τιμωμένοις, τὸν δὲ ἄδικον, ὅταν τοὺς ἄγαθοὺς, καὶ διὰ τῶν ἄλλων οἱ φθονεροὶ κακοῦνται· οὐ γὰρ μόνον τοὺς ἴδιους κακοῖς ἀχθονται ὅσπερ ἐκεῖνοι, ἄλλα καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοτρίους ἄγαθοῖς.

1 Rivalry is again stressed at 1387b25: ὁ φθόνος λύπη τις ἐπὶ εὐπραγίᾳ φαινομένη τῶν εἰρημένων ἄγαθων περὶ τοὺς ὦμοιους, μὴ ἵνα τι αὐτῷ, ἄλλα δὲ· ἐκεῖνοι· φθονήσουσι μὲν γὰρ οἱ τοιοῦτοι οἷς εἰς τινὲς ὦμοιος ἐστινον· ὄμοιος δὲ λέγω κατὰ γένος, κατὰ συγγένειαν, κατὰ ἴδιον, κατὰ ἴδιον, κατὰ τὰ ὑπάρχοντα.

2 Plutarch gives a very similar definition: φθόνος μὲν γὰρ ἐστι λύπη ἐπὶ ἀλλοτρίους ἄγαθος, ἐπιχαρεκακία δ’ ἡδονὴ ἐπὶ ἄλλοτρίῳ κακοῦ· ἀμφότερα δ’ ἐκ πάθους ἄνημερου καὶ ἤθελου γεγένηται τῆς κακοποιείας. (Mor. 518c). Xenophon’s Socrates sees the central characteristic of phthonos in the fact that it is directed towards the successes of one’s friends (on which further below): Φθόνον δὲ σκοπῶν, δ’ τι εἶπ. λύπην μὲν τινα ἐξημάτικαν αὐτὸν ὄντα, οὔτε μέντοι τὴν ἐπὶ φιλῶν ἀτυχίας οὔτε τὴν ἐπὶ ἐγχθρῶν εὐτυχίας γιγνομένην, ἄλλα μόνον ἐρήθη φθονεῖν τοὺς ἐπὶ ταῖς τῶν φιλῶν εὐπραξίαις ἀνομενέουσας. (Mem. 3.9.8).

3 Hippias B 16 DK; for the self-destructiveness of phthonos see Democritus B 88: ‘He who feels phthonos harms himself like an enemy’ (ὁ φθονεύν ἐστὶν ως ἐγχθρὸν λυπέσαι) and Plut. Mor. 92c.
Plutarch in his *On Slander* [says]: ‘Hippias says that there are two types of phthonos. One is just, when one feels phthonos of bad people who receive honours, the other is unjust, when one feels phthonos of good people who receive honours. And those who are phthoneroi of others do themselves a double ill, for not only are they aggrieved on their own account, at their personal misfortunes, they are also aggrieved at the successes of others.’

This fragment suggests that the meaning of phthonos is more complex than Aristotle would allow. Arguing primarily from the Hippias fragment, Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, and several passages of fourth-century rhetoric, David Konstan has recently argued that Hippias’ use of phthonos is more representative of fifth- and fourth-century Greek usage. Konstan explains Aristotle’s negative definition as the result of his desire to use separate terms for good and bad variants of the same emotion: Aristotle needed a noun to sit opposite the bad emotion phthonos, and thus supplanted the ‘just’ variant of phthonos with a term created from the archaic emotion-word nemesis (which in Homer indicated indignation at socially transgressive behaviour but was defunct as an emotional term by the early fifth century): τὸ νεμεαῖν. Aristotle’s condemnation of phthonos, on this view, owes less to the Greek concept of phthonos than to the place he allotst to it in his overly schematic breakdown of the emotions.

Konstan’s conclusions will be substantially supported by the following analysis, but some refinements will be proposed. Aristotle's negative definition of phthonos is not, in fact, unusual: the difficulties encountered in reconciling Aristotle's definitions with attested usage is found with every explicit ancient discussion of the nature of phthonos. Demosthenes, who provides one of the bleakest condemnations of phthonos, or phthonos, as a term denoting anger at another's success.

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6 Konstan (2006), 120-1, citing Isaeus 6.61 (Ὤστε οὐ φθονείσθαι εἰςιν ἡξίω, ἀλλὰ πολὺ μᾶλλον, νὴ τὸν Δία καὶ τὸν Αὐτοῦ, οὕτως, εἰ λήγονται ἤ μὴ προσήκει αὐτοῖς); Demosthenes 21.196 (οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδαμόθεν σοι προσήκον ἔλεος ὑπὸ καθ' ἐν, ἀλλὰ τοῦ ἔσοντος μίσος καὶ φθόνος καὶ ὀργή· τούτων γὰρ ἡξία ποιεῖς); Isocrates 12.23 (Ἀλλὰ τούτως ὑπερικόν ἀπολογοῦμαι πρὸς τοὺς ἀδίκους μοι τὸν ἴδιον ἡξίων φθονυόντας, καὶ πειρῶμαι διδάσκειν αὐτοῖς ὡς ὡς δικαίως ὑπὸ προσηκόντως περί μου ταύτην ἔχουσι τὴν γνώμην). Further §3.4.1, §3.5.2. Cairns (2003b), 33-7, shows that nemesis in the *Iliad* is the response of the ‘disinterested bystander’, indicative of ‘a breach of the standards of one’s society’, and more open to reciprocal usage than any other Iliadic anger term, with a relationship to justification.

7 Konstan (2006), 115-16. He suggests that the verbal noun to nemesan is used here because Aristotle had used the simple noun nemesis with a different significance elsewhere (1233b16-34).
phthonos (as the most reproachable and shameful of emotions), \(^9\) elsewhere implies that the jury should 'justly feel phthonos' (φθονήσει δικαίως, 28.18) at the injustices he has suffered. If the same speaker can use the term with such diversity, it seems necessary to abandon the search for a prescriptive definition and instead to conduct our analysis in terms of ‘prototypical’ or ‘focal’ meaning (the meaning of phthonos in the classic scenario), which might bear a partial (or ‘family’) resemblance to other uses.\(^10\) The notion of ‘grudging’, ‘resenting’, and ‘denying’ is, as we shall see, shared by all uses of the phthon- root in classical Greek. Disagreement is largely focused on whether this resentment is correlated to desert (ancient definitions and discussions invariably state that it is not, but some ancient usages imply that it is) and whether phthonos occurs only between rivals (again, ancient definitions often suggest so, but phthonos is clearly also used outside the context of rivalry). The condemnations of phthonos in lyric and tragedy, also voiced by Xenophon's Socrates, Aristotle, Demosthenes, Isaeus, and Plutarch,\(^11\) illustrate important aspects of the prototypical sense of phthonos:\(^12\) the spiteful grudging of success to others, regardless of desert, particularly in the context of rivalry, from which the virtuous are exempt.

While Konstan is right that Aristotle’s highly negative definition is too restricted to cover all usages of the fifth and fourth centuries, many of Konstan's statements—which suggest that phthonos or phthoneô (unqualified) could indicate a positively-regarded response to the unmerited success of others (i.e. ‘righteous indignation’ that served ‘to preserve the proper hierarchy in society’)—seem too revisionary.\(^13\) While it is possible in the fifth and fourth centuries to combine the word phthonos with words like ‘just’ or ‘deserved’, to describe someone else’s emotional response as

\(^{9}\) Dem. 20.139-140: παντάπασι φύσεως κακίας σημείον ἔστιν ὁ φθόνος, καὶ οὐκ ἐξε πρόφασιν δι’ ἐν ἀν τύχοι συγγνώμης ὁ τούτο πεπονθάς, ἔτι καὶ οὐδ’ ἔστιν δνεῖδος ὅτῳ πορρώτερόν ἐσθ’ ἡμῶν ἡ πόλις ἡ τοῦ φθονερὰ δοκεῖν εἶναι, ἀπάντων ἀπέχουσα τῶν αἰσχρῶν.

\(^{10}\) See Rosch (1983).

\(^{11}\) See above n.4 and Isoc. 15.142, Pl. Tim. 279d (cited §1.2).

\(^{12}\) For Aristotle’s tendency to give a definition of the paradigmatic instance of an emotion, rather than an exhaustive one, see Owen (1960), 169; Harris (2002), 58. On the prototypicality of Aristotelian orgê: Cairns (2003b), 27.

\(^{13}\) Konstan (2006), 127: phthonos like nemesis could indicate ‘a resentment at people who “get above themselves” and violate the status rules of a highly class-conscious society’; 122: ‘both terms represent an emotional response based on the judgement that a person, whether an equal or an inferior, is getting above himself’; 121: ‘the verb phthoneô may carry the sense “feel righteous indignation at”’; cf. below (n.15).
Phthonos (unqualified) implies that their emotion was the unjustified resentment spawned of rivalry. Although those portrayed as feeling phthonos might often have believed their resentment to be justified, for another person to label it phthonos (or them phthoneros) would naturally imply that their resentment was unjustified: from Hesiod to the fifth century there is no instance where the word phthonos alone carries the sense ‘righteous indignation’ that is correlated to desert. Moreover, as Konstan observes, to describe someone as phthonos (that is, ‘temperamentally given to resenting others’ well-being’) was always a strong criticism.\textsuperscript{14}

In this phthonos resembles the English term ‘resentment’: despite the fact that it is possible to talk in modern English and classical Greek of dikaios phthonos and ‘justified resentment’, to characterize someone else’s indignation as plain ‘resentment’ or phthonos or to describe someone as ‘resentful’ or phthoneros is inherently critical. The importance of context cannot, of course, be underrated: the words ‘I resent his attitude’ carry different implications from the words ‘he resents my knowledge’. While the former implies that the resentment is justified, and the latter suggests the opposite. Yet ‘resentment’ and ‘resentful’, like phthonos and phthoneros, typically evoke the latter situation, and carry no particular connection to morality or desert. Konstan supports his conclusion that phthono- words were associated with desert and the violation of social rules by reference to ‘positive’ uses of phthonos in Hesiod, lyric, and classical prose. But these ‘positive’ evaluations are positive in quite different senses and have no sense comparable to the ‘just phthonos’ mentioned by Hippias.\textsuperscript{15} The brief survey of the use of phthonos in Greek literature before Herodotus that follows provides the necessary background for this study, since, as we shall see, Herodotus’ fairly diverse uses of divine phthonos do not all

\textsuperscript{14} Konstan (2006), 121.
\textsuperscript{15} Konstan (2006), 120. To illustrate that phthonos is not ‘uniformly negative’ he offers Pindar’s statement that ‘phthonos is better than pity’ (P. 1.85). But this is from the point of view of the object not the patient of phthonos: it is based on the fact that the successful are the object of phthonos and the unsuccessful the object of pity (oiktirmos). The same idea underlies Nicias’ statement in Thucydides that the Athenians, in their weakened state, deserve the pity (oiktos) rather than the phthonos of the gods (7.77.4). It is not to be supposed, with Konstan, that ‘phthonos too—as pity’s opposite—should be linked with desert’ ([2006], 120); rather they were opposed because receiving phthonos and receiving pity represent opposite states: prosperity and poverty. That it is better to be envied than to be pitied does not mean that it is more appropriate to feel envy than to feel pity.
fall within the prototypical sense outlined by Aristotle, but their departures from the prototypical sense can often be paralleled in earlier authors.

Homer uses *phthoneô* to mean ‘refuse’ or ‘deny’, a meaning clearly linked with the later sense of ‘grudging’, but mostly without the implication of rivalry and the negative associations that characterize later usage. When Telemachus asks Penelope why she *phthoneei* to let the bard sing about Odysseus there is no allegation of *rivalry* (although his words are certainly somewhat critical); Telemachus refers to Penelope’s reluctance or refusal to grant the singer the freedom to choose his own topic (*Od.* 1.346). While most Homeric examples are devoid of the notion of rivalry, others show some similarity to later usage. Associations with rivalry seem to appear already in the disguised Odysseus’ appeal to the established beggar Irus to tolerate another beggar in the house; here Odysseus seems to characterize *phthonein* not as a refusal to give or grant something, but a resentment of the success of a rival, which brings no benefit (for there is enough for both), and would be unnecessarily churlish (*Od.* 18.15-18).

Hesiod’s sole use of *phthoneô* (*Op.* 26) has been the site of debate; on one side, Walcott has attempted to retroject the Aristotelian ‘*phthonos* : bad / *zêlos* : good’ schema onto Hesiod’s writing. On the other, Konstan has argued that Hesiod uses *phthonos* as one of a number of ‘positive terms for competitive effort’. While Walcott’s definition is wholly anachronistic, Konstan’s description of *phthonos* as ‘positive’ must be qualified. It provides no precedent for the use of *phthonos* as a

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16 *Phthonein* occurs twice in the *Iliad* (4.55-6, opposed to *eaô*), and 7 times in the *Odyssey*; *epiphthonein* occurs only in the *Odyssey* (11.149, opposed to *eaô*). See Konstan (2006), 118.
17 E. e.g. *Od.* 6.68, 11.381, 17.400, 19.348.
18 Nagy (1979), 228-32, and Most (2003) see the later sense of *phthonos* peeking through Epic diction, whilst Herrmann (2003) and Konstan (2006), 118, simply see *phthoneô* used within the context of rivalry.
19 The only occurrence of the *phthon-* root in Hesiod aside from *Op.*118: *aphthonos* (‘abundant’).
20 Walcot (1978), 14: ‘it is possible to distinguish between *phthonos* and *zêlos*, one being bad and the other a good quality.’
21 Konstan (2006), 119 (cf. 120-1).
22 It is not tenable to suggest one Hesiodic meaning for *zêlos* when it, like *eris*, receives such different treatment from his two works (contrast the monstrous description at *Op.* 196-201, where Zêlos is opposed to Nemesis and Aidôs, with the positive characterization at *Th.* 384-8, where Zêlos is associated with Zeus and Nikê). Likewise, it is not possible to oppose *phthoneô* to *zêlos* when the former’s only occurrence is alongside *zêlos* in the discussion of aspects of good *eris* (*v.*26, the only *phthon-* cognate in Hesiod; *zeloô* appears at *v.*23).
positively regarded ‘righteous indignation’, akin to Hippias’ ‘just phthonos’ or Aristotle’s to nemesan. Hesiod compared the outcome of good and bad eris, not the justness of the emotion in the patient: bad eris causes war and conflict, good eris provokes the idle to work. In Hippias and Aristotle, by contrast, the distinction is between (respectively) dikaios phthonos / to nemesan (which are felt towards those who prosper unjustly and which it is good to feel) and adikos phthonos / plain phthonos (which are felt towards those who prosper justly and which should be avoided). The correlation of phthonos with ‘desert’ is as lacking from Hesiod as from Homer, and does not (contrary to Konstan’s suggestion) provide any precedent for phthonos as the justified response to those who ‘get above themselves’. The link between phthonos and rivalry, debated in the Odyssey, is unmistakable in Hesiod.

Between Homer and the fifth century phthonos changes its associations radically. In her monograph on phthonos in Pindar, Patricia Bulman argues that (amongst humans) phthonos is a ‘completely negative emotion’, and numerous examples bear out her words. In the first Olympian Pindar dismisses the story that the gods feasted on Tantalus’ shoulder as the blasphemous invention of envious neighbours (φθονερῶν γειτόνων), envious (we understand) of Tantalus’ favour with the gods, from which Pindar dissociates himself (152: ἀφίσταµαι). The idea that rulers and the prosperous were the automatic—rather than deserving—objects of resentment was a commonplace, particularly (and unsurprisingly) in praise poetry. In the eleventh Pythian Pindar opines that prosperity (olbos) itself attracts phthonos:

κακολόγοι δὲ πολλίται.  
ἵσχει τε γὰρ ὀλβὸς οὐ μείονα φθόνον (28-9)

For the citizens speak ill,  
And prosperity does not stem still greater resentment.

The injustice of phthonos is particularly emphasized in Nemean 8, where Pindar notes that it is the better, not the worse, who are objects of phthonos. Here, as in the

23 Bulman (1992), 1 and passim.  
24 See, e.g., Arch. fr.19; Pi. P. 1.85; Bacch. 11.63; S. OT. 1526, Ai. 157; Xen. Hieron 1.9.
last example, the common association with 'rivalry' seems to be absent and *phthonos* indicates an upward looking ‘envy’:

\[ \omega \nu \nu \delta \varepsilon \lambda \gamma \iota \omega \phi \theta o\nu r\omicron\iota\sigma i \delta \varepsilon \gamma \iota \nu \theta o\nu r\omicron\iota\sigma i \delta \nu \kappa \delta \rho \iota \varsigma \iota . \] (21-2)

Words are a morsel for the *phthoneroi*,
And [their *phthonos*] ever fastens to what is noble,
But does not strive with the worse.

The poem is about praise and blame, and the importance of praising and blaming the right people: slander and *phthonos* are opposed to praise, which confers deserved *timē* on the successful. Bacchylides directly opposes *phthonos* to *ainos* (praise) and *dikê* (justice), admonishing that *phthonos* must be ‘pushed away with both hands’ (5.187-9), and exhorting the listener to praise the wise man (*sophos*) with justice (*sun dikêi*), unless prevented by ‘bold speaking *phthonos*’ (13.199-202). In these examples, then, *phthonos* is used to negatively characterize the resentment of others’ success (implying a lack of justification or virtue in the patient), allied to a strong implication that the resented success is *deserved*.\(^{25}\)

Aeschylus’ Agamemnon tells the chorus ‘it is a rare man who honours a prosperous friend without *phthonos*’ (Ag. 833-4; here, again, *phthonos* is focused on *olbos*, 837). This highlights an important aspect of *phthonos*, that it can tempt one to violate the duties of friendship: we also find *phthonos* as a negative reaction to the success of *philoi* in, for example, Isocrates (1.26) and Xenophon (Mem. 3.9.8).\(^{26}\)

Nagy has observed the connection between *phthonos* (and unfair reproach more generally) and imagery of food, biting, and gluttony from Homer to Pindar:\(^{27}\) Irus, whom Odysseus beseeches not to feel *phthonos*, is characterized as having a stomach which is *margos* (‘gluttonous’ *Od*. 18.2); Bacchylides (3.67-8) notes that he who speaks well (εὗ λέγειν) is ‘one who does not fatten himself on *phthonos*’ (μὴ φθόνωφ

\(^{25}\) For a broader discussion of the social dynamics of envy and resentment see Cairns (2003a).
\(^{26}\) Cf. n.4. Plut. *Mor*. 91f-92b notes that *phthonos* and *philoneikia*, if it they cannot be avoided by any other means, should be worked off on enemies not friends (clearly a potential danger).
\(^{27}\) See Nagy (1979), 224-6, 229.
Pindar elsewhere says 'words are a morsel' (*opson*, literally 'boiled meat') for those who are *phthoneroi* (*N.* 8.21-2), and talks of the bite (*dakos*) of slander (*kakagoria*) as best avoided (*P.* 2.52-3). We shall see that the imagery of consumption recurs in Artabanus’ speech on the *phthoneros* nature of god in the *Histories* (7.46.4, §3.5.5).

This brief survey cannot hope to be exhaustive, but certain recurring elements have been seen which serve to flesh out the associations that *phthonos* typically carried in lyric, tragedy, and prose: although defined in *amoral* terms by Aristotle (resentment of all success in rivals irrespective of desert), *phthonos* is invariably used in contexts where the *phthonos* is implicitly *immoral* (to stress that the resented success *is* deserved and that the resentment aroused is not only irrespective of, but actually *contrary to*, desert). The focal sense of grudging is alloyed to strongly negative connotations. If indulged, *phthonos* obstructs the successful from gaining their deserved honour (*timê*), hinders people from fulfilling their duties to their *philoi*, and is associated with gluttony. Unsurprisingly, and especially in praise-poetry, *phthonos* is frequently not only felt between rivals, but also of the rich, powerful, and successful by their inferiors. As Bacchylides says, if detected in oneself, *phthonos* is to be resisted at all costs (5.187-9). Hippias' division of *phthonos* into good and bad suggests that in the fifth century *phthonos* could be used of justified resentment, but such usages are not attested in any quantity until the fourth century (above n.6), where they are always qualified by a word like 'justly' (*axiôs*).

The next section examines the use of *phthonos* and cognates in the *Histories*, to establish whether, in the *Histories*, we find anything akin to a Hippian 'just *phthonos*'. It will emerge that Herodotus’ usage of *phthonos* is close to the prototypical and bleak characterization given by Aristotle in *Rhetoric*.

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28 The text is partially reconstructed, but very plausible, especially in the light of other parallels.

29 See also *O.* 1.52, *P.* 2.55-6 (Archilochus, 'fattening himself' (παινόμενον) on heavy-worded hatreds...').
**Phthonos in the Histories**

### 3.3. Human Phthonos.

*Phthonos* and *phthoneô* occur primarily in a human context in the *Histories*, and, rather helpfully, Herodotus’ characters engage in explicit theorizing on the nature of *phthonos*. A *phthono* root is applied to god(s) five times, thrice in the form *phthoneros*. The adjective *aphthonos* mostly appears as a measure of quantity (‘plentiful’ or ‘abundant’), clearly related to the etymology (i.e. supplied in ‘ungrudging’ amounts) but frequently without any notion of agency (e.g. 2.6.2). *Aphthonos* is only once applied to a person: in Otanes’ description of tyranny he states that the tyrant should be *aphthonos* (but goes on to say that, in fact, tyrants are particularly subject to *phthonos*, 3.80.3). A related term, *agê* (probably also ‘resentment’, verbal form *agamai*) occurs twice, both times associated with *phthono* root words, with which it may be synonymous, in the context of rivalry (6.61.1, 8.69.1). The compounds *epiphthonos* and *epiphthoneô* are found three times in the *Histories*, once in connection with the gods (4.205; cf. 7.139.1, 9.79.2).

In the *Histories*, human *phthonos* is typically felt by individuals of individuals, and usually has as its object the deserved glory and success of a rival. Those who feel *phthonos* frequently attempt to prevent successful individuals from receiving their rightful *timê* (3.30.1, 3.146.1, 6.137.2, 8.124.1, 8.125.1). *Phthonos* is also used more generally to describe the emotion felt on beholding successful rivals, where the destructive consequences or the lack of justification are stressed (e.g. 3.80.4, 6.61.1, 7.236.1-2, 7.237.2, 8.69.1).

The lack of due honour paid to Themistocles by the Greek generals (during a competition for the best Greek leader) illustrates how *phthonos* often works to obstruct the rightful allotment of *timê*. Herodotus is in no doubt that Themistocles was considered the greatest (when it came to the vote, he notes, every general put

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30 They are found at 3.30.1; 3.52.5; 3.80.3-4, 3.146.1, 4.104, 6.61.1, 6.137.2, 7.236.1-2, 7.237.2, 8.69.1, 8.124.1, 8.125.1, 9.71.4.
31 1.32.1, 3.40.2, 7.10.e, 7.46.4, 8.109.3.
32 *Phthoneros* and *aphthonos* also seem to describe opposite dispositions at Pl. Resp. 500a1.
33 The coupling is found only in these places.
Themistocles’ name on their ballot paper after their own) but in the end Themistocles has to sail to Sparta to be honoured:

Οὐ βουλομένων δὲ ταῦτα κρίνειν τῶν Ἑλλήνων φθόνοι, ἀλλ’ ἀποπλεόντων ἑκάστων ἐς τὴν ἑωυτῶν ἀκρίτων, αὐτίκα μετὰ ταῦτα ἐς Λακεδαίμονα ἀπίκετο θέλων τιμηθῆναι (8.124.1-2)

The Greeks, in their phthonos, did not want to pass judgement on this [competition], and instead each sailed away to his own land without making a decision. Nevertheless Themistocles’ name was cried far and wide, and he was considered the wisest man in Greece by far. Since he won but received no honour from those who had fought in Salamis, he immediately went to Sparta, desiring to receive timê.

In epinician poetry, too, we saw deserved ainos opposed to phthonos.34 Xerxes gives important insight into the nature of phthonos in explaining to the distrustful Achaemenes why he is confident of the good will of Demaratus, the Spartan king in exile at his court. Achaemenes claims that Demaratus’ advice to Xerxes is treacherous because he feels phthonos at Xerxes’ success; like all Greeks, Achaemenes claims, Demaratus ‘feels phthonos at those who are successful and hates what is better’ (τοῦ τε εὐτυχέων φθονέουσι καὶ τὸ κρέσσον στυγέουσι, 7.236.1). Xerxes replies he trusts Demaratus because of the nature of their relationship: xenia (‘guest friendship’). For ‘of all men, it is a xenos who is the most well-disposed towards a xenos who prospers (εὖ πρήσσοντί), and when consulted will give the very best advice’ (7.237.2-3). This is contrasted with the behaviour of citizens towards other successful citizens, which is characterized by phthonos, and leads all but the particularly virtuous to keep good advice to themselves:

πολιήτης μὲν πολιήτη εὖ πρήσσοντι φθονέει καὶ ἔστι δυσμενής τῇ σιγῇ οὐδ’ ἂν συμβουλευομένου τοῦ ἀστοῦ πολιήτης ἀνήρ τὰ ἀριστά οἱ δικέοντα εἶναι ὑποθέοιτο, εἰ μὴ πρόσω ἀρετῆς ἀνήκοι· σπάνιοι δὲ εἰσὶ οἱ τοιοῦτοι. (7.237.2)

A citizen feels phthonos of another citizen when he prospers, and is ill-disposed in his silence, nor, when the city takes council, would a citizen man suggest what he thought was best, unless he were advanced in virtue. But few are of such a sort.

It is a striking flaw in Ranulf’s analysis of *phthonos* in Herodotus that he suggests that Achaemenes’ characterization of the Greeks as particularly disposed to *phthonos* indicates that Herodotus and his contemporaries did not consider the term pejorative or disparaging, but instead took an invidious pleasure in the spectacle of *phthonos* depriving people of their deserved honour.\(^{35}\) It is clear that Herodotus’ portrayal of the *phthonos* that arises in the context of rivalry—particularly, perhaps, in situations of competitive equality—is critical rather than exultant. Xerxes is a Persian king theorizing about democracy, but he seems both to echo (verbally) and to challenge Hesiod’s presentation of ‘good eris’ in his discussion of *phthonos*: while it is particularly associated with rivalry, it is not always beneficial to the wider group.\(^{36}\) Perhaps surprisingly, Xerxes' analysis is supported by many Herodotean examples of *phthonos* which, as Aristotle would later claim (*Rhet.* 1386b and 1388a), is felt by those who are in competition with each other,\(^{37}\) not those who share a relationship where the success of one benefits the other, such as *xenia*. From the *Histories* we can compare: the ancient rivalry of the Spartan kings (6.52.8), exemplified by Demaratus’ *phthonos* and *agê* of Kleomenes (6.61.1); the *phthonos* and *agê* of Artemisia’s rival captains who delight at the prospect of her failure (8.69, contrasting with the King’s great pleasure and *ainos* of her advice); and the behaviour of the Greek captains towards Themistocles (8.124.1-2, contrasting with the generous rewards from the Spartan state: μεγάλως δὲ ἐτίμησαν). By contrast, the Egyptian king Amasis initially expresses only pleasure at seeing his *philos* and *xenos* Polycrates prosper, mitigated only by concern that he might attract a negative reaction from the *phthoneros* divinity (3.40.1).

*Phthonos* is thus particularly associated with the destructive resentment between rivals (not felt by those of exceptional virtue) and prevents the wise and successful from receiving their deserved honour. It is also associated with unjust actions, as

\(^{35}\) The claim is made repeatedly: (1933/4.1), 67 (cited above, n.2), 69, 90-1, 112.

\(^{36}\) Cf. Hes. *Op.* 25-6 καὶ κεραμεὺς κεραμεῖ κοτέα καὶ τέκτονι τέκτων./ καὶ πτωχὸς πτωχῷ φθονεῖ καὶ ὀιδὸς ὀιδῷ. On the tendency of *phthonos* to hinder one from achievement see n.5 (above).

\(^{37}\) Aristotle’s concord with Herodotus is unsurprising, since both agree with a long tradition of observing that envious rivalry is aroused by the sight of those who have similar aspirations, not between, for example, god and soldier, or tyrant and beggar. The idea is first found in Hesiod, *Op.* 25-6, cited by Plato (*Lys.* 215d), Aristotle (*Rhet.* 1388a), and Plutarch (*Mor.* 92a), all of whom, like Herodotus, stress rivalry as an aspect of *phthonos*. For the almost disastrous effects of Greek rivalry on the resistance to the Persians, see Harrison (2003), Baragwanath (2008).
emerges from Herodotus’ characterization of Hecataeus’ report of the exile of the Pelasgians from Attica. There is a version in which the Athenian exile of the Pelasgians was *dikaios* (‘just’), but in the version of Hecataeus, Herodotus says, the Pelasgians were driven out *adikôs* (‘unjustly’), when the Athenians were seized by *phthonos* and *himeros gês* (‘desire for land’) on seeing the worthless land with which they had paid the Pelasgians for building their city wall productively cultivated (6.137.2). Rivalrous *phthonos* is also associated with spiteful behaviour. Maeandrius, on retreating from Samos before the Persians and the former tyrant Syloson, decides to allow his brother to lead a doomed attack on the invading Persian force, feeling *phthonos* that Syloson might retake the city without trouble; he knew that the force of Samians did not stand a chance, but wanted to make the Persians ill-disposed towards the islanders and Samos as weak as possible before he handed it over (knowing a secret escape route for himself). In consequence of Maeandrius' *phthonos* Samos' population is killed and the survivors forcibly removed (3.149.1). Maeandrius’ action is a classic example of spite in bringing no benefit, other than the satisfaction of seeing his rivals (and many others collateral) suffer.

In the examples considered thus far *phthonos* is felt by the ‘losing’ party in any particular interaction, although within a relationship of rough parity (that can thus be construed as ‘rivalry’). In this respect the description of the *tyrannos* by Otanes in the Constitutional Debate (3.80-3) has often been considered to differ.

As described by Otanes, the tyrant has two qualities: *hubris* and *phthonos*. The former is the consequence of wealth, whilst the latter is ‘born into [humans] from the beginning’ (3.80.3). The association between tyranny and *phthonos* is strong: a *phthon* -root occurs four times in six OCT lines. Otanes states that a tyrant ought to be ‘without *phthonos*’, because he possesses all good things (ἀνδρὰ γε τύραννον ἄφθονον ἔδει εἶναι, ἐχοντά γε πάντα τὰ ἄγαθά, 3.80.4). Now, Otanes may mean that the tyrant is somehow (morally?) obliged to be *aphthonos* (= ‘ungrudging’, ‘generous’) because so much power is concentrated in his hands, but he may mean that the tyrant ought to be ‘without *phthonos*’ (= envy of others who have particular qualities that he does not) because his position places him so far above everybody else that he has no rivals. This would fit the common association between *phthonos*
and rivalry. Of course, we cannot wholly discriminate between these two senses, for they are not exclusive and the Greek can carry both, but the rest of the passage supports the latter interpretation. *Phthonos* provokes the tyrant to destroy the best and elevate the worst (φθονεῖ γὰρ τοῖς ἀρίστοις περιεσώσθε τε καὶ ζῶονσι, χαίρει δὲ τοῖς κακίστοις τῶν ἀστῶν, 3.80.4) presumably out of a sense of rivalry with his subjects, misplaced though it is. This will be important when we come to consider divine *phthonos*, for the analogy between tyrannical and divine behaviour is central to some Herodotean interpretations of the *phthonos* of the gods.

The figure who provoked Otanes’ criticisms of tyranny (and the only actual ruler said to feel *phthonos*) is Cambyses. (Xerxes, unlike his captains, feels delight not *phthonos* at the excellence of his subordinates, e.g. Artemisia, 8.69.) Cambyses feels *phthonos* only once and here, too, a rivalrous ‘envy’ would seem to be at issue. Cambyses’ spies, the ‘fish-eaters’, return with a huge bow from the Ethiopian king, bearing a message that the Persians should only attack when they are strong enough to draw bows of such size with ease (3.21.3). Smerdis, Cambyses’ brother, is the only Persian capable of this feat, and Cambyses, in *phthonos*, sent him back from Egypt to Persia (3.30.1). Immediately afterwards Cambyses is visited by a divine dream in which it is announced that Smerdis is sitting on the Persian throne. On awaking, Cambyses ordered his brother killed. It would turn out that the dream was a true vision of the future, but that Smerdis the Magus (identical and homonymous with Cambyses brother Smerdis) would be the usurper of Cambyses’ throne. To understand Cambyses’ *phthonos*, as some have, as a *protective jealousy* towards the threat on his kingly *timē* would misplace *phthonos* in the sequence—Cambyses feels *phthonos* as a result of his brother’s physical prowess, which enable him to achieve what Cambyses cannot; only afterwards does he receive the prophetic dream.38

We have now examined numerous examples of Herodotus’ use of *phthonos* in the context of humans, from which it emerges that *phthonos* and *phthoneō* are typically associated with rivalry, a failure to render due honour, unjust actions, and spiteful behaviour. *Phthonos* is expressly said to be absent from certain types of reciprocally

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38 Harrison (2003), 151, identifies this instance of *phthonos* as also being ‘a form of pre-emptive or anticipatory envy’, apparently connecting the emotion with the feared usurpation.
beneficial, non-rivalrous relationship (i.e. xenia), and those who are particularly virtuous. There is no instance in which phthonos is associated with the desire to correctly apportion timê in a hierarchical or monarchical society, nor (in contrast to examples in Hesiod, later oratory, and the Hippias fragment) can any uses of phthonos be construed as ‘positive’ in any sense.

In scenes where individuals might be thought to ‘get above themselves’—where we might expect to find a (Hippian) ‘just phthonos’ (= ‘righteous indignation’)—phthonos is absent. In Homeric Greek, the term for this emotion would be nemesis, but, as we shall see (§3.5.2), nemesis is not an emotional term in the Histories and there is no specific term for 'indignation'. Phthonos is not felt, for example, by Astyages or Artembares in the case of the shepherd-boy Cyrus’ hubris against Artembares’ noble son—a flogging which violates the timê appropriate to his station (1.114-15).

The final term to be considered is epiphthonein, which admits a greater range of meanings in Herodotus. When it is suggested to Pausanias that he should mutilate the corpse of Mardonius in revenge, he uses the verb epiphthonein in a context that is suggestive of justified indignation: ‘that is a thing which it is fitting more for Barbarians to do than for Greeks, and we epiphthonein them for it’ (τὰ πρέπει μᾶλλον βαρβάροις ποιέειν ἢ περ Ἔλλησι, καὶ ἐκεῖνοι δὲ ἐπιφθονέομεν, 9.79). While the context suggests a translation of epiphthonein as ‘to feel indignation’, another use of the epiphthon- stem shows that this may be an effect of the context—the term does not connote only ‘justified’ resentment. This is clear from the way Herodotus frames his claim that the Athenians were the crucial element of the Greek victory: he says that his opinion will be epiphthonos to most people, but is nevertheless true (ἀληθές, 7.139.1). Clearly, to say that something is epiphthonos to others (or that others might epiphthonein one’s words or deeds) does not necessarily imply their objectively righteous indignation, for they can be both incorrect and motivated to deny appropriate timê by rivalrous resentment. Pausanias’ use of epiphthoneô is, then, the only example of a phthon- root word without a strongly negative valence, and indicates that the word can bear a neutral sense like ‘resent’
(amenable to both positive and negative evaluation). It may be that ἐπίθεονος seemed particularly appropriate in Pausanias' speech because its strength and viscerality stress the intensity of his disapproval.

Herodotus’ use of phthonos suggests clearly that, whether or not we allow for a ‘positive’ phthonos linked to desert (i.e. ‘righteous indignation’) in classical literature more widely, the Histories show no sign of it. Phthonos had a decidedly ‘ugly ring’ to Herodotus and his contemporaries. Achaemenes’ characterization of the Hellenes as ‘feeling phthonos of those who do well, and hating what is best’ (7.236.1) is strongly critical, and provides no justification for concluding that Herodotus must have felt ‘edified by a belief in jealous gods’. With this in mind, let us examine the meaning of the phthonos of the gods in Greek literature.

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39 As argued by Ranulf (1933/4.1), 67-9 (cited above §3.1 n.2).
3.4. The Phthonos of the Gods in Early Greek Literature
3.4.1. Developmental Theories of Divine Phthonos and Nemesis

The first chapter of this thesis outlined the history of the interpretation of divine phthonos. Denounced as blasphemy by Plutarch, who presumably interpreted phthonos in its prototypically negative sense, the repeated statements by Herodotus’ warnsers that ‘god is phthoneros’ were largely ignored in the sixteenth century by scholars who interpreted Herodotus’ narratives as examples of the divine punishment of mortal crimes. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, the case was made that divine phthonos was, in fact, part of ‘divine justice’ and synonymous with nemesis (interpreted similarly to the Aristotelian definition of to nemesan): phthonos signified not divine invidia but justified divine indignation at human arrogance or hubris and associated crimes (fitting in a conception of divinity as provident and benevolent). Advocates of this view in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century generally ignore the overwhelmingly negative meaning of phthonos in the Histories. The translation of ‘divine phthonos’ as ‘justified indignation’ was typically justified by reference to the passage that lent itself best to this interpretation (i.e. 7.10ε), to various crimes committed by those at whom the gods are said to feel phthonos, to the equivalence of phthonos and nemesis in Herodotus’ usage (implied by their juxtaposition at 1.32.1 and 1.34), and to several other common expressions in which nemesis and phthonos were allegedly interchangeable. These were ad hoc defences of an ideologically motivated interpretation, owing more to the theological concerns of Herodotus' critics than the text.

In the late nineteenth century a different explanation emerged, based on the observation (made as early as the mid nineteenth century) that there is a degree of latitude in the meaning of the phrase ‘the phthonos of the gods’ in the classical period. For scholars working within the dominant evolutionary framework of the

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40 These arguments and interpretative traditions are described in detail in §1.3-6.
41 For an early observation of the diversity in meaning (from ‘Neid’ to a punishing response to hubris): Schömann (1844), 132. For this as the difference between ‘elite’ and ‘popular’ religion see, e.g., Schuler (1869).
late eighteenth-century (in which religion becomes increasingly ‘moral’ and ‘rational’ over time, that is, increasingly like contemporary Christianity), the natural explanation seems to have been that a ‘popular’ and amoral belief in divine *phthonos* (= resentment of human prosperity) became ‘moralized’ or ‘purified’ in the intellectual awakening of the Greek people.  

When nobler, more mentally developed, elite authors like Aeschylus and Pindar talked of divine *phthonos* they must have meant something quite different from the older, popular notion of divine *jealousy* or *envy* of human prosperity, namely god’s *righteous indignation* towards the unjust and arrogant, synonymous with divine justice. As we saw in the first chapter, commentators were divided on whether Herodotus held the elite or the older, popular view, and many argued that he vacillated between them in an unselfconscious fashion. This, in turn, seems to have played an important role in the development of the enduring view of Herodotus as theologically primitive, naive, and unselfconscious. It is striking that in the mid-twentieth century Eduard Fraenkel, confronted with Ranulf’s compelling arguments that Aeschylus’ and Pindar’s use of divine *phthonos* seems to attribute an immoral emotion to the gods, could respond with a straightforward appeal to the developmental theory of religion:  

The chief fact to remember is that the φθόνος ascribed to the gods was originally something crude and primitive. How else could it have been called φθόνος? The belief that certain actions of the gods originated from so base an instinct must go back far beyond the period at which we learn of it from our literary sources. When the idea first comes to our notice, it seems already well on the way to a more dignified and purer conception.

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42 This explanation is formalized by Rohde (1901), 328-30—not original with Dodds, as Rakoczy suggests, (1996), 250—and would dominate the discussion of divine *phthonos* in the early and mid 20th century. Welcker (1862.3), 28-32, argues that the divine becomes a moral force in Greek thought (striving for balance and harmony) only after the Persian War (divine *phthonos* is not tied into this development, however). Garve’s complex developmental theory anticipates that of Rohde, but with Garve this is only part of a development that begins with ‘the earliest religions’ (which includes the Mosaic Genesis alongside early myth), and moves through numerous stages, (1792/6.2), 41-50. For scholarly approaches to ‘divine *phthonos*’ and ‘divine *nemesis*’ (a issue of major interest in the 19th century) see, in addition to §1.5-6: Herder (1786); Besenbeck (1787); Zoega (1817); Günther (1824); Van Marle (1826); Bötticher (1829); Lehrs (1838); Runge (1856); Nägelsbach (1857); Hoffmann (1860); Tournier (1863); Dörries (1870); Huit (1883); Halpert (1888); Meuss (1888); Fries (1931).

In Fraenkel’s view, then, ‘divine phthonos’ was substantially a moral doctrine indicating divine indignation at human arrogance and (consequent) injustice even before its first attestations in Pindar and Aeschylus.\textsuperscript{44} For Wilhelm Nestle, by contrast, the moralization of divine action was precisely the point that Aeschylus was keen to impress upon the audience of the Persae: the messenger’s mention of ϕθόνος θεῶν (362) represents Aeschylus’ intentional introduction of the ‘folk-belief’ that god envies prosperity which is subsequently corrected by Darius’ ghost (820-31), who portrays the destruction as the righteous divine punishment for Xerxes’ hubris and excessive ambition, and represents the poet’s own view.\textsuperscript{45} For Wilamowitz the development came still later: in the Persae, performed in 472, Aeschylus still holds the popular view, which he rejects in the Oresteia, performed in 458.\textsuperscript{46} Fritz Wehrli argued that the strong opposition between divine jealousy and divine retribution in the choral ode of the Agamemnon (750-62)\textsuperscript{47} is absent from all other Aeschylean works, which exhibit the ‘popular’ belief.\textsuperscript{48} While Fraenkel views divine phthonos itself as a moral response allied to divine justice, many others view divine phthonos as the older, popular belief against which Aeschylus’ own theology is to be characterized. We shall return to evaluate these disagreements, which also divide more recent scholars, below (§3.4.2).

The questions that divided Herodotean scholars in the early twentieth century, then, were part of a wider debate on the nature of divine phthonos in classical literature. The developmental schema seems to have predisposed scholars to assume that, in any particular passage or author, divine phthonos must either indicate a wholly moral, purified vision of divine action (i.e. ‘righteous indignation’ and just punishment), or a non-moral, vulgar superstition (i.e. god’s ‘envy’ or arbitrary resentment): the sociologist Svend Ranulf found little favour among classical

\textsuperscript{44} A position laid out, using by Cornford (1912), 118-19, in the idiom of contemporary (Frazerian) anthropology.
\textsuperscript{45} Nestle (1907), 309 n.5.
\textsuperscript{46} Wilamowitz, cited in Fraenkel (1950.2), 349.
\textsuperscript{47} The chorus performatively reject the palaiphatos logos that the gods resent prosperity itself (750-6, often interpreted as the ‘popular’ belief in divine phthonos, e.g. Dodds (1951), 30, Winnington-Ingram (1983), 1). Rather, they insist that, unlike all other men, they believe that there will always be a ‘well-chiled fate for straight and just houses’. Instead, wealth produces hubris which creates daring (thrasos), and gives rise to ‘madness/destruction’ (atê, 757-62).
\textsuperscript{48} Wehrli (1931), 83-6, followed by Opstelten (1952), 232.
philologists when he argued that the Greeks were completely insensible to the distinction between just divine punishment of crime, capricious divine destruction imposed arbitrarily, and divine jealousy of prosperity and pride, and considered them all to be equally edifying and satisfying spectacles. Following the early polarization of interpretations of divine ἐρωτικός in Herodotus, scholars in the latter part of the twentieth century have tended, depending on their wider interpretative concerns, to follow one school or the other, and continue to treat divine ἐρωτικός as synonymous with a moralized ‘divine justice’ (cf. §1.5, §1.9) or with its opposite: an amoral divine hostility or an arbitrary resentment of any great prosperity or success (§1.6.2).

Developmental theories of religion no longer hold the tyranny they did, and it is easier to appreciate that there are several problems with the theory that divine ἐρωτικός become ‘rationalized’ in the course of the fifth century by pious elites (be they playwrights or philosophers). No convincing defence has been offered for the assumption that, over time, people generally progress from 'primitive' to 'purified' theological views and, in the process, necessarily imagine their gods to be increasingly moral. The fact that charges of the ‘immorality’ of god in traditional or popular belief are attested fairly continuously from Xenophanes to Richard Dawkins would seem to suggest that, at all periods, there have been debates about what types of disposition it is appropriate to attribute to the divine, particularly so, perhaps, in fifth-century Greece. More problematic still, the developmental theory of divine ἐρωτικός has no grounding in the philological evidence for the early meaning of ἐρωτικός reviewed above. As Konstan has observed, the word ἐρωτικός shifts from a fairly unmarked term for ‘denying’ or ‘saying no’ in Homer (perhaps still visible in the Platonic exhortation to speak: μὴ φθονήσῃς etc.) to a more negatively viewed

49 Ranulf (cf. §3.1 n.2). As we shall see, his recognition that many later commentators analyse divine action using different categories to those used by fifth-century Greeks is of great importance. But his claim of total Greek insensibility to the ‘difference of the types’ is demonstrably incorrect in some instances (e.g. A. Ag. 750-62, where the chorus make precisely this distinction, cf. above n.47).

50 For general comments on developments in Greek religion see, e.g., Lloyd-Jones (1990), 256, West (1999), Fantham (2003), 231.

51 On criticisms of ‘old’, ‘popular’, ‘Homeric’, or ‘poetic’ theology as immoral see §1.1 (esp. nn.27-8, on Xenophanes, Sextus Empiricus, Augustine) and §1.2 (on Euripides, Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, and Plotinus, who criticize the idea of the ἐρωτικός of the gods). On the notion of the ‘fitting’ in Greek theology see Jaeger (1947), 51-4, and Pohlenz (1965).

52 So Lanzillotta (2010), 85: ‘even in Plato’s time the fundamental meaning seems to be approximately the same [as in Homer]’. The core sense of ‘denying’ is certainly present, but in the
emotion in later centuries. In fact, the first attestations of the expression ‘divine phthonos’ occur at the same time, and in the same authors, as the first clear condemnations of human phthonos: in Aeschylus, Pindar, and Herodotus. If we assume that the expression 'divine phthonos' had an original meaning before its first surviving attestation that changed and developed, we should expect the opposite development to that supposed by Rohde and Fraenkel: an originally ‘neutral’ meaning (in which the gods simply ‘deny' things to mortals) that became increasingly negatively viewed, in consequence of the changes which the word phthonos undergoes.

Konstan, in fact, posits a different developmental theory to support the interpretation of some uses ‘divine phthonos’ as a justified and reasonable response to mortal transgression. He argues that, in addition to a considerable overlap between nemesis and phthonos at all periods, the terms developed in different directions in the course of the fifth century: the negative sense of phthonos became predominant as a result of the aristocratic condemnation of lower-class ‘envy’, while nemesis retained its more positive associations as a result of the cult of Nemesis at Rhamnous. Influenced, I suspect, by the tradition of theological apologetics, Konstan suggests that the expression ‘the phthonos of the gods’ preserves the ‘antiquated’ positive sense of phthonos as 'righteous indignation' (whose existence I disputed in the last section). In classical prose, Konstan argues (although he does not specify any particular authors), ‘though described as phthonos, this top-down [divine] indignation is no different from that expressed by the older term nemesis’, and served ‘as the term for divine displeasure at human immoderation’.53

In postulating a fossilized 'positive' sense for ‘divine phthonos’ Konstan offers a new philological explanation for the major difficulty encountered by scholars who have striven to preserve the elusive equation between ‘divine phthonos’ and ‘divine

context of debates between intellectual rivals the expression μὴ φθονήσῃς (e.g. Prot. 321c, Resp. 338a) and variants do, in fact, seem to have the later sense described above (§3.2-3): to exhort the other not to feel phthonos and withhold their knowledge is to exhort them to transcend rivalrous grudging and to ‘be a good sport’. Cf. Theog. 769-72, Pl. Prot. 327a-b and Diotima’s talk of philosophia aphthonos in Symp. 210d, with Herrmann (2003).

justice’. Previously those who wished to make this argument were forced to claim that we must understand *phthonos* in completely different ways depending on whether the patient is divine or mortal. Bulman, for example, claims: ‘human *phthonos* in Pindar is a completely negative emotion, spawned by one’s ignorance of mortal limitations and nurtured by an inferior ἐρως...[but the] *phthonos* of the gods is better understood as equivalent to *nemesis* and translated as the gods’ “retribution” or even their “right to veto”’. Bulman’s position, which makes explicit a tacit consensus among many nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries scholars, has rightly attracted criticism for not explaining why human *phthonos* should operate contrary to desert and justice, while divine *phthonos* operates in *perfect accord* with it.

Konstan’s justification for the ‘positive’ sense of divine *phthonos* relies on his claim that, at some point between archaic and classical Greek, both *phthonos* and *nemesis* could ‘represent an emotional response based on the judgement that a person, whether an equal or an inferior, is getting above himself.’ In this Konstan seems to go too far, as we have seen (§3.2-3). While it is possible in the fifth and fourth centuries to combine the word *phthonos* with a word like ‘just’ or ‘deserved’, to describe someone else’s emotional response as *phthonos* (unqualified) typically suggests that *phthonos* was the unjustified resentment spawned of rivalry or envy, and brought a host of negative associations. The point is made by Hippias (and illustrated by some fourth-century uses) that *phthonos* can be used to describe the resentment of bad or inappropriate behaviour, but there is no evidence that the *phthon-* root was ever particularly associated with ‘indignation’ of the sort which Cairns identifies in the Homeric emotion *nemesis* and which Aristotle gives to his new coinage *nemesan*.

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54 Bulman (1992), 1; cf. 12: ‘Pindar’s divine *phthonos* closely resembles Aristotle’s divine *nemesis*, at least to the degree that both are sanctioned by *justice... the gods’ righteous and corrective indignation*’ (my italics). Lanzillotta (2010), 76, describes divine *phthonos* in the same rather legalistic terms: ‘the divine right to veto human happiness’, although he prefers ‘avarice’ elsewhere (2012), 141. These discussions are wide-ranging and stimulating but lack clarity: his primary concern in seems to be to establish whether any given instance of *phthonos* is or is not ‘envy’ (a word left undefined), a rather rigid mode of analysis, divorced from the complexity of language.


We have, then, seen two attempts to explain by means of developmental theories why divine *phthonos* should refer to ‘righteous indignation at unrighteous success or arrogance’ while human *phthonos* typically means ‘unjustified indignation at deserved success’. But neither plausibly explains why Herodotus, Pindar, or Aeschylus should have had the radically different ideas about human and divine *phthonos* which Bulman claims in the case of Pindar, and Konstan suggests in the context of ‘classical prose’. The next section looks in detail at what Herodotus’ literary predecessors, Aeschylus and Pindar, meant by when they attributed *phthonos* to the gods. If, as often claimed, they intended by divine *phthonos* something completely different to human *phthonos*, this would be of great significance. We shall see, however, that this impression is largely the result of a long tradition of reading Greek texts with a set of theological, philosophical, and literary concerns that push commentators into defending tenuous interpretative positions.
3.4.2. Divine *phthonos* in Aeschylus and Pindar

The first attested association between god(s) and *phthonos* occurs in Pindar’s tenth *Pythian* (performed 498) and is of particular interest, since it implicitly links divine *phthonos* (20-2) with *nemesis* (41-3), terms which recur in tandem in Herodotus (1.32-4). In the victory ode for Hippokleas of Pelinna Pindar prays that Hippokleas and his family ‘may encounter no grudging reversals from the gods,’ and continues ‘the heart of god alone is without cares’ (20-2). The sense that these ‘grudging reversals from the gods’ (φθονερα ἵς ἐκ θεών μετατροπίαις) are particularly associated with the difference between human and god is developed as the poem continues, for Pindar contrasts the fortunes of men, for whom the ‘brone heaven’ is beyond reach, with that of the Hyperboreans, who are free from old age, illness, and toil and have escaped ‘excessively just (*huperdikos*) *nemesis*’. 57 As several commentators have pointed out, 58 the reference to *nemesis* points not to the fact that the Hyperboreans do not commit crimes against one another (as a moralizing scholion suggests), 59 but rather to the fact that that they have escaped the ills that otherwise plague humans. In other words, *nemesis* is conceived of as the force that necessarily visits humans (who have not escaped it) with pain, old age, and illness. *Nemesis* is an abstract noun (the –σις ending indicating a process) formed from the νε root, which has at its heart the notion of ‘distribution’. 60 As such it lends itself easily to being understood as ‘what one gets’ in a world where suffering is an inevitable part of being human. *Huperdikos*, a superficially paradoxical coinage (can one ever be *too* just?), appears to suggest that *nemesis* is ‘more than just’, that is excessively punitive. 61 This is a significant development from the sense that *nemesis*

57 Descriptions reminiscent of the Hyperboreans are found of the gods (fr.147) and the golden race in Hesiod (Op. 112-15), discussed by Brown (1992), 98-101.
58 Brown (1992), 98, argues that *huperdikos* *nemesis* refers to ‘the dispensation that characterizes the world or ordinary men’, and proposes a similar reading of *nemesis* in Herodotus. *Nemesis* ‘maintains the alternation of fortune and circumstances in the lives of men’ (103). Schewen (1949), 37, and Lanzillotta (2010), 89, draw the same conclusions.
61 Contra Fränkel (1975), Index B s.v. ὑπέρδίκος, who translates ‘standing up for the right’, and elaborates (492 n.15): ‘Here, and here only, ὑπέρδίκος means not ὑπέρ δίκην but ὑπέρ δίκης. We should have to postulate the existence of ὑπέρδικος in this sense from ὑπερδίκεω, which is formed analogously to ἀδικέω from ἀδίκος...the Hyperboreans are exempt from [*nemesis*] because they do no
bears in Homeric epic where it indicates a justified and disinterested outrage at the breach of accepted social norms (roughly, ‘what one should get’).\textsuperscript{62} Both the ‘resentful/grudging reversals from the gods’ and \textit{huperdikos nemesis} are associated with the key difference between mortals, on the one hand, and gods and Hyperboreans, on the other: suffering. The same can be said of Pindar’s other reference to \textit{nemesis} in \textit{O. 8.86-7} (\textit{νέμεσις διχόβουλος}) where the ‘divided council’ of \textit{nemesis} evokes even more clearly the connection with the mixed lot of humanity, which Pindar prays Zeus should not send to Aegina. This sense of \textit{nemesis} may already be present in the Hesiodic personification (further §3.5.2). In the tenth \textit{Pythian}, then, Pindar prays that his patrons should not be the objects of divine \textit{phthonos} or the law of \textit{nemesis} and suffer the inevitable reversal of fortune, a rather impossible prayer, we might think. It is no surprise that the poet moves on to advocate enjoyment of the present in the face of the uncertainty that the future holds (61-3).

The motives of the gods remain inscrutable, but it is clear that neither divine \textit{phthonos} nor \textit{nemesis} is associated with ‘righteous indignation’. Although Pindar describes \textit{nemesis} as ‘excessively just’, there is no suggestion that the mixed dispensation of mortals is linked to what an individual or mortals as a whole ‘deserve’ or responsive to any culpable mortal behaviour: if we look for ‘crimes’ that ‘overly just \textit{nemesis}’ might ‘punish’ in humans (but not in Hyperboreans who have escaped her) we find only health, youth, and leisure. An interpretation in terms of ‘divine justice’ or ‘objectively justifiable outrage’ imposes quite different concerns to those that emerge from the poem, in seeking (unlike Pindar) to affirm the fairness and appropriateness of this divinely sanctioned cosmic set-up, which resembles that described by Achilles at the end of the \textit{Iliad} (24.525-40, further §3.7). Similarly, Pindar’s prayer in \textit{Isthmian 7} (‘may no \textit{phthonos} of the gods disturb me’, 39-42)

wrong.’ For the problematic associations of \textit{ὑπερδίκος} (which do not fit Fränkel’s posited translation) see A. \textit{Ag. 1395-6} (Clytemnestra, having described the slaughter of Agamemnon, says that it would be just, indeed \textit{huperdikos}’ to pour libations over his bloody corpse, were it fitting (\textit{πρεπόντως})), S. \textit{Aj. 1119} (the chorus rebuke Teucer for his harsh words in such bad-circumstances: they ‘bite’, even if \textit{huperdikos}).

\textsuperscript{62} See above n.7.
accompanies reflections on the inevitability of death, the ephemerality of pleasure, and the impossibility of a mortal reaching the ‘bronze-paved seat of the gods’ (40-4).

If *Pythian* 10 associated divine *phthonos* with the necessary misfortunes that characterize the human lot, we see a different but related set of associations in the thirteenth *Olympian*, where he prays ‘Father Zeus, be ever ungrudging (*aphthonêtos*) at my words’ (24-5). Of this Bulman says: ‘by identifying divine *phthonos* with divine *nemesis*, a scholium has found the correct paraphrase: ἐπὶ τὸ τῶν ἔπεσι καὶ τῶν ὑμνοὺς λέγω περὶ αὐτῶν μὴ νεμεσήτης, οὗ Ζεὺς [‘I mean, may you not feel *nemesis* at my words and prayers, Zeus’]. If we interpret the scholion’s use of *νεμεσάω* in the Aristotelian sense of *nemesis*, as Bulman does (above n.54), then the comment is likely to be an early attempt to ‘purify’ Pindar’s thought for Neoplatonist or Christian consumption (like numerous ancient scholia on divine *phthonos* or *nemesis* in classical texts), rather than a sensitive exegesis of Pindar’s meaning.63 Pindar clearly does not intend to pray that Zeus will not be ‘righteously indignant’ at the undeserved success of his patron (*Aristotle’s* *nemesis*): such an implicit charge would be wholly inappropriate. Pindar seems, rather, to suggest that the combination of success (implicitly *deserved* success) and high praise from others risks incurring divine *phthonos*. The apotropaic prayer resembles that uttered by Aeschylus’ Agamemnon as he uneasily prepares to acquiesce in Clytemnestra’s excessive glorification of him by treading on the dyed cloth. When Agamemnon says ‘may no *phthonos* from the eye of the gods strike me from far off’ (*Ag.* 946-7: θεῶν μὴ τις πρόσωθεν ὀµµατος βάλοι φθόνος, cf. 904) there is, again, little sense that *phthonos* is equivalent to the chorus’ *palaiphatos logos* (750-6, i.e. prosperity and success alone bring misfortune): instead, it is feared, excessive glorification by Clytemnestra and his acquiescence in it is likely to provoke divine resentment.64 By referring to the *phthonos* of the gods and praying that it not follow his words, Pindar shows his awareness of the dangers of excessive praise.

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63 The Scholiast on θεῶν φθόνος *ad* A. Pers. 362 likewise paraphrases *phthonos* as *nemesis*; see also the comments on *huperdikos nemesis* at Pi. P. 10.41-4 (above n.59), on A. Plut. 87, and on the divine temptation of Pandarus in the *Iliad* (schol. bT Il. 4.66a ex., discussed below n.171). Further examples of moralizing scholia on theological matters in Nünlist (2009), 13 n.47.

64 Similar is *Ag.* 921-2, where Agamemnon describes Clytemnestra’s attempt to honour him as a god rather than as a man (925) as strewing an ‘enviable path’ (ἐπίφθονον πόρον) for him.
In the eighth Pythian Pindar’s prayer that the gods should ‘look with unjealous (aphthonos) eyes on [Xenarkes’] good luck (tukhai)’ (71-2) suggests a different set of associations from the passages just examined. Here, as in Pythian 10 and Isthmian 7, there seems to be a direct link between success and the (potential) phthonos of the gods, which would tend to reverse good fortune in line with the dispensation of limited good fortune to humanity. There is no sign that Pindar would consider divine phthonos, were it to strike Xenarkes (as the prayer implies it might), as a justified response to ‘big thinking’, hubris, excessive praise, or any sort of criminal transgression. Of course, Pindar would be unlikely to say this in the context of a praise poem, and this, more than anything else, suggests that he did not consider divine phthonos to be an objectively moral outrage at culpable or criminal behaviour, but rather the sort of automatic resentment of good fortune with which human phthonos, as we have seen, was typically associated (e.g. 7.236.1, focused on εὐτυχεῖν; Pi. P. 11.28-9, A. Ag. 837, focused on ὀλβος). Moreover, Pindar’s comments on divine phthonos are followed by the reflection that success and misfortune are the work of a/the daimon whose purposes are inscrutable to men:

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\text{τὰ δ’ οὐκ ἐπ’ ἀνθράσι κεῖται· δαίμων δὲ παρίσχει·

ἀλλοτ’ ἄλλον ὑπερθε βάλλων, ἄλλον δ’ ὑπὸ χειρὸν

μέτρῳ καταβαίνει·} \ (76-7)
\]

All this lies beyond human calculation: and [a/the] daimon disposes it:
Now hurling one man upward, now bringing another down
Below the measure of the hand.

The meaning of divine phthonos in Aeschylus’ Persae has been much debated. Early in the play the messenger refers to divine phthonos (τὸν θεόν φοθόνον, 362), in addition to the ‘guile of the Greeks’, as the cause for Xerxes’ defeat: Xerxes, he says, was aware of neither. Later Darius’ ghost presents the misfortunes of the Persians as a just punishment from Zeus (κολαστὴς... εὕθυνος βαρύς) for the hubris and big thinking of Xerxes (ὑπέρφευ... φρονεῖν/ ὑπερφρονήσας/ ὑπερκόμπων ἅγαν φρονημάτων, 820-31). Several interpretations of the relationship between these two statements were reviewed in §3.4.1: The first is that divine phthonos is a paraphrase
for Darius’ later comments about the divine punishment of hubris and thinking more than mortal thoughts.\textsuperscript{65} The second is that the messenger refers to an ‘archaic’ or ‘folk’ belief that prosperity inevitably brings a reversal in fortune, which Darius implicitly rejects by affirming divine ‘punishment’ of hubris, thereby giving us the poet’s views.\textsuperscript{66} Another possibility is that divine phthonos of Xerxes’ grand designs, on the one hand, and hubris/divine punishment of hubris, on the other, are not exclusive visions of divine action,\textsuperscript{67} but different evaluations of it: while ‘divine phthonos’ would tend to present Xerxes as a victim of oppressive cosmic forces, Darius’ interpretation of Xerxes’ defeat uses the language of ‘punishment’ and stresses the transgression of norms and the validity of the divine response. The messenger, of course, has every reason (both as a Persian, and as the bearer of bad news) to take Xerxes’ part and a dim view of the Persian defeat, while the infamously whitewashed character of Darius seems intended to serve as a foil for Xerxes’ folly and thus stresses his son’s culpability.

But it is difficult to be sure exactly what conceptual system 'the phthonos of the gods' refers to here; although there is a clear focal sense to the notion that the gods feel phthonos in Aeschylus and Pindar, there is a degree of variety in how it is construed. Divine phthonos is always associated with prosperity, success, or good fortune, and it is always a destructive bringer of misfortune. Like human phthonos, it frequently appears to be a possible response to good fortune and deserved success in themselves, but the dangers were clearly perceived to be greater if further attention was drawn to one’s successes in an inappropriate way (for example if one is the object of excessive praise, particularly if one is to acquiesce in it, even reluctantly, as Agamemnon does).

It seems, then, that divine phthonos can be used in somewhat different rhetorical contexts in which it might make more or less sense to talk of ‘culpability’ (the topic that has most interested commentators from the ancient scholia to the present,

\textsuperscript{65} Fraenkel (1950.2) 349-50, similarly Meyer (1899), 20, Broadhead (1960), ad 361-2, Cairns (1996), 21
\textsuperscript{66} Nestle (1907), 309 n.5, followed by Winnington-Ingram (1983), 1-15; Fisher (1992), 261-2.
\textsuperscript{67} Moving in the direction taken by Ranulf (§3.4, above), but not accepting his exaggerated claims about the total insensitivity of all Greeks to the difference between these evaluations.
seeking to find a punitive ‘divine justice’ responding to ‘guilt’). In some contexts humans seem capable of drawing divine phthonos onto themselves (and implicitly, therefore, capable of avoiding doing so), while in others it seems to be automatic and inevitable feature of the human condition. When it is suggested that the gods might respond with phthonos to deserved successes that have already been achieved, divine phthonos seems a destructive force to be feared. In the course of apotropaic prayer and admonition, by contrast, it is implied that people might guard against divine phthonos by recognizing the limits of human good fortune, limiting their ambitions, and avoiding excessive praise. These two positions are open to an easy rationalization: the gods’ grudging nature manifests itself in the misfortunes that are a necessary part of the human condition, but it is particularly likely to be provoked by great successes, ambitions, and praise amongst humans, which will consequently meet with particularly extreme misfortunes.

To attempt to distinguish categorically between divine resentment which focuses on deserved human success and resentment which focuses on one’s own desire for (or others’ praise of) that success would allow an anachronistic interest in ‘sin’ or ‘guilt’ to drive a wedge between ideas that clearly derive from the same vision of divinity. What looks from a Greek perspective like a set of interrelated ideas based on a phthoneros divinity, looks from other perspectives (e.g. Platonic or Christian) like a vacillation between logically incompatible theological views: ‘moral’ and ‘just’ divine punishment of hubris, and ‘immoral’ divine resentment of prosperity. 68 This would seem to explain the many attempts by later commentators to interpret divine phthonos in only one of these senses, 69 which has, I suggest, led them to seek overly restrictive definitions of the term. The resentment implied by divine phthonos in Aeschylus and Pindar, then, embraced a range of phenomena which look quite

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68 These concerns certainly emerge from pre-Platonic literature (e.g. A. Ag. 750-62) but cannot be assumed to be the central or dominant theological framework within which all literature, or an author’s entire corpus, is to be interpreted.

69 For divine phthonos as non-moral (and thus exclusive of ‘moral’ divine motivations) see e.g. Versnel (2011), 183 (‘divine envy’); Rakoczy (1996), 253-70 (who admits only one instance of ‘moralized’ divine phthonos—E. IA. 1089-97—which he interprets as a late ‘intellektuelle Sonderposition’ (262-3)—omitting, e.g., Hdt. 8.109.3, 4.205); Dodds (1951), 29, (divine ‘hostility’ that is originally ‘unmoralized’). For divine phthonos as one way of referring to a dynamic that is fundamentally ‘moral’ in classical authors (in being the ‘justified’ punishment of the insult to the timê of the gods) see Cairns (1996), 17-22 (esp.20); Lloyd-Jones (1971), 68-70; Fraenkel (1950.2) 349-50.
disassociated if one approaches the text by asking whether the gods are moral (responding to human ‘crimes’ such as arrogance and great ambition with ‘punishments’) or non-moral (visiting successful humans with misfortune because of a predisposition to envy all success). We shall see that the variation observed here is also to be found in the most extensive and elaborate exploration of the notion of divine phthonos: Herodotus’ Histories.
3.5. Divine *phthonos* in Herodotus

3.5.1. Introduction

This section attempts a detailed examination of the five speeches in the *Histories* which urge the *phthoneros* nature of god. It is perhaps surprising that, despite the many studies of Herodotus’ philosophy, theology, religion, and vision of history, many of which recognize that these speeches are central to Herodotus’ world-view, few studies have discussed these five inter-referential speeches in detail since Heinrich Meuss in 1888, who attempted the formidable task of demonstrating the ubiquitous ‘benevolence’ of god in the *Histories.*\(^\text{70}\) As argued in chapter one, earlier scholars typically gave divine *phthonos* a relatively cursory treatment, and treat it as a feature of a punitive ‘divine justice’ (citing 7.10ε, or 1.32 in connection with 1.34) or as immoral divine ‘hostility’ or ‘envy’ (citing 1.32, 3.40, or 7.46). Recently Lanzillotta has argued that divine *phthonos* refers to ‘the divine right to veto human happiness’, and contends that the Greeks never attributed the emotion of ‘envy’ to their divinities.\(^\text{71}\)

It is as well to start by stating outright that Herodotus associates the statement ‘god is *phthoneros*’ with a range of divine behaviour that is more diverse than that seen in Aeschylus and Pindar: from resenting those who are particularly wealthy (Solon’s speech: 1.32), to resenting those who ‘think big’ (Croesus: 1.32.1, cf. 1.34; Xerxes: 7.8γ.1, cf. 7.10ε), to resenting those who are prodigiously successful or fortunate and insisting that fortune be mixed with misfortune (Amasis’ speech: 3.40), to an undiscriminating resentment of all human happiness that makes death a sweet release from the wretchedness of life (Artabanus’ speech: 7.46).\(^\text{72}\) While commentators have, at all periods, tended to assume that only one of these can be the true interpretation and ignored the rest (or alternatively assumed that the movement between these

\(^\text{70}\) An exception being the thorough study by Krause (1976), 199-223; that of Rakoczy (1996), 264-6, is brief and interesting but omits key passages (4.205, 8.109.3) that require his substantially correct conclusions about the other passages to be nuanced, and does not contextualize the idea within the narrative context.

\(^\text{71}\) Lanzillotta (2010), see above n.54.

\(^\text{72}\) It is also associated with the abstracted ‘divinity’ that recurs in much theological discussion in the *Histories* (§2.8), as well as with highly anthropomorphic conceptions of god, as ‘jealous’ or ‘envious’ tyrants.
different ideas betrays Herodotus’ propensity for self-contradiction), these three types of divine action are all more or less prototypical manifestations of a *phthoneros* disposition. That is, they are what one might expect of a being temperamentally disposed to resenting the successes, greatness, or happiness of others. ‘Thinking big’, enjoying unlimited success without failure or pain, and experiencing unmixed happiness are all the province of the divine, and any human who provokes divine resentment, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and whether or not he later repents it, will inevitably bring merciless divine destruction down upon his own head. That Christian thinkers have typically considered the punishment of 'arrogance' or 'pride' to be a feature of ‘divine justice’, but resentment of good fortune to be a most ‘unjust’ and unchristian notion of divinity is clearly responsible for the long-standing resistance to perceiving the basic coherence of these different forms of grudging behaviour. As we shall see, they differ only in the intensity and the object of their ‘grudging’ or ‘resentment’. Platonic and subsequently Christian thought is also responsible for another tendency, observable at all periods of scholarship, namely positively to evaluate those instances of divine *phthrones* in which the gods’ behaviour can be construed as ‘responsive’ to a human action or pride (which is then described as ‘crime’), and to use the language of justified ‘punishment’ of the ‘guilty’. I shall argue that to interpret the dialogues and subsequent misfortunes according to a crime/punishment schema—the dominant paradigm for interpreting these stories at most periods of scholarship—imposes a foreign narrative pattern onto Herodotus' largely sympathetic presentation of Croesus Xerxes, and Polycrates, and replaces the tragic pathos of the narrative with an ‘all’s well that ends well’ tone which cannot be reconciled with the text. It has encouraged readers from the Renaissance to ignore Herodotus’ stress throughout these scenes on the necessity of suffering in human life, the means by which god forces humans into disastrous situations, the cyclical nature of the historical process, and the oppressively grudging nature of god.

Under the formidable weight of scholarly theodicy, the modern scholar can scarcely follow the narrative without instinctively counting ‘injustices’ and ‘crimes’ for which any terrible misfortune can be viewed as ‘just punishment’. This was indeed a
concern to the many ancient and modern thinkers who were committed to a vision of divine benevolence, but little or no such concern emerges from Herodotus’ speeches on divine phthonos or the narratives to which they are attached, as we shall see. The association between ‘unjust’ behaviour and the types of action that draw down divine phthonos will be considered below (§3.6), and it will be noted that there is a very limited degree of overlap. An essential part of the emotional complexity of the Histories is that, although Croesus and Xerxes are clearly ‘flawed’ in as much as they comprehend the phthoneros nature of divinity too late to forestall disaster, yet their sufferings are greater than they deserve, and in this sense tragic. The hostile and often bewildering nature of the divine world is a central part of many Herodotean narratives, in this resembling Sophoclean tragedy. The pressure to affirm the benevolent nature of the Herodotean divinity and discover 'crimes' is such that they have been willed into existence and buttressed by questionable arguments and an emphasis that belongs to the scholar rather than the text. Many misreadings can be traced back to explicit attempts by scholars in the late nineteenth century to accommodate Herodotean narratives into a Neoplatonic or Christian theological framework by casting divine deception as 'self-deception' (or as a 'test', or as 'punishment'), by insisting that all prophecy is helpful and well-intentioned, and by looking for ‘guilt’ or Schuld for which misfortune can be considered as ‘punishment’. In discussing the theological tenor of Herodotus’ dialogues on divine phthonos and the misfortunes that follow, this section will examine the various forms of theodicy attempted on the Histories from the Renaissance onwards. Discussion of

73 Cf. discussion of near-contemporary evidence for the concept of divine benevolence (§2.12), of its development in Platonic and Neoplatonic thought (§1.2), and in scholarship of the 16th to 21st centuries (§1.5, §1.19).

74 I use the word ‘tragic’ in its English sense, not too distant from that in Aristotle, for narratives which depict the unmerited or excessive sufferings of sympathetically-portrayed characters. The just, proportional, and satisfying punishment of criminal, wicked, and impious characters is not ‘tragic’, although such events or interpretations may well be found in Attic tragedy (e.g. Aeschylus’ Persae, as interpreted by Winnington-Ingram (1983), 15), and are often described as ‘tragic’ by those who consider Aeschylean theodicy the hallmark of the genre. The term ‘tragic’ can, of course, be taken in various ways and is used with great variety by different scholars. Of the narratological, thematic, structural, and stylistic similarities between many Herodotean stories and Attic tragedies there can be no doubt, as has long been appreciated: for an overview see Griffin (2006), Said (2002), 117-20, and for bibliography on Herodotus as a ‘tragedian’, Versnel (1977), 24 n.29. Although often informative, Said’s method is questionable—she tends to conclude that Herodotus is less tragic if any episode or oracle in the Histories can be shown to deviate from any pattern or idea observable in any extant tragedy, or from Aristotle’s prescriptive stipulations in the Poetics (which she interprets as insisting that misfortune or ‘fall’ must be a logical consequence of ‘crime’ or ‘misdeed’, esp.125-6). On either of these criteria, however, most surviving tragedies (like the Histories) are, at most, semi-trAGIC.
the theology of the Croesus *logos* as a whole is postponed until the fourth chapter, where it is given a fuller treatment.

I begin with a general observation about all the *phthonos* dialogues in the *Histories*. The *phthoneros* nature of god is affirmed by the most authoritative characters of the *Histories* (Solon, Amasis, Artabanus, as well as Themistocles), at the most structurally significant points: before the misfortunes of Croesus and the defeat of the Lydian Empire, before the fall of Polycrates and the greatest naval-empire known to mankind, in the council in which Xerxes announces his plan to campaign against Greece (before the dreams force him to continue with the invasion against his will), just before the Persian crossing of the Hellespont as Xerxes and Artabanus gaze down upon the assembled troops, and just after the battle of Plataea. Links between the words of Solon, Amasis, and Artabanus are numerous, as are thematic and verbal echoes between the speeches and the narratives of misfortune that follow them. As such the theme of divine *phthonos* would seem to be central to Herodotus’ portrayal of these monumental events of the past, which are dramatized as significant political events but also personal tragedies. As I argue elsewhere, the narrative persona, diction, and use of direct speech in each of these scenes departs radically from Herodotus’ more ‘empirical’ narratorial mode (best exemplified by the style of book 2).\(^75\) In the speeches on divine *phthonos* the all-pervasive intertextuality is not explicit (of the ‘as I showed earlier’ type) but implicit (close verbal echoes); the narrator is withdrawn, and his characteristically intrusive persona is absent; the story progresses through speech and reflection not, as elsewhere, through narratorial description; the narrator occasionally breaks into elegant periodic sentences; characters of all nations speak like Greeks, and literary allusions abound, alongside poeticisms from Homer and tragedy which Herodotus does not use elsewhere. This brief list summarizes at what I argue in detail elsewhere: that ‘divine *phthonos*’ is associated with an elevated register which Herodotus self-consciously employs. The metaphysical speculations and pessimistic worldview which the warners endorse thus seem to be clothed in an entirely different narratorial garb from the empirical, scientific, and sceptical mode in which much of the *Histories* is narrated. At the end

\(^{75}\) Ellis (forthcoming).
we will return to question the relationship between this narrative discourse and its theological implications (does theology follow style, or style theology? Can we draw a distinction between ‘theology’ as literal belief and ‘theology’ as metaphor for human life or as a ‘dramatic’ background?). In what follows I restrict myself to interpretation of the meaning and links between these speeches, and an exploration of how they relate to the subsequent misfortunes.
3.5.2. Solon’s Speech to Croesus.

Phthonos

The first mention of divine *phthonos* is made by the Athenian sage and lawgiver Solon, who arrives in Sardis, capital of Lydia, as it is ‘at its peak in wealth’ (ἄκμαιξούσας πλούτῳ, 1.29.1). King Croesus asks Solon a leading question after he has given him a tour of the ‘great and *olbios* (prosperous)’ treasury (1.30.1): has Solon ever seen someone who was most *olbios* of all men? (1.30.2). After Solon names three Athenian citizens of moderate means as the most *olbios*, Croesus—who had himself hoped for that title (1.30.3) and is irked by the implicit rejection of his worth—asks for an explanation. Solon replies:

Ω Κροῖσε, ἐπιστάμενὸν με τὸ θείον πᾶν ἐὼν φθονερὸν τε καὶ ταραχῶδες ἐπειροτάς ἀνήριστοις πρηγμάτωι πέρι. Ἐν γὰρ τῷ μακρῷ χρόνῳ πολλὰ μὲν ἐστὶ ίδεῖν τὰ μὴ τις ἔθελει, πολλὰ δὲ καὶ παθέν. (1.32.2)

Croesus, you ask me about human affairs, when I know that the divine is entirely *phthoneros and meddlesome*. For in a long period of time there is much to see which one would rather not, and much to suffer besides.

Solon’s speech is an elaborate piece of rhetoric. He begins by calculating the number of days that an average man lives in the course of seventy years: 26,250 days. He observes that no day brings the same as any other, from which he concludes in epigrammatic fashion ‘man is entirely *sumphorē*’ (‘chance’ or ‘misfortune’). Solon’s emphasis, particularly his stress on the importance and unpredictability of the great number of days, echoes the concerns of tragedy and lyric, particularly the conception of man as *ephēmeros*, ‘creature of the day’ (a phrase he seems to echo in the words τοῦ ἐπ᾽ ἡμέρην ἔχοντος, 1.32.5). After this general proclamation of human uncertainty, Solon introduces Croesus, who is little disposed to hear about it, to a distinction between *eutukhiē* or ‘good fortune’ (which is temporary since it designates one’s current state but is always vulnerable to reversal), and *olbos* or

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76 Detailed critical discussion of this dialogue begins, to my knowledge, with Garve (1792/6.2), 2-73.

77 Sem. fr. 1.3 (West); Pi. P. 8.95; S. At. 131-2. Aristotle highlights the timeframe of a single day as particularly characteristic of tragic action (1449b12-15); cf. Fränkel (1946).
eudaimoniê (an evaluation that can only be retrospectively applied after death to those whose have enjoyed a more holistic, life-long ‘good fortune’). Behind Solon’s intellectualized linguistic prescriptivism is a lesson on the instability of great good fortune and the necessity of ‘looking to the end’, a lesson that gradually becomes more explicit—almost identical in language and thought to the chorus’ words in Aeschylus’ Agamemnon (928-9), Sophocles’ Oedipus Tyrannus (1528-30) and Euripides Andromache (100-1). Not only is man presented with a great variety of experiences—by virtue of the self-evident fact that no day is like any other—but, as the speech continues, Solon makes it clear that wealth and olbos are actually negatively correlated. Solon’s comparison between the extremely wealthy man (ὁ µὲν δὴ µέγα πλούσιος) and the man of moderate means (ὁ µετρίος ἔχων) connects ‘wealth’ with anolbia (1.32.5-6) reversing Croesus’ initial assumption that olbos and ploutos are essentially equivalents. The appearance of olbos is, Solon implies, almost ill-omened: ‘god has given a surreptitious glimpse of olbos to many and then utterly destroyed them’ (πολλοῖσι γὰρ δὴ ὑποδέξασαι ὁ θεὸς προφήτης ἀνέτρεψε, 1.32.9). Hence, until someone has ‘lived out their days (τὸν αἰῶνα) well’, they should not be considered olbios (‘happy/blessed’, 1.32.5) but rather eutukhos (‘lucky’, 1.32.7-9). Croesus, who had been annoyed before this speech (1.32.1), is...
now thoroughly disillusioned with Solon. He considers him utterly ignorant (ἀμαθέα, 1.33) and sends him away (ἀποπέμπεται, 1.33); Solon failed to respond to Croesus’ elaborate flattery (1.30.2) in kind.

**Nemesis**

After Solon’s departure, the narrator tells us, ‘great nemesis from god took Croesus, presumably because he thought himself the happiest of all men’ (1.34). The word *nemesis*, only here in the *Histories*, is generally interpreted as bringing a *new* theme to the passage quite distinct from the ideas so far mentioned by Solon: in the narrator’s assessment, it has been argued, it is not god’s invidious *phthonos* but god’s ‘righteous indignation’ that caused the death of Croesus’ son. This interpretation of *nemesis* is natural to those familiar with Aristotle’s definition and use of *to nemesan* (*Rhet*. 1386b) and *nemesis* (*E.E.* 1233b16-34), for in these works Aristotle opposes *phthonos* and *nemesis* as being, respectively, not linked to desert and lowly regarded and linked to desert and highly regarded. Indeed, superficially, it might even appear that Herodotus anticipates Aristotle’s refusal to attribute *phthonos* to the gods, and, on the same basis as Aristotle,83 ‘corrects’ Solon’s statement on divine *phthonos* to ‘divine *nemesis*’. This impression is reinforced by an analysis of Homer’s use of *nemesis*, which, likewise, is linked to the sense of ‘justification’ that characterizes the response of the ‘disinterested bystander’.84 On the basis of an Aristotelian or Homeric interpretation of *nemesis* (as some form of god’s ‘righteous indignation’ that brings ‘punishment’ for human ‘guilt’, ‘crime’, or ‘transgression’ of social norms) several scholars have argued that Herodotus' Solon uses divine *phthonos* as a euphemism for divine *nemesis* so as to avoid directly accusing Croesus of *'hubris'* and enjoying unjustly gained prosperity.85 Solon, it is urged, thereby illustrates the

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83 Aristotle follows the Platonic stricture and insists that the gods feel emotions that accord with justice and desert (cf. §1.2). *Met.* 983a: ‘But the divine is not accepted to be *phthoneros*; rather, as the saying goes, the poets tell many lies.’ (‘αλλ’ οὕτε τὸ θεῖον φθονερόν ἐνδέχεται εἶναι, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὴν παρομοίαν πολλὰ πεσόνται άνθρωποι); *Rhet*. 1386b13-15: ‘for what happens contrary to desert is unjust, which is why we assign *to nemesan* to the gods (ἄδικον γὰρ τὸ παρὰ τὴν ἄξιαν γιγνόμενον· διὸ καὶ τοῖς θεοῖς ἀποδίδομεν τὸ νεμέσαν).’

84 See above n.7.

85 Gould (1989), 79 (tentatively), Fisher (1992), 358-9 & 301-2, Cairns (1996), 17 esp. n.80, and Pelling (2006b), 150-1, interpret *nemesis* (1.34) in the sense of the Homeric emotional term (‘indignation’ or ‘righteous indignation’). Pelling compares *Il*. 2.296, *Od*. 18.227, 22.59, and deduces from *nemesis* and *phthonos* two of the different strands outlined at §1.7; Versnel (2011), 183-4, sees *nemesis* as distinct from *phthonos* in implying the retributive ‘punishment’ of ‘guilt’: ‘it is not divine
truth-perverting environment of the oriental, monarchical court, while the narrator clarifies his real meaning. I shall argue that this interpretation, in some forms at least, rests on a long-standing misinterpretation of the meaning of *nemesis* in the fifth century, resulting from Aristotle’s revival of the archaic emotional sense of *nemesis* had been defunct for at least several centuries before he wrote.

Nemesis, in her personification as a divinity, had long had another life quite distinct from the Homeric emotional term (which was occasionally used of the gods), as a personification or process with explicitly negative associations, as her presence in one Hesiodic genealogy suggests (*Th*. 223-31):

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tίκτε δὲ καὶ Νέμεσιν πῆμα θνητοίς βροτοῖς
Νῦξ ὃλοκ. μετὰ τὴν δ’ Απάτην τέκε καὶ Φιλότητα
Γηράς τ’ οὐλόμενον, καὶ Ἕριν τέκε καρπερόθημον.
αὐτάρ Ἕρις στυγερή τέκε μὲν Πόνον ἀλγινόεντα
Λήθην τε Λιμόν τε καὶ Ἀλγεα δακρυόεντα
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And *destructive Night bore Nemesis, a pain for mortals,*
And after her she bore Deception and Friendship,
Destructive age also, and strong-headed Strife.
Hateful Eris bore grievous Toil,
And Forgetfulness, and Famine, and painful Suffering...

envy but human pride sprouting from excessive prosperity that provoked the reversal of luck as divine punishment...’. It seems to be both *nemesis* and the inherited curse (1.13, 1.91) lead Versnel to talk of ‘the principle of divine justice’ in the Croesus *logos* (197). Fisher (1992), 358 & n.81, interprets *nemesis* in the Homeric sense of ‘indignation’—but as ‘the “indignation” of an “envious” deity’. Cairns (1996), 18 n.80, argues that the Homeric emotional term *nemesis* always focuses on a ‘perceived offence’, and suggests that *nemesis* is the indignation of a deity who is called *phthoneros* only by speakers careful not to offend (see next note).

86 The ‘tactful’ nature of Solon’s speech is a recent idea often (but not always) associated with the above interpretation of *nemesis* as the narrator's correction of *phthonos*. It seems to be first claimed by Nagy (1990), 248 (cf. 244, 262), and subsequently by Cairns (1996), 22; Munson (2001c), near n.4: ‘Solon, like Artabanus (7.46.3 and 7.10e), is speaking to a king; Amasis is, in addition, himself a king (3.40.2; cf. 3.43.1). It makes sense that these characters would emphasize a connection between calamity and greatness rather than between calamity and wrongdoing’; Pelling (2006a), 106 (of Solon’s speech), 109 (of Artabanus’); (2006b), 150-1: ‘Solon is talking to a despot, and a recurrent Herodotean idea is the way that discussion with despots imposes its own conversational dynamics. No one can talk straight and *λόγος* itself becomes distorted’ (further 158, 168-9); cf. Krause (1976), 213 n.3 & 216, Lloyd-Jones (1990), 255-6, Moles (1996), 269-70, Fisher (1992), 369, 374 (on 7.10e).

87 E.g. *Il*. 24.53: the gods might, Apollo says, feel *nemesis* if Achilles’ abuse of Hector’s body continues.
In Pindar, as we have seen, nemesis (whether a divinity, an abstract concept, or a process connected in some way to the gods) was credited with the dispensation of the inevitable sufferings that strike humanity—old age, suffering, and illness—and was associated with (rather than opposed to) the ‘grudging reversals from the gods’ which Pindar feared might strike his fortunate patron (P. 10.20-2, cf. O. 8.86-7). The image of nemesis as bringer of mortal misfortune (irrespective of desert) may already be implied by Hesiod’s description of Nemesis as simply ‘a pain for mortal men’ (contrasting with the much more positive presentation of Nemesis at Op. 195-201). What is beyond doubt is that neither Pindar nor Hesiod in the Theogony use nemesis as an emotional term of ‘righteous indignation’.

It is tempting to postulate an origin for the later notion of nemesis, as represented by Pindar, in the personification of the ‘indignation’ of the gods towards mortals who surpass (or attempt to surpass) the mortal lot—whether by challenging the gods, or by experiencing particularly great fortune or wealth, or by avoiding suffering, illness, or misfortune. Although this can, from the divine perspective, be considered worthy of nemesis (i.e. ‘indignation’), from the human perspective this nemesis might appear little more than the ruthless oppression of a divinity who is phthoneros: ‘grudging’, disposed to 'denying', or 'jealous'. On this (tentative) reconstruction, as the personification of (divine) ‘indignation’ developed into the inevitable law of mixed dispensation it came to stand by a somewhat euphemistic metonymy for the disasters that characterize the mortal condition, and lost its original sense of ‘objective justification’. The sense that nemesis is a focalization of the ‘indignation’ of the gods may have been more or less active in different contexts, and Pindar’s two epithets for nemesis support this: ὑπέρδίκος (‘excessively just’/‘excessively strict’) suggests an awareness of the original connotations of ‘indignation’ (alongside a scepticism about its true ‘justification’), while διχόβουλος has no undertones of justification and communicates the ‘mixed’ nature of nemesis without any undertones of justice or

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88 Hesiodic personifications of emotions may be given extremely different senses across the two works (see, e.g., n.22 on Zêlos) but it seems that the departure Nemesis in the Works and Days it is the departure of humans’ capacity for ‘indignation’ (nemesis) and ‘shame’ (aidôs) whose departure would make life intolerable, while in the Theogony it is divine nemesis that is a ‘pain for mortals’.
89 For this connotation see also A. fr. 266 N&R, with discussion and bibliography in Fisher (1992), 301-2.
desert. In the absence of more attestations of the term between epic and fifth-century lyric we can only speculate about its development, but it seems that, in the abstraction of the emotional term to a cosmic or divine law, nemesis became associated with human misfortune more generally, and in doing so lost its original association with socially transgressive or unjust behaviour. As Pindar’s tenth Pythian illustrates, by the fifth century nemesis could be used in tandem with the idea of divine phthonos to refer to the limitations of the mortal condition and the transience of human fortune.

Returning to the Histories, the phraseology confirms that Herodotus does not use nemesis in its archaic sense as an emotion of ‘righteous indignation’. We find not ‘god felt nemesis’ but ἔλαβε ἐκ θεοῦ νέμεσις μεγάλη Κροῖσον (‘a great nemesis from god took Croesus’ 1.34); no more in Ionic than in English is it possible to substitute for ‘I was very indignant with you’ the words ‘a great indignation from me took you’. The words ἐκ θεοῦ (‘from god’) clearly indicate that nemesis is some sort of process associated with god (who, as Solon has impressed upon us, is phthoneros and tarakōdēs, and only shows humans a hint of olbos before destroying them), not an emotion. It is, then, part of a curious development of nemesis and the influential revival of its archaic sense by Aristotle that, to classical scholars at least, nemesis is associated only with a force of ‘just divine indignation’, focused on outrageous or transgressive behaviour or undeserved success that is amenable to interpretation as ‘guilt’ or ‘Schuld’. In Herodotus, as in Pindar and perhaps in Hesiod’s Theogony, nemesis is not the Homeric emotional term but a force of divine distribution that does not allow humans to experience unmixed prosperity, success, or (as we see clearly from Herodotus’ usage) suffer humans to have an inflated self-conception, or even

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90 The cult of Nemesis at Rhamnous (the Northernmost Deme of Attica) is likely to have played a role in the process, especially in later periods: see Stafford (2000), 76-104.

91 Another possibility for the change in the sense of nemesis may have been by analogy to the verb nemô, whereby nemesis is the arbitrary distribution given to men: ‘what a human gets’ as opposed ‘what one should get’. For the use of nemô to refer to this kind of apparently arbitrary distribution see, e.g., Il. 14.187-9: Ζεύς δ᾽ αὐτὸς νέμει ὄλβον Ὀλύμπως ἀνθρώπους ἄνθρωποις ἔσθελος ἥδε κακοῖσιν, ὅπως ἔθελησι, ἐκάστῳ. Καὶ ποι οἱ τάδ᾽ ἔδωκε, σὲ δὲ χρῆ τετελάμεν ἐμπῆς.
think that they might be extraordinarily ‘happy’ or ‘prosperous’, an idea that, Fisher has argued, has no particular relationship with the Greek concept of \textit{hubris}.^93

It is, in any case, difficult to sustain the view that Solon voices a euphemistic and coded truth which the narrator then ‘corrects’; Herodotus explicitly describes Solon’s speech as ‘true’, unflattering, and provocative, just as he does in the case of Artabanus’ speech on divine \textit{phthonos} in the War Council (7.46.1 Αρτάβανος...δὲ τῷ πρῶτον γνώμην ἀπεδέξετο ἐλευθέρως, cf. 7.10ε). When asked who might be the most \textit{olbios} man, Solon, ‘with no sycophancy at all, but saying what was really the case’, gives two answers each of which frustrates Croesus’ obvious desires (Σόλων δὲ οὐδὲν ὑποθωπεύσας, ἀλλὰ τῷ ἔντι χρησάμενος, λέγει, 1.32.2). Regardless of Croesus’ obvious pique (σπερχθεὶς, 1.32.1), Solon discourses on divine \textit{phthonos} and the importance of looking to the end, providing elaborate justifications for his low estimation of Croesus in the rankings of \textit{olbos}, until the king dismisses him, ‘not at all pleased’ and holding him in very low regard as ‘thoroughly ignorant’ (ταῦτα λέγων τῷ Κροίσῳ οὐ κως οὔτε ἑγαρίζετο, οὔτε λόγου μην ποιησάμενος οὐδενός ἀποπέμπεται, κάρτα δόξας ἀμαθεὰ εἶναι, 1.33). The framing of Solon’s speech suggests that the theological or philosophical crux of the warning is not muffled by the velvet trappings of the oriental court.^94 The view that in the speeches of Solon, Artabanus, and perhaps Amasis divine \textit{phthonos} (understood as an unreasonable divine emotion) represents a tactful code for divine \textit{nemesis} (understood in an Aristotelian sense) runs against Herodotus’ explicit narratorial comments, and,

\footnotetext[92]{On literary precedents for divine ‘thought policing’ see Pelling (2006b), 151 n.36, who suggests Theogn.659-64 and E.fr.1113a Kannicht.}

\footnotetext[93]{See Fisher (1992), 357-9, who argues that the ‘over-confidence’ and ‘unalloyed and unstoppable success’ of Cyrus and the behaviour of Croesus in conversation with Solon do not fall within the Greek concept of \textit{hubris}. Cairns (1996), 20-1, by contrast, stresses the dispositional aspect of \textit{hubris} and argues that human \textit{hubris} and divine \textit{phthonos} are natural correlatives: ‘in divine resentment of human prosperity there will always be an element which focuses on the attitude of the human victim, either on his failure to manifest the correct attitude... or on his active adoption of the wrong attitude.’ While this conclusion is overly prescriptive (it cannot account for Herodotus’ use of \textit{phthonos} at 7.46), some relationship between the dispositional aspect of \textit{hubris} (associated with μέγα φρονέων) and divine \textit{phthonos} can be urged at, e.g., 7.10ε.}

\footnotetext[94]{I thus resist Pelling’s suggestion (2006), 152, that Croesus’ court has ‘exactly the atmosphere that generates tyrannical oppression and violence’: ‘sending away’ in low esteem is the worst that any character meets with in the body of the Croesus logos (contrast the treatment of Pantaleon which Herodotus only relegates to the end of the narrative, 1.92, allegedly a ‘distortion’ of history for religious purposes for which he is rebuked by Jacoby (1982 = 1913), 29-30).}
importantly, the ‘anger’ of Croesus (like that of Xerxes) would seem to indicate transgressively plain speech as opposed to conventional tact.\(^{95}\)

*Nemesis* and *phthonos* do, then, refer to the same conceptual system (as long claimed, cf. §1.5), but this is not a ‘righteous divine indignation’ at human culpable human injustices or crimes, but rather the ‘distribution from god’ of ill-fortune in accordance with the limits set by a divinity that is ‘grudging and troublesome’, as a result of which *sumphorē* is an essential part of human existence. The narrator’s comment about *nemesis* endorses Solon’s speech, and makes reference to the hostile and oppressive cosmic set-up that Croesus fails to appreciate, a failure that will cost him dear. This is an important detail: the interpretation of *nemesis* in an Aristotelian sense has been one of the major barriers to appreciating that Solon’s speech and the following narrative form an internally coherent set of ideas. As noted in §1.7-8, it has been increasingly urged that Solon’s speech is an inharmonious medley of traditional ideas that are, in turn, incompatible with other ideas in the Croesus *logos* and the rest of the *Histories*.

The difference between misfortune that strikes Croesus because he has a high self-opinion (traditionally but misleadingly described, in scholarly circles, as the cycle of *hubris* and *nemesis*, and categorized as part of a ‘moral divine justice’)\(^{96}\) is not to be conceptually divorced from misfortune that strikes the prosperous because god is *phthoneros* and *tarakhōdēs* (conventionally translated by ideas like, ‘hostility’, ‘Missgunst’, ‘envy’ and ‘Neid’, and categorized as ‘immoral’). Both ideas are clearly derivative of the notion that the gods are resentful. The impression that these are distinct conceptual systems is largely the result of theological and philosophical movements probably set in motion by Plato or Socrates, which have great impact on

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\(^{95}\) Kurke (2011), 134-5, sees the characterization of Solon as truthful and blunt as an implicit Herodotean criticism of the Aesopic mode of *aimos*, allegedly exhibited by Bias/Pittacus at 1.27; yet the advice of Bias/Pittacus is a clear and logical argument which uses analogy quite differently from the Aesopic fable. Solon’s speech, moreover, is replete with high poetic language: he speaks a truth, but it is in a poetic rather than everyday style.

\(^{96}\) The ‘traditional view’, as outlined and convincingly debunked by Fisher (1992), 2-3, which can be traced back to Lehrs (1838).
subsequent Christian thought and scholarly thought. The claim, then, that the juxtaposition of divine phthonos/the akmê of Sardis, on the one hand, and Croesus’ inflated self-assessment/nemesis, on the other, presents two distinct and incompatible conceptual systems is not sustainable unless we insist on the ultimate validity of Platonic and Christian theological categories (which I do not).

Moreover, the implicit downgrading of the Herodotean Solon's vision of divine action to the status of ‘folk wisdom’ should also be questioned; it follows in a long tradition of opposing ‘elite’, ‘purified’, or ‘rationalized’ beliefs that the gods are moral to ‘popular’, ‘vulgar’, and ‘irrational’ beliefs that the gods are immoral (§1.6.2; §3.4.1). While Solon outlines a vision of divinity that can be found in lyric, tragedy, and epic, this is not, in itself, a sign that the idea is irrational or characteristic of unselfconscious thought. The demiurgic mythos told by Plato’s Timaeus would propose a sanitized vision of divinity (as specifically not phthoneros) that built on Xenophanean ideas of divinity; the idea that the divine is not phthoneros was clearly ‘proverbial’ by the time of Aristotle or Plotinus (§1.2). But it would be as mistaken in the case of Herodotus as of Plato or Plotinus to think that our ability to trace his intellectual lineage alone indicates that the vision of divinity that emerges is necessarily unconscious, unintended, or inconsistent.

But the stress on the ‘dissonance’ of Solon’s speech goes far beyond the longstanding confusion over phthonos and nemesis. Since Gould it has been urged that there is an inconsistency between theories of predictable causation on the one hand, and ‘random’ or ‘arbitrary’ causation on the other. Versnel and Gould are right to

97 Jacoby (1980 = 1913), 29, for example, talks of the ‘Widersprüche’ between the idea of ὑβρις leading to ‘gerechte Strafe’ and ‘die gewöhnliche Auffassung vom Neide der Götter’. (Though it is not clear precisely what he understands by ἱβρις.) The same use of outsider’s categories underlies Pelling’s separation of ‘three strands’, and his suggestion that ‘god is phthoneros and tarakhôdês’ is not compatible with the idea that ‘life is mutable and anyone’s fortunes may change’ (i.e. ‘man is entirely συμφορή’), (2006b), 149.

98 The point is made eloquently, with different emphasis, by Fornara (1971), 78-9.

99 Gould and Versnel identify divine phthonos as ‘predictable’ in contrast to tarakhôdês, tukhê and sumphorê which are ‘arbitrary’ and ‘unpredictable’ (§1.7-8). Predictability and unpredictability are, it is worth pointing out, not exclusive. The image of lightening used by Artabanus at 7.10ε is a prime example: one can never predict a lightening strike, but one knows that it will always strike what is highest. One can observe patterns without thereby gaining total predictive control (think of the weather man). This goes for most of what Herodotus says about the gods; it does not constitute ‘contradiction’.
identify a degree of unpredictability and arbitrariness in Solon’s metaphysical vision, particularly in his stress on the different things that each day brings and his statement that ‘man is entirely *sumphorê*. But neither *tukhê* nor *sumphorê* have any sense of ‘true randomness’ (which would indeed be exclusive of divine causation, if the gods were understood to have dispositional traits such as *phthonos*).\(^{100}\) Etymologically these words indicate ‘what one gets’ and ‘what one encounters’ (from *τυγχάνω*, ‘obtain’, and *συμφέρω*, ‘meet, bring together’, respectively), and they are as compatible with many different metaphysical positions as modern talk of ‘chance’, which, in English, might represent a focalization from the human perspective, or a reference to true randomness, and may or may not be linked to various concepts of metaphysical agency. Likewise, for god to be ‘troublesome’ or ‘turbulent’ (*tarakhôdês*) does not indicate the complete arbitrariness and unpredictability that would exclude a *phthoneros* disposition.\(^{101}\) The clearest evidence for this is that the φθον- and ταραχ- roots are often used in tandem in reference to human and divine dispositions.\(^{102}\) They were not considered separate principles that constituted an impossible and inconsistent character, but ones that together create up a plausible personality: one who is ‘resentful’ and disposed to ‘disturb’ or ‘interfere’ when provoked by prosperity and success.

Another alleged ‘dissonance’ is that between a *phthoneros* god and the cyclical nature of human success stressed elsewhere. While the notion that god is *phthoneros* and *tarakhôdês* might be (and has been, cf. §1.7-8) elaborated in all sorts of ways so as to entail various conceptual systems, it is perfectly compatible with the notion of a cyclical movement of prosperity implied by the narrator’s comments that human *eudaimoniê* does not stay in the same place (1.5.4) and Croesus’ comment on the ‘circle of human affairs’ which does not allow one person to be lucky all the time (1.207.2). Croesus’ cyclical metaphor makes explicit one of several possible elaborations of Solon’s poetic speech: that when the ‘grudging and troubling’ god

\(^{100}\) Cf. §1.7-8. The English concept of chance apparently underlying many scholarly discussions is discussed in appendix 3b.

\(^{101}\) The claim is made by Gould (1989), 79, opposed by Pelling (2006b), 149, and repeated in more moderate terms by Versnel (2011), 528 (cf. §1.7-8, nn.168 & 177).

utterly ruins a prosperous individual after having shown him a glimpse of olbos, he then raises another individual to the top of the heap, if only for a brief time. Indeed, Solon's statement that god has ‘given a glimpse of olbos to many’ before destroying them utterly suggests that it is god’s tendency to repeatedly create and shatter prosperity. That the circle metaphor brings another dimension to Solon’s vision of the transience of human olbos/eudaimoniê is scarcely an inconsistency. Solon elaborates mostly at an individual level what Croesus’ metaphor of the circle elaborates on a universal level.\footnote{Cf. Hellmann (1934), 43, who argues that Solon is a wise character but discusses a smaller area of human life (26,250 days) while Herodotus deals with multiple generations and centuries. What Solon says is important, Hellmann suggests, but not the full picture.}

To observe the basic internal coherence of Solon’s speech and its close relationship with the cyclical vision of history laid out by the narrator and Croesus is not to deny that there are numerous different theological principles running through the Histories as a whole, and the Croesus logos in particular, many of which seem to coexist unreconciled (further §4.1, §4.3). However, once established, the sound principle of not ‘making sense’ of different theological ideas has tended to move into the active dissimilation of ideas that share a good deal in common, without being strictly formulated to express a single dogmatic principle. Analysed on its own terms, then, Solon’s speech and the narrator’s comment form a conceptually focused unity: the grudging and troublesome nature of god, the huge and unpredictable diversity of human experience, the unavoidability of human misfortune, and the correlation between prosperity or inflated self-esteem and disaster. In all these aspects, in fact, Solon’s speech echoes the concerns of Greek epic, lyric, and tragedy, which often stressed the ephemeral, impotent, and wretched nature of humanity and the transient nature of success, usually in opposition to the blessed and happy experience of the gods (further §3.6). The next chapter returns to the question of how the themes in Solon’s speech recur in the story of Croesus, and how they relate to other theological principles in the work.
3.5.3. Amasis’ Letter to Polycrates (3.40 and 3.124-5)

Polycrates, tyrant of Samos, enjoyed a sudden windfall of success. His empire suddenly (αὐτίκα) grew (ηὐξετό) and was much celebrated (βεβομένα) throughout Ionia and Greece, for ‘wherever he determined to campaign, everything went fortunately for him’ (δόκου γὰρ ἱθύσει στρατεύεσθαι, πάντα οἱ ἐχώρεε ἐυτυχέως, 3.39.3). These words echo those that precede Cyrus’ campaign against the Massagetae, in which he would die, after receiving Croesus’ advice about the ‘wheel of human affairs’ (1.207): ‘wherever Cyrus determined to campaign, that people was powerless to escape’ (ὅκῃ γὰρ ἱθύσει στρατεύεσθαι Κῦρος ἀµήχανον ἣν ἐκεῖνο τὸ ἔθνος διαφυγεῖν, 1.204.2). Polycrates had a great army, and he ravaged everything without discrimination (3.39.3). Amasis, Polycrates’ Egyptian ally, on observing his successes, is pleased to see his ally prosper (cf. 7.237.2-3) but is troubled by the unadulterated nature of Polycrates’ good fortune (3.40.1). He sends him a letter warning of the dangers of unmixed good fortune which closely resembles aspects of Solon’s speech:

Αµασὶς Πολυκράτεϊ ὡδὲ λέγει. Ἡδὸν μὲν πυνθάνεσθαι ἀνδρὰ φίλον καὶ ἐξείνον εὖ πρήσσοντα, ἐμοὶ δὲ αἱ σαι μεγάλαι εὐτυχίαι οὐκ ἄρεσκοσι, τὸ θεῖον ἐπισταμένω ὡς ἔστι φθονέρον. Καὶ κως βούλομαι καὶ αὐτὸς καὶ τῶν ἂν κήδωμαι τὸ μὲν τι εὐτυχέειν τῶν πρηγμάτων, τὸ δὲ προσπαίειν, καὶ οὕτω διαφέρειν τὸν αἰῶνα ἐναλλαί πρήσσον ἢ εὐτυχέειν τὰ πάντα, οὕδένα γὰρ κο λόγῳ οἶδα ἄκουσάς ἃς τοῖς ἐς τέλος οὐ κακῶς ἐτελεύτησε πρόρριζος, εὐτυχέων τὰ πάντα. (3.40.2-3)

Amasis says this to Polycrates: Whilst it is pleasant to see a man who is a friend and xenos prosper, for me your great successes do not suffice, since I know that the divine is phthoneros. I prefer myself and for those whom I care about to be successful in some things, and to fail in others, and to thus live out their days faring now one way, now the other, rather than to be successful in everything. For I have never heard of anybody who was successful in everything that did not come to an awfully (lit. ‘uprooted’) bad end.

Amasis goes on to suggest an apotropaic ritual by which Polycrates might vitiate his menacingly good luck: he should find his most valuable possession and ‘throw it away so that it should no longer come amongst men’ (1.40.4). Polycrates divests himself of his seal ring, his most prized possession, by hurling it into the sea, and
‘experienced sumphorê’ (‘misfortune/suffering’, 1.41.2). But shortly afterwards the ring turns up in the belly of a fish presented to him by a well-meaning fisherman. On the return of the ring Polycrates realized that the matter was ‘divine’ (theion, 3.42.4), and wrote to Amasis, who in turn recognized that that ‘it is impossible for a man to save another man from what is going to happen’ and that if Polycrates was so lucky in everything that he found even what he threw away he was doomed to end ‘not well’ (3.43.1), and thus severed their friendship (3.43.2). A good while later Polycrates became the victim of an ‘impious’ desire for vengeance by the Persian satrap Oroites (for the variant versions of this, see 3.120-1). Accepting an offer of money to give shelter to Oroites, who posed as a political exile, Polycrates travelled to inspect the money himself in total disregard of the dire warnings of his seers and his daughter, and was killed terribly, ‘in a manner neither worthy of himself or his ambitions’ (οὔτε ἐνυτικοῦ ἁξίως οὔτε τῶν ἐνυτικοῦ φρονημάτων). ‘For’, Herodotus continues, ‘none of those who became tyrants of Syracuse, nor any of the other Greek tyrants is worthy to be compared with Polycrates in magnificence (megaloprepeî)’ (3.125.2). Polycrates’ corpse was then crucified, fulfilling his daughter’s metaphorical vision of his death. ‘The many good fortunes (eutuktiai) of Polycrates’, the narrator concludes ‘ended in this’ (1.125.4).

The verbal and thematic resonances between Amasis’ letter (and the story of the ring) and Solon’s speech are striking. Amasis’ description of the phthoneros divinity maps exactly onto that of Solon and Artabanus, and the linguistic parallels extend to particular words and sentence structure (note the complimentary participle in both):

3.40.2: ἐμοὶ δὲ αὐτὶ μεγάλαι εὐτυχίαι οὐκ ἁρέσκουσι, τὸ θείον ἐπισταμένον ὡς ἢ στὶ φθονερὸν

1.32.2: ἐπισταμένον μὲ τὸ θείον πᾶν ἐνὸν φθονερὸν τε καὶ ταραχῶδες ἐπειρωτῆς...

Cf. 1.5.4: τὴν ἄνθρωπην ὅν ἐπισταμένος εὐδαμονίην οὐδαμὰ ἐν τῶν τοῦτος μένουσαν, ἐπιμνήσομαι ἄμφιτέρων ὦμοιος.

Amasis repeats several other words from Solon’s speech which recur in Artabanus’ speeches but are otherwise rare in the Histories: prorrizos (cf. 1.32.2, 7.46.4), and
Solon’s insistence on looking at the telos and teleutê is picked up by the verb teleutaô (3.40.3, cf. 1.30.4, 31.5, 32.5, 7, 9). Amasis does not treat Polycrates to Solon’s elaborate hair-splitting on olbos and eutukhiê, but he repeatedly emphasizes the dangers of eutukhiê, which Solon had distinguished from long-standing olbos. Just as Solon had said that one is not olbos until after one’s death but merely enjoys an unstable eutukhiê, Amasis' eutukhiê suggests something transient, inherently ill-omened.

Amasis associates the statement that ‘god is phthoneros’ with a subtly different set of ideas to Solon’s speech and Artabanus’ speech in the War Council (on which §3.5.4). Whereas ‘nemesis from god’ (a god who is phthoneros and tarakhôdês) struck Croesus because he ‘thought’ himself the most olbios man (1.34), Amasis fears that the phthoneros divinity will strike Polycrates simply because of his good luck, unrelated to his evaluation of it. And so it happens: Polycrates accepts Amasis’ advice, casts away the ring, which seems symbolic of his kingdom or his power, and experiences sumphorê—until the ring miraculously returns, clearly symbolizing the rejection of the gesture, and frustrating his attempts to ‘mix’ his ‘good fortune’ artificially.

It is, then, neither any high self-regard in Polycrates, nor the ‘undiscriminating’ nature of his ravaging (which receives the briefest of mentions), but rather Polycrates' freakishly unmixed ‘good fortune’ that the narrator and Amasis highlight as the particularly salient feature.

The character of Polycrates, like that of Croesus (cf. §4.2), has been subjected to searching critical evaluations by scholars, who have tended to see the return of Polycrates’ ring and his continuing good fortune as due to his own shortcomings and ultimately self-incurred. In The Significant and the Insignificant Van der Veen makes

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104 Outside the speeches studied here prorrizos and variants recur only at 6.86.δ in direct speech (describing the gods’ destruction of a perjurer); aiôn only at 9.17.4 (Harmocyes’ pre-battle speech to the Phocaeans) and 27.3 (Athenian speech to Tegeans: the Seven ‘ended their aiôn and lay unburied’). 105 Van Groningen (1949/59), ad 3.41, Versnel (1977), 25-37, (esp. 33-6), Labarbe (1984), 26, Perysinakis (1999), 17. Garve (1792/6.2), 52, argues for the value of the ring without this symbolism: ‘zugleich, als Edelstein und als Kunstwerk, von großem Werthe’.
the maximum case for Marinatos’ claim that Polycrates’ downfall is not due to the inevitability of divine *phthonos*, but rather to ‘Machtbessenheit und Blindheit für die Wahrheit’.\footnote{Marinatos (1982) developing the thesis of Marg (1953), who moves in the direction suggested by Meuss (1888).} Van der Veen’s argument is one variant of the long tradition of blaming Polycrates for the failure of the apotropaic gesture—on the basis that the ring is too meagre an offering—a misunderstanding already set to rights by Versnel, elaborating on an interpretation by Van Groningen.\footnote{Above n.105. The insignificance of the offering is an old claim that can be traced to Meuss (1888), 18 (Polycrates is destroyed because of his ‘Sicherheit’, and because he did not make the ‘truly great offering of reducing his power’; the ring may be ‘zu klein oder nicht passend’). This is the line taken by How & Wells (1912), *ad* 3.41, and Legrand (1932/54), *ad* 3.40.}

Van der Veen marshals an imposing array of arguments to defend the thesis that the story of Polycrates demonstrates not ‘divine intransigence’ or ‘the inflexibility of the gods’, but rather Polycrates’ own mental inflexibility and domination by self-gratification, ultimately leading to his destruction.\footnote{Van der Veen (1996), 6.} In brief, Van der Veen’s contention is that the failure of Polycrates’ apotropaic gesture stems from incorrect execution of the sound advice of Amasis, which was not to be interpreted as recommending that he discard a physical object, but rather that Polycrates relinquish his ‘power’. This argument is superficially plausible, especially since Van der Veen grounds his analysis in close analysis of the text, following a method very similar to that of Timothy Long, who explores the significance of minor variations in repeated passages.\footnote{Long explains his method at (1987), 23-4 and 38, and applies it in detail to a number of episodes of the Croesus logos.} But, on examination, the textual evidence does not convince. Detailed refutation is worthwhile, not only because the episode is one of the most intriguing and popular Herodotean vignettes (for reception see §1.6.1), but also because Van der Veen’s claims remain unanswered and would urge a series of ideological oppositions that have been increasingly popular in Herodotean scholarship since the mid twentieth century, as an interpretative paradigm for the *Histories* as a whole: that humans suffer misfortune only as a result of their own culpable errors and
foolishness and the gods are not to be considered responsible. In essence, Van der Veen makes a morality play out of a tragedy.110

Van der Veen’s argument is substantially based upon the differences between Amasis’ advice to Polycrates (3.40.4), and how Polycrates internalizes and acts upon this advice as described by the narrator (3.41.1). Van der Veen identifies five differences:

1. “‘suffering’ (άλγεῖν) has been changed to “annoyance” (άσᾶσθαι)’
2. Amasis’ qualification that the object must be πλείστου ἄξιον ‘has disappeared’
3. ‘Amongst his treasures’ (τῶν κειµηλίων) has been added’
4. ‘The future indicative (άλγήσεις) has been changed into the potential optative (āν...άσηθείη)’
5. ‘The element of “thinking” (φροντίσας) has been removed’

Van der Veen explains these five variations by reference to Polycrates’ ἡδονή (3.42.2), and the formula συµφορη ἔχρατο which ‘is not in itself suggestive of any “suffering” on the part of Polycrates’.111 He concludes that Polycrates (rather than the gods’ inability to forgive or change their mind) is to blame, and provides a damming analysis of Polycrates: ‘pleasure is predominant in his mind’, the ‘irrational impetus (here ἡδονή) exerts decisive and fatal influence on his conduct, outweighing the control of rational deliberation’.112

The variations do not support these conclusions. Polycrates’ heedlessness will come into play in the companion piece that describes his death (3.120-5), but they cannot be retrojected onto the story of the ring. I begin with the first variation, which Van der Veen presents as the key that allows the true significance of the other variations to be unlocked: Polycrates, in internalizing Amasis’ message, downgrades the emotion of pain that he is supposed to experience from agonizing ἀλγεῖν to merely discomforting ἀσᾶσθαι. Van der Veen devotes some space to a comparison of use of ἀλγος in Herodotus and the use of ἄση and ἀσᾶσθαι in earlier literature (esp. Theog.

110 Versnel (1977), 22-3, is one of few recent scholars to observe that Polycrates is a deeply tragic figure, arguing from the concentration of eutukh- words that this is a story about the vicissitudes of human good fortune.
He concludes, ‘ἀση designates a feeling which, unlike ἄλγος, can be manipulated and shaken off at will...[it] is rather on the level of everyday annoyance, irritation, chagrin and the like...ἀσᾶσθαι is to ἄλγεῖν as nausea is to pain, as temporary downheartedness to grave mental agony...Polycrates recoils from “suffering”.' But Van der Veen overlooks the use of ἀση in the Histories, which otherwise occurs only once, where it describes the emotion that Persian fathers are spared by not having any contact with their children until they reach 5 years of age, when the risk of infant mortality is past (1.136.2). It is thus the emotion that a parent would feel at the death of their own child, whom they have personally raised for up to five years. The variation is between two words which signify great grief.

The fifth variation is equally insignificant. The verb φροντίζω, whose absence Van der Veen considers indicative of Polycrates’ subconscious reluctance to carry out what his logical faculties dictate, is replaced rather than omitted. The contrast between the advised φροντίζω and the verb used of Polycrates—δίζηµαι (3.41.1, twice)—does not point to a lack of thought. δίζηµαι means both to ‘look for’ in a physical sense (e.g. 1.214.4; 3.139.3; 5.928.2) or to ‘question’ or ‘consider’ in an attempt to understand. It had been used by the pre-Socratics to describe their investigations, and Herodotus uses it to describe the Athenians, who ‘consider’ the oracle of the wooden wall (7.142.1), as well as to describe his own logos (4.30.1). The variation does not suggest Polycrates’ irrationality, or any reluctance to apply critical thought.

Van der Veen argues that ‘the wording of Amasis’ letter concurs’ with the identification of ‘power’ as what was ‘most dear’ (πλείστου ἄξιον, 3.40.4) to Polycrates. But the inference that Polycrates’ πλείστου ἄξιον is ‘power’ and power alone clashes directly with Amasis’ concluding thoughts on the episode: he learns (ἐµαθε) that Polycrates is doomed because is he is fortunate in everything (εὐτυχέων τὰ πάντα, 3.43.1)—‘he finds even what he throws away’. Rather than being focused

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113 Van der Veen (1996), 11-12.
115 Parmenides (frs. 28 B 2.2, 6.3, 7.2, 8.6 DK) and Heraclitus (fr. B 101 DK). For discussion of Herodotus’ preference of the ἱστ- root to this word-group see Fowler (2006), 29-32.
on an individual entity, it is in fact the all-pervasiveness of Polycrates’ good fortune that is the focus both of Amasis’ warning and his conclusion, which the narrator independently highlights before and after the episode. Ἐὐτυχέων occurs four times with τὰ πάντα (3.39.3, 40.2, 43.1, 44.1). The emphasis cannot be on Polycrates’ power to the exclusion of all else. Although martial success is clearly the most significant part of his enviable success, the loss of the ring symbolizes the interruption of Polycrates’ unmixed ἔυτυχίη by causing him to experience sumphorê (3.41.2). It seems, then, that the ἔυτυχίη that was to be mitigated is not only martial success.

Herodotus, in fact, gives us the explicit conclusions of Amasis (whose advice is allegedly misinterpreted) on receiving Polycrates’ letter describing the return of the ring. Amasis does not conclude that Polycrates’ choice was qualitatively wrong (i.e. that he should have abandoned his world-view and attempted conquests), nor that he gave up too soon and should have continued throwing things away or should have disposed of the ring a second time. Instead Amasis concludes that it is impossible to save a man from what will happen to him, ‘if he is fortunate in everything and finds even what he throws away’ (3.43.1-2). Just as the discarding of the ring symbolizes sumphorê, its return symbolizes the rejection of the gesture: there is no suggestion that it fails because of incorrect execution. The replacement of Amasis’ future indicative by the potential optative (variation four) is wholly unremarkable: Amasis gives a command, Polycrates is considering how best he might implement it. Finally, the argument is made that συμφορῇ ἔχρᾶτο indicates minimal suffering (3.41.2).118 This is based on the observation that, while συμφορὴν ποιέεσθαι means to ‘consider something a misfortune’ (i.e. grieve), συμφορῇ χρᾶσθαι means to ‘experience the effects of an unpleasant situation’. Van der Veen points out that Herodotus couples the latter phrase with another verb indicating grief, or qualifies it with μεγάλη, μεγίστη, or some similar term in each of its other five occurrences. ‘In the conspicuous absence of any qualification of the expression,’ he concludes, ‘what we have here is a non-committal statement not in itself suggestive of any “suffering”’

117 As argued by Van der Veen (1996), 8 & n.21, and Meuss (1888), 17-18. This interpretation is one that could fit with the original advice, but it is not one that Herodotus presents. It should be noted that the injunction was to use this as an on-going remedy to excessive good fortune—but the return of the ring is apparently interpreted by Amasis as rejection of the whole method.
118 Van der Veen (1996), 15-17.
on the part of Polycrates.’ But *sumphorē* is precisely what Polycrates must experience to bring his fortune back down to the level of the human and avert the *phthonos* of god; the expression συμφορῆ ἔχρατο indicates that Polycrates’ gesture did precisely what it was supposed to, until it was rejected.

Returning to the contrast between ‘rationality’ and ‘pleasure’, Polycrates feels pleasure on one occasion only—in response to the fisherman’s laudatory and devoted words to him on dedicating the fish, after which Polycrates promises him a two-fold χάρις, perhaps showing the *megaloprepeiē* for which Herodotus later praises him (3.125.2). But pleasure does not characterize Polycrates’ decision-making (it is only mentioned *after* the choice and disposal of the ring), nor is it particularly associated with him. While there is no contrast between the alternative poles of ‘pleasure’ and ‘reason’, Solonian motifs do recur. The fisherman describes himself as ἀποχειροβίοτος, ‘a man who gains his living from his hands’, and states that he thought the fish ‘worthy of Polycrates and his rule’. The opposition between the humble and the great recalls Solon’s words: ‘the man who is very wealthy is no more *olbios* than the man who has enough for a day (τοῦ ἐπ’ ἡμέρην ἔχοντος, 1.32.5) unless fortune (*tukhē*) follows his good state and he should finish his life well’. It is, of course, the greatness of Polycrates that provokes the envy of god, and causes the fish to return to him.

To conclude, the claim that Polycrates’ pleasure dominates his rationality and leads to a misunderstanding of Amasis’ advice overlooks the presence of δίζημαι and the meaning of ἄση in the *Histories*, runs contrary to the reaction of the advisor himself, and requires that the single reference to Polycrates’ ἡδονή at the fisherman’s gift be understood as the central characteristic of the decision that precedes it.119 The addition of τῶν κειμήλιων (variation three) does indeed show us where Polycrates looks for his most valued possession, but he seems to have looked in the right place, and chosen the most significant and valuable of all his worldly treasures. If Amasis were talking about an abstract entity such as ‘power’, his words would be actively misleading: he says ‘throw it away so that it might never come to men any more’

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119 The thematic opposition between ‘pleasure’ and ‘reason’, which I question at §4.2, is urged particularly by Flory (1978).
Neither Amasis nor the narrator give the slightest hint that ‘power’ was Amasis’ meaning. If the apotropaic ritual is flawed, as Meuss, How and Wells, Legrand, Marinatos, Van der Veen, and Löfler argue, then Amasis is presumably to blame for suggesting that Polycrates discard a treasured possession rather than downscaling his imperial ambitions. Herodotus could, of course, have chosen to write the scene in that way, but we cannot ignore the fact that he did not.

The reasons for the rejection of Polycrates’ apotropaic gesture remain obscure. But the story of the ring and the ghastly end to which Polycrates’ freakish string of successes leads is imbued with a sense of mysterious supernatural menace, and unavoidable disaster. It is not at all amenable to the more comfortable and reassuring ‘moral’ reading attempted by modern commentators, whereby gods who are kind, benevolent, or operate with a strict but fair code, bring everything to its proper and deserved end.

The end of Polycrates’ story, again, contains Solonian motifs. After Oroites conceives his ‘impious’ desire to kill Polycrates, he sends a messenger to discover Polycrates’ plans:

Πολυκράτης γάρ ἐστι πρῶτος τῶν ἡμεῖς ὑμεῖν Ἑλλήνων ὡς θαλασσοκρατέων ἐπενοήθη, πάρεξ Μίνω τε τοῦ Κνωσσίου καὶ εἴ δὴ τις ἄλλος πρῶτος τούτου ἴρξε τῆς θαλάσσης· τῆς δὲ ἀνθρωπηίης λεγομένης γενεῆς Πολυκράτης πρῶτος, ἐλπίδας πολλὰς ἔχων Ἰωνίης τε καὶ νῆσων ἄρξειν.

For Polycrates is the first Greek of whom we know who wanted to have a sea-empire, aside from Minos the Knossian, and any one else before him who might have ruled the sea. But of the so-called human race, Polycrates was the first, having many hopes of ruling Ionia and the islands.

It is clear that Herodotus’ stress here is on Polycrates ambition (importantly not impiety, injustice, or irrationality), which is unprecedented in the human race, at the moment when he meets with his death. It is, in fact, Polycrates’ ambitions that the deceptive Oroites exploits to carry out his unholy and unprovoked act of deception (3.122.4, 123.1). Polycrates, disregarding the warnings of his daughter and his seers
(πάσης συμβουλίης ἀλογήσας, 3.125.1) sailed to Magnesia and met with his terrible death.

The order in which god's hostility to Polycrates, and his own bad decisions occur suggests the opposite connection to that generally claimed by scholars keen to make Polycrates responsible for his own disaster. Polycrates’ success attracts the phthonos of the divine, and his evil fate was, as Amasis noted, inevitable; Polycrates’ subsequent refusal to acknowledge his daughter’s prophetic dream and the unequivocal warnings of his seers betray the hand of the divine. His self-destructive blindness to the divinely revealed future is the means for his exquisitely dramatic destruction. Prophecy functions here, as often, as a dramatic element in the narrative, not as the warning provided by a benevolent divinity which would have enabled a character to avoid disaster. Ultimately, we must accept Herodotus’ own unambiguous evaluation of Polycrates’ divinely ordained end, the natural end of a man who experienced such unnaturally good luck in a world controlled by a phthoneros divinity:

Ἀπικόμενος δὲ ἐς τὴν Μαγνησίην ὁ Πολυκράτης διεφθάρη κακῶς, οὔτε ἑαυτῷ ἄξιος οὔτε τὸν ἑαυτῶν φρονήματον. (3.125.2).

On his arrival at Magnesia Polycrates perished terribly, in a manner neither worthy of himself, nor of his ambitions/thoughts.

Proportionality, a central pillar of human dikê in the Histories (further §3.5.8), is denied the gods by the narrator, who self-consciously crafts Polycrates’ story as a rather stylized tragedy, rather than a story of divine justice.
Darius died, Herodotus tells us, without being able to avenge himself upon the revolting Egyptians or the Athenians. When Xerxes succeeded to the throne, ‘he was in no way desirous of campaigning against Greece’, but intends only to put down the revolt in Egypt (7.5.1). Mardonius, his cousin, persuades the young Xerxes by various means (7.5):

120 by an ‘argument from revenge’ for the burning of temples in Sardis, by encouraging Xerxes to enhance his reputation, and by listing the beauties of Europe. Mardonius, whose motive was to be governor of Greece, was joined by others with similarly disreputable and self-serving motives: the Aleudae in Thessaly, the exiled Peisistratids, keen to use the Persian support to regain tyranny of Athens, and the Athenian oracle-monger Onomakritos, who had been caught in the act of forging prophecies and exiled. The cause of these ‘allies’ is furthered by Onomakritos who selectively reads to Xerxes all those prophecies that predicted the necessity of a Persian yoking the Hellespont, omitting all those that predicted his misfortune.

By this alliance of self-interested persuasion and deception the new king is ‘persuaded’ (ἀνεγνώσθη, 7.7) to go to war, and, with his passions raised, he calls a council of the Persians (who are on several later occasions characterized as reluctant to campaign), 121 and delivers a speech which moves over several themes: the habitual Persian custom of not staying still and the god who leads them always to better things. He presents the campaign as augmenting his own personal timē and serving the interests of ‘punishment’ and ‘requital’. He presents his plan to yoke the Hellespont (in identical terms to the oracles that had been presented to him) and to burn Athens in requital for the burning of temples in Sardis, the event which Herodotus had called the ‘beginning of the troubles’ (5.97). At this point Xerxes’ speech takes a turn for the poetic and somewhat manic: he announces his plans to

120 For Xerxes’ youth see also A. Pers. 13, 744, 782.
121 Their hesitant silence after Mardonius’ speech evokes stifled criticism of Xerxes’ opinions (7.10.1), and when Xerxes announces his change of mind they perform obeisance ‘while rejoicing’ (κεχαρηκότες προσεκύνεον, 7.12.3). Likewise, at 9.16 the nameless Persian states that many Persians know the disastrous outcome but they do not tell the hawkish Mardonius because it is impossible to change ‘what must come from god’.
conquer not only the Athenians, but also ‘those who dwell in the land of Pelops the Phrygian’ (i.e. the Peloponnese, 7.8γ.1), so as to make the Persians lands ‘border on the aithēr of Zeus’: ‘the sun will look down upon no other country but our own’. His plan is to drive through Europe, till none can stand before him: ‘thus all alike shall bear the yoke of slavery, those who are aitioi (‘guilty/responsible’) and those who are not’ (7.8γ). After this ominous speech Mardonius waxes lyrical on Xerxes’ brilliance and the virtues of the campaign, introducing numerous spurious facts. When Mardonius had thus ‘smoothed over’ Xerxes’ opinion there is an awkward silence (7.10.1), at which point Artabanus, Xerxes’ uncle, speaks up, hesitantly at first, but also rising to an impassioned crescendo. Artabanus urges Xerxes not to campaign, mentioning the strength of the Greeks and the near-disaster of Darius’ Scythian campaign. His final appeal is to the importance of good planning (irrespective of the outcome which fortune might bring) which turns into a poetic statement on the ire that ‘the god’ feels towards great things (tall trees, great houses, and huge armies), and the destruction he sends upon them, with obvious implications for Xerxes (7.10.ε):

You see that (the) god casts thunder at the most outstanding creatures, and does not allow them to vaunt themselves, while the small ones irk him not. You see that he hurls his missiles at the greatest houses and trees. For (the) god loves to cut down what rises above the rest. In the same manner great armies are defeated by small ones, whenever (the) god, feeling envy, casts fear or thunder upon them, by which they are destroyed in a manner unworthy of themselves. For (the) god does not allow anyone but himself to think big. Pushing forward in everything causes disasters, from which great penalties tend to arise. Restraint has its advantages, even if they are not immediately apparent, but revealed by time.

In this third instance of divine phthonos Artabanus suggests that god’s phthonos focuses only on outstanding beings to the exclusion of the rest. At Abydos he will
talk about the *phthoneros* divinity in quite different terms as indiscriminately resenting prosperity to *all* mortals, and the reason for the difference in emphasis is clear. The fact that all human happiness and success is the object of the resentment of a generally *phthoneros* divinity has limited persuasive value when advising a powerful and successful king not to seek further glory in campaign. What is relevant is that divine *phthonos* is attracted by those who attain exactly the type of success for which Xerxes’ campaign would seem to aim, whereas modest behaviour is (at least relatively) safe. The proximity in status of the parties concerned indicates that we are dealing with a more prototypical instance of classical *phthonos* (cf. Arist. *Rhet.* 1386b.17-20, §3.2), for Xerxes’ arrogant boast seems to risk putting him in rivalry with Zeus himself (7.8.γ1-2), as does the hyperbolic praise he receives from a Greek when he crosses the Bosphorous: the man addresses him as Zeus and asks him why he has assumed the form of a Persian (7.56.2).

The terms in which Artabanus describes ‘(the) god’ are striking. He is wont to chop down whatever is highest (φιλέει γὰρ ὁ θεὸς τὰ ύπερέχοντα πάντα κολούειν), and to strike the greatest things with lightning. The image closely evokes Socles’ story of Thrasybulus’ message to Periander of Corinth in book five:122 when Periander enquired how he might best keep control of the citizens, Thrasybulus, in silence, led Periander’s messenger into a corn field and wherever he saw an exceptionally long stalk of wheat cut it down until he had destroyed ‘the highest and most beautiful’ of the corn. Periander, comprehending the enigmatic message, applies Thrasybulus’ advice to his government of Corinth, and begins a true tyranny of Corinth:

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\text{kai ekoloue aiei okos tina ious ton astagynon uperechontai, koloyon de erriste, eis o tov lioni to kalliston te kai baihtaton dieftheire tropho toiohto...Perianдроς de synexi to poisbhen kai noxor schon de o iupetibeto Thrasybulouplos tois upereychous ton aston foneuein, enthaita de paiania kikoptita exofaine eis tois polihatas.} (5.92.ξ2-η1)
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The verbal similarities demonstrate that Socles’ description of the tyrant Artabanus’ description of the gods are in close dialogue with one another; Artabanus’ describes the gods in strongly anthropomorphic terms, and models their behaviour on that of

122 Noted, e.g., by How & Wells (1912), *ad* 1.32; Krause (1976), 216 n.1; Harrison (2003), 158.
the bad tyrant. Commentators from Meuss to Lanzillotta have argued against the translation of *phthonos* as ‘envy’ (or ‘Neid’), urging the implausibility of the idea that a god should feel ‘envy’ of a being as categorically different and as insignificant as a human. While, in the abstract, there is a certain logic to this—and we cannot think that Herodotus suddenly forgets his usual caution about the nature of the gods (2.3.2) or the fact that the Persians think that the gods do not have human nature (1.131.2)—rivalry between human and god is precisely the point at issue here, despite the obvious power imbalance. The *Histories* itself provides a precedent for rivalrous *phthonos* being felt not only between equals (as most often), but across huge gulfs in status. In the constitutional debate Otanes states that the tyrant should be *aphthonos* (‘ungrudging’) ‘because he has every good’ (which, as suggested at §3.3, probably implies that he should not feel rivalrous *phthonos* with his inferiors), but in fact he feels *phthonos* towards the best of the citizens (ἐς τοὺς πολιτέας... τοῖς ἄριστοις), and rejoices in the worst. Artabanus describes the gods as feeling *phthonos* when their inferiors display greatness, success, or ‘think big’, and the implication is that gods are to successful rulers as jealous tyrants are to successful citizens. In Aristophanes’ *Wealth*, Wealth himself complains that Zeus feels *phthonos* of the best, and hence made Wealth blind. Xerxes is both exceptionally beautiful and pre-eminent among the Persians (7.187.2) and in the rashness of speech he thinks very ‘big’. The fact that he repents of his great plans that very night and takes Artabanus’ warning to heart is a crucial part of the narrative: Xerxes’ moderation came too late, and once provoked divine destruction must run its course.

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123 Compare E. *Supp.* 444-9 for that this figure of the tyrant as the destroyer of the best people, where the metaphor of the crop stresses the arbitrary and unaturalness of this way of behaving. For discussion of Herodotus’ attitude towards tyranny see Waters (1971), Lateiner (1977), Ferrill (1978), Gammie (1986).

124 Meuss (1888), 14-15: ‘Wo sind denn Züge, die auf einen solchen Anthropomorphismus deuten? Der *phthonos* im schleimmen Sinne ware der einzige’ (and so this sense is discounted); Lanzillotta (2010), 80-1, 90-1.

125 In cursing Mardonius at the end of this speech Artabanus uses the traditional motif of a corpse left unburied and ingloriously torn by the dogs and birds (7.100.3), with its clear Homeric overtones (II.1.4-5, 24.411, cf. S. *Al.* 830; E. *Hec.* 1078-9), despite Herodotus’ assertion in the customs of the Persians that they do not bury their dead until they have been torn by a dog or bird (1.140, cf. Stein *ad loc*). The emphasis is not at all that which we would expect from a Persian, as Herodotus’ ethnography describes them. The fact Artabanus’ curse draws on the customs of *Homo Homericus* rather than *Homo Persianus* reveals the degree to which Artabanus’ speech draws on Greek poetic tradition rather than the ‘realism’ of ethnographic or theological enquiry. This movement between different conceptual worlds in line with narrative concerns is common in Herodotus (cf. appendix 5).


127 In this resembling his father, cf. Darius inscription at the river Taurus (4.89.3).
Returning to the question of ‘justice’, Artabanus’ warning of divine *phthonos* is devoid of any suggestion of morality or desert: god’s *phthonos* focuses on greatness itself (ὑπερέχοντα... μέγιστα... ὑπερέχοντα, 7.10ε) its visible and public manifestation or ‘vaunting’ (φαντάζεσθαι) and on self-conception (φρονέειν μέγα), not on the justice or injustice by which that greatness might be achieved, or ‘injustices’ committed on fellow humans. The verb *phthoneô* thus carries a similar sense to that which it has in a human context: a resentment of any particularly notable success, irrespective of desert, by rivals, or whom the resentful party might feel are becoming rivals. That Artabanus does not present prodigious success or ‘thinking big’ as immoral but rather dangerous and unstable is also suggested by other choices of vocabulary: the god’s reaction to modest beings is not to reward them in recognition of their justice, but rather to not be ‘irked’ by them (τὰ δὲ σμικρὰ οὐδὲν μὴν κνίζει), which associates *knizô* and *phthonos* and reinforces the conclusion that the word is used without any connection to desert.\(^\text{128}\)

Most significant is Artabanus’ own evaluation of the destruction of the great beings that attract the god’s ire: they are destroyed in a manner ‘unworthy of themselves’ (ἀναξίως ἑωυτῶν, 7.10.ε). With this echo of Herodotus’ epitaph of Polycrates (διεφθάρη κακῶς, οὗτε ἑωυτοῦ ὑξίως οὗτε τῶν ἑωυτοῦ φρονημάτων 3.125.2)—another man whose great ambitions and magnificence (*megaloprepeiê*, 3.125.2; cf. *megalophrosunê* 7.24.1, 136.2) caused him to fall victim to divine *phthonos*—Artabanus expresses dissatisfaction with the results of divine *phthonos*, as either unjustified, or disproportionate. As we shall see (§3.6), Artabanus’ presentation is endorsed by Herodotus, for, once Xerxes relinquishes his plans, submits to Artabanus’ sound and moderate advice, and reverts to what Artabanus calls his own nature, he and his uncle are forced against their will by deceptive dreams to conduct the disastrous campaign against Greece, where they will suffer crushing defeat. The dialogue on divine *phthonos*, then, prepares us for the tragic presentation of the Persian wars, as part of the circle of human affairs: the destruction of sympathetic characters ‘unworthily of themselves’, part of the inevitable movement of human prosperity.

\(^{128}\) *Kniçê* is used both of emotions (e.g. *eros*, 6.62; cf. E. *Med.* 568) and situations (e.g. a gnôme *knizei* Xerxes, 7.12), and might be rendered as ‘bother’, ‘irk’ or ‘provoke’.
On a hill at Abydos Xerxes sat on a white throne, overlooking his army mustered for crossing into Europe, and watched a staged sea battle amongst his ships. When he saw the entire Hellespont covered in ships, and the planes and capes of Abydos full of men he counted himself blessed, then began to weep (ὁ Χέρξης ἑωντὸν ἐμακάρισε, μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο ἐδάκρυσε, 7.45). When Artabanus queries this apparently contradictory behaviour, Xerxes explains his tears as a response to the ephemerality of human life: ‘a pity (κατοικτίραι) came upon me considering how brief all human life is, if, of all those present, none will be alive in a hundred years’. Xerxes’ sudden perspective on human life recalls that of Homer’s Hippolochus, in conversation with Diomedes: ‘like the generations of leaves are the sons of men. The wind blows and one year’s leaves are scattered to the ground...’ (Il. 6.146-9). Artabanus replies in yet bleaker terms:

Yet we have all suffered something even more pitiful in our lives. For in his short life not a single one of these people nor any other man is born so blessed that he does not wish frequently, and not only once, that he was dead rather than alive. For misfortunes beset him and illnesses convulse him, and they make life, though short, seem long. And so death becomes a longed-for liberation from wretched life. God, having given us a taste of the sweet life, has been discovered to be grudging in his giving.

In this brief, poetic speech the phthoneros nature of god is nothing less than the basis for a pessimistic generalization on the nature of the human condition. The inescapable realities of illness and misfortune (sumphorē) make death preferable to life, sufferings are caused to all by god’s indiscriminately grudging distribution of ‘the sweet life’, which makes life a burden, death a release. This passage, placed at the most symbolic point of Herodotus’ work—the Persian crossing from Asia to

3.5.5. The Dialogue at Abydos (7.46.3-4)
Greece in full glory—echoes the Iliad’s reflections on the brevity and wretchedness of life, particularly Achilles’ speech to Priam on the jars of Zeus in Book 24 (further §3.6). Yet Herodotus more closely echoes Pindaric epinician poetry in taking the moment of maximum human potential, magnificence, and glory to reflect upon the ultimately wretched condition of humanity and the transience of such things, in contrast to the perpetual, blessed condition of the immortals.

Artabanus’ speech indicates that mention of god’s phthoneros disposition need carry no implication of ‘desert’ or ‘morality’ nor even be ‘responsive’ to any human behaviour that can be construed as an ‘offence’ (contrasting with Artabanus’ conception of phthonos in the war council, 7.10c). Artabanus names no particular individual or class affected by phthonos—every human wishes many times in his life that he was dead, because the god is phthoneros of the sweet life, and refuses mortals more than a taste of it. The phthon- root in Greek can indicate a top-down ‘jealousy’, a bottom-up ‘envy’, but typically indicates a ‘resentment’ between equals. Here, by contrast to Artabanus’ first speech, divine phthonos has none of these prototypical connotations of rivalry, but is rather associated with the divine dispensation that makes (and keeps) mortals in a state qualitatively different from god, which seems to echo closely the speeches of Solon and Amasis, although in the subsequent narratives god’s phthonos would focus particularly on self-conception (Croesus) and good luck (Polycrates). The frequent association between phthonos and gluttony, eating, and biting discussed above (§3.3) seems to be evoked by the image of god ‘giving a taste of the sweet life’ (γλυκὺν γεύσας τὸν αἰῶνα) before snatching it back from mortal mouths, presumably because the γλυκὺν αἰῶνα is for divine consumption only. Artabanus echoes earlier speeches on divine phthonos in other details: he associates it with human ‘misfortunes’ (συμφοραὶ προσπιέτσασαι, cf. 7.46.3) as well as the ταραχ- root (νοοῦσι συνταράσσοσαι, 7.46.3) which, as we have seen, is particularly associated with both divine and human phthonos in Greek literature (§3.3).

See nn.69 & 93 for contrary views. Attempts to interpret divine phthonos as a moralized emotion allied to justice have tended, since Valckenaer and Larcher, to simply omit this episode (cf. §1.5, §1.9).
This speech, like all those reviewed in this section, uses language from a particularly elevated register. Artabanus uses the poetic term αἰῶν, so far only occurring in the mouths of Solon and Amasis (see §3.5.2); he employs hyperbaton, relatively rare in the Histories, twice in this short speech: οὐδεὶς οὕτω ἄνθρωπος ἔστω κυδότων πέφυκε (7.46.1), and ὁ θεὸς γαλακτόν γεύσας θὸν αἰῶνα (7.46.4). The image of god ‘giving a taste of the sweet life’ picturesquely recalls Solon’s statement that god ‘surreptitiously shows a glimpse of olbos to many before destroying them root and branch’ (1.32.9). The ‘sweetness’ of ephemeral success is a metaphor used by Pindar in his victory odes, and the γαλακτόν αἰῶν recalls the ephemeral, Zeus-given μεῖλιχος αἰῶν at the end of the eighth Pythian (8.96-7). In the ensuing conversation, too, Artabanus will refer to ‘the old saying’ that ‘every outcome (τέλος) is not clear at the beginning’ (1.51.3), explicitly styling a piece of Solonian wisdom (1.32.9) 'proverbial'.

This dialogue, in fact, is a complex discussion of the different ways of responding to the difficulties and miseries of the human condition. This is the first time in the Histories that a ruler, whose inevitable misfortunes approach, explicitly internalizes the pessimistic and limited nature of human life before he suffers disaster. Croesus, of course, initially rejects Solon’s statement that man is sumphorē, only comprehending his message about the transience of human olbos as he stands atop the pyre, bereaved and broken (1.86). Polycrates and Xerxes both heed the warning of Amasis and Artabanus (respectively) and carry out their advice (discarding the ring and cancelling the campaign, both to no avail), but their mental response to the characterization of the human condition remained obscure. Here, however, Xerxes and Artabanus are in complete agreement about the nature of life, and they debate how best to go about living in a world so disposed. Xerxes responds poetically (7.47.1):

130 Artabanus also uses hyperbaton twice with chiasmus of nouns and adjectives at the dramatic moment at which he reconciles himself to the expedition against Greece, in accordance with the will of god (7.18.3): ἐπὶ δὲ δαμομὴν τις γίνεται ὄρμῃ, καὶ Ἕλληνας, ὡς οἶκε, φθορὴ τις καταλαμβάνει θεήλατος.

131 Pi. O. 1.109; N. 7.51-2.

132 Croesus’ paraphrase of Solon’s message is succinct: nothing of those who are alive is olbios. Pelling (2006b), 158 n.65, suggests that there are two interpretations possible of Solon’s speech and of Croesus’ summary—I see no need to distinguish so strictly (in Pelling’s terms, we need not ask ‘a or b? ’—it is both).
Artabanus, with human life being just as you say, let us cease from the subject, nor let us dwell on bad things when good things are at hand.

Artabanus divulges his prophetic fears about the land, the sea, and the fidelity of the Ionians, and recommends the path that combines caution with boldness: ‘the best man is the one who shrinks from nothing when planning, and reckons on suffering everything, but is bold when it comes to action’ (7.49.5).

Xerxes again agrees on the details, but offers a different response: no human can have certain knowledge of the future and all must suffer adverse events. Thus, he argues, ‘it is better to be courageous in everything and to suffer half of the ills rather than to fear everything in advance and never suffer anything at all’ (7.50.1). It is the bold, Xerxes insists, not the fearful and cautious, who tend to acquire riches, as the history of the illustrious kings of the Persian Empire demonstrates. Xerxes, with ample rhetorical flair, propounds a philosophy of bold optimism in a world of uncertainty: one must suffer, and should take risks, which may yield gains. His words, just like those of Artabanus, find support in the writings of Herodotus’ contemporaries and predecessors, particularly Democritus and Pindar, and

133 Cf. Solon 1.32.1: ἄνθρωπιον πρηγμάτων πέρι (although πέρι is the one preposition used anastrophically in classical prose).
134 Land and sea: 7.49 (cf. 8.12-13); the fear of Ionian revolt (7.51) is only partially vindicated (8.22, 85, 90).
135 Xerxes’ insistence that one should be bold and reconcile oneself to setbacks, rather than being overly cautious, might draw support from Democritus’ statement that ‘courage makes disaster small’ (B 213 DK: ἄνδρειτάς ἄτας μικράς ἐρήμη) and ‘daring is the beginning of a deed, but chance is the master of it’ (B 269: τόλμα πρήξιος ἀρχή, τύχη δὲ τέλεος κυρίη). Xerxes’ desire to contemplate the good things at hand rather than the uncertainty of the human lot appears explicitly anti-Solian (it echoes Croesus’ criticisms of Solon at 1.33), but shows a hedonistic and philosophically respectable response to the pessimistic condition of the human life, one echoed Pindaric epinician (e.g. P.10.61-3), and perhaps in Democritus’ exhortation to the young that they should enjoy youth rather than hope for their uncertain old-age: ‘The old man was young, but it is unclear to the young man if he will reach old age. The good that is complete is better than the future which is yet unclear.’ (B 295 DK: ὁ γέρων νέος ἐγένετο, ὁ δὲ νέος ἀδήλου εἰ ἑ γήρας αἰσθάνετα τὸ τέλεον ὁν ἐγάθον τοῦ μέλλοντος ἐτι καὶ ἀδήλου κράσους.) Democritus’ precise meaning is hard to pin down, but despite a superficial verbal similarity with the insistence of Solon and Artabanus on the telos, Democritus’ point must be fundamentally different: according to Solon nothing that seems ‘good’ at present is certain to remain, for its telos is only revealed at the end (1.32). In urging the enjoyment of what is teleion (‘complete’) over what is uncertain in the future Democritus cannot be referring to what Solon would describe as
develop a positive and vigorous response to man’s adverse position. Xerxes adopts the demonstrative rhetorical style that Artabanus had used for his admonitions, he coins epigrammatic phrases, and uses acoustic effects. He answers each of Artabanus’ fears reasonably and point by point, although we know that each expectation will be frustrated.

Xerxes’ appeal to the lessons of the past, of course, is based on the rise of the Persian Empire, an incomplete set of data, as the audience of the Histories knows. Xerxes understands the human condition, inasmuch as it is brief, unpredictable, and frequently painful; yet he is not possessed of the more holistic picture. In fact, Xerxes never abandons his tendency to construct a linear vision of Persian prosperity that projects the astronomical rise that the Persians had thereto enjoyed into the future, albeit recognizing that success is uncertain. Just as he is now more formidable than he was in the past, Xerxes assumes that, should his present campaign against the brave Greeks succeed, he would become immune to future defeat by other mortals. Although he recognizes the possibility of defeat, he assumes that success would secure a continuing upward trajectory. He says to the Persian nobles before the crossing of the Hellespont: ‘As I have learnt (ὡς γὰρ ἐγὼ πιστὴν μνήμην...), we campaign against good men and if we conquer them (ἂν κρατήσωμεν) no other army of men will ever oppose us’ (7.53.2, cf. 7.8γ.2-4). Xerxes accepts that he must encounter setbacks, that life is difficult, and that he may fail; but he still strives for permanent and stable success, and lasting supremacy amongst humanity.

Xerxes’ advice looks good, and indeed, his words, like those of Artabanus, are full of apophthegms that resemble contemporary moral philosophy and recognize the uncertainty of human life. But his view of history and the human condition does not recognize the full implications of the phthoneros nature of god, or the necessarily

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136 Cf. his illustration of a philosophical point by example (7.50.3): ὁρᾶς τὰ Περσῶν πρήγματα... echoing Artabanus (7.10ε): ὁρᾶς τὰ ὑπερέχοντα ζώα... ὁρᾶς δὲ ὃς ἐς οἰκήματα τὰ μέγιστα..., and the later wise Persian (7.16.3): ὁρᾶς τούτους τοὺς δανυμένους Πέρσας... (cf. S. Ant. 712, Ai. 118, OC. 1453; E. fr. 420, 1052 Nauck; Xen. Mem. 1.4.16, 3.4.3).

137 7.50.3: μεγάλα γὰρ πρήγματα μεγάλοις κινοῦνται ἐδέλει καταμένοι... 138 7.50.4: ... πολλὴν φοβήν φερόμενον πορευόμεθα...
transient nature of human prosperity. Herodotus has equipped the reader with a more diverse range of exempla than the young Xerxes—apparently reared only on the narrative of Persian ascendancy—can possess: the story of the rise and fall of Croesus (framed by Solon’s speech at Sardis and Croesus’ speeches to Cyrus on the circle of human affairs) and the sudden and unstoppable good fortune of Polycrates ending in his savage execution. The reader, like the narrator and the prescient Artabanus, knows that success is cyclical.
3.5.6. Themistocles’ Speech Before Plataea (8.109.3)

Before the battle of Plataea Themistocles addresses the troops in a speech designed to dissuade the Athenians from breaking up the bridge over the Hellespont. In the course of the persuasion Themistocles makes the last mention of divine phthonos in the Histories:

Τάδε γὰρ οὐκ ἠμεῖς κατεργασάμεθα, ἀλλὰ θεοὶ τε καὶ ἥρωες, οἵ έσθόνησαν ἄνδρα ἕνα τῆς τῆς Ἀσίης καὶ τῆς Εὐρώπης βασιλεύσαι, έόντα ἁνόσιόν τε καὶ ἀτάσθαλον· ὃς τὰ τε ἱρά καὶ τὰ ίδια ἐν ὁμοίῳ ἐποιέτο, ἐμπιπράς τε καὶ καταβάλλον τῶν θεῶν τὰ ἁγάλματα· ὃς καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν ἁπεμαστήσωσε πέδας τε κατῆκε. (8.109.3)

We were not the ones who did this, but the gods and heroes, who felt phthonos that one man should rule over Asia and Europe, a man who was unholy and reckless; who reckoned holy and profane things alike, and burnt and threw down the statues of the gods; who flogged the sea, and sunk chains into it.

Here it is not only god, but also the heroes who are said to feel phthonos, and this phthonos occurs alongside several ideas that have not featured in the speeches examined so far: impiety and recklessness. Themistocles’ words seem to imply that divine phthonos focuses not only upon success, greatness, and prosperity, but also on impiety and reckless behaviour. The participle ἐόντα is ambiguous, and leaves room for a number of logical connections: did the gods and heroes feel phthonos at the prospect of one man ruling two continents because he was unholy and reckless, or did they simply feel phthonos at the prospect of a man ruling two continents, a man who also happened to be unholy and so on? While the latter interpretation is possible, there seems to be no reason to think that phthonos here must refer only to the resentment of success, and could not include the resentment of Xerxes’ less admirable actions. Xerxes’ impieties would seem to further compound the god’s resentment, since they represent direct assaults on the divine realm (and as such would independently incur a punitive divine vengeance). As we have seen, phthonos, like the English ‘resentment’, can be used in contexts where the ‘grudging’ is expressly stated to be ‘justified’, even if this is a less typical use, and one not otherwise found in the context of divine phthonos in the Histories. Given the rhetorical context, moreover, it seems likely that Themistocles is introducing a
moralizing element into the gods’ involvement in the war, one that has been absent from much of the rest of the description. Of course, of all the speakers who use a phthon- root word of the gods in the Histories (the rest being wise warners whose words are assiduously borne out by the text) the narrative inclines the reader to take Themistocles’ with a pinch of salt. Where the others are warners whose words are worked up in full gnomic and poetic glory, Herodotus focuses on this speech as an act of successful rhetorical manipulation (109.1, 110.1), far more so than the warners, whose words are characterized as honestly spoken.

Themistocles’ speech thus illustrates an important point about the meaning of phthonos in a divine context. When used of gods, as of humans, phthonos was not so strongly associated with negative judgements as to preclude resentment which could be condoned or approved of. Though it is unusual, the phthonos of the gods is associated here, if loosely, not only with success and greatness but also ‘impiety’ and ‘recklessness’. It seems likely, however, that the association of phthonos with desert is possible in the case of the verb, but would not be possible in the case of the adjective phthoneros: to be dispositionally phthoneros means to be predisposed to begrudge the successes of others, not to be predisposed to feel ‘justified indignation’.
3.5.7. The Death of Pheretime (4.205)

The other *phthon-* cognate applied to the gods is the compound ἐπίφθονος. Queen Pheretime, after inflicting extremely harsh punishments upon the murderers of her son (4.202) came to a sticky end shortly after, from which the narrator draws a moral of wider import:

ζώουσα γὰρ εὐλέων ἐξέζεσε, ὡς ἄρα ἀνθρώποισι αἱ λίην ἱσχυραὶ τιμωρία πρὸς θεῶν ἐπίφθονοι γίνονται.

Whilst alive she was consumed by worms, so we may see that overly harsh vengeances are *epiphthonoi* to the gods.

As emerged from the analysis of 7.139 (see §3.3, above), *epiphthonos* does not connote only ‘justified’ resentment (cf. 7.139); doing or saying something that is *epiphthonos* need imply no moral turpitude or failing. Taken together with Pausanias' use of *epiphthoneô* at 9.79, this passage indicates that the *epiphthon-* root might refer to anything from ‘resentment at improper behaviour’ to ‘slanderous resentment motivated by rivalry’. Its application to overly harsh punishments might be imagined as presenting the gods as arbiters as justice, or as resenting the usurpation of a divine monopoly on extreme punishment of the sort manifested elsewhere.¹³⁹

That overly harsh punishments are hateful to the gods suggests that the gods serve a regulatory role in human justice, part of their wider role as punishers of offences against divine shrines or institutions, a role which the gods indisputably play within the *Histories* (cf. 2.120.5). It is, however, worth stressing again that the principle that the gods regulate human justice does nothing to demonstrate that they themselves are bound by the same constraints, nor that Herodotus considers all their actions to be in line with laudable moral principles.

¹³⁹ The totality of divine destruction is emphasised in other discussions of the *phthoneros* divinity (1.32.2, 7.46.4, cf. 6.86.8) by the word *prorrizos* whose sense is captured by our slightly extended botanical metaphor: destroyed ‘root and branch’.
3.5.8. Conclusions

The above discussion suggests that Herodotus, like Aeschylus and Pindar, linked divine *phthonos* with several related ideas: that suffering, misfortune, and illness are unavoidable, and death is thus often preferable to life (7.46, 1.31); that human prosperity and success must always be cut with misfortune, increasingly devastating in proportion to the extent and duration of that success (3.40); that the most successful and prosperous are the most likely to have their fortunes reversed (1.32, 3.40, 7.10ε); that high self-regard or arrogance which might lead mortals to imagine, even for a moment, that they are immune to the vicissitudes of the human lot are particularly dangerous (7.10ε; 1.32.1 with 1.34); and that excessively violent punishments (4.205) or impiety and recklessness (at least when alloyed to great ambitions) might incur god’s resentment and punishment (1.108.2). The long disagreement over the word’s meaning seems linked to a scholarly tendency to consider only some of the passages—the pessimistic (1.32, 3.40, 7.46) or the punitive (1.32 with 1.34; 4.205; 7.10ε with 7.8γ; 8.109)—and to gloss over the rest. But divine *phthonos* can be used in all these contexts, and displays a similar range of meaning to human *phthonos*, which is prototypically a lowly-regarded resentment between rivals that pays no regard to desert, but can also be used of ‘resentment’ occurring outside the context of rivalry, of ‘resentment’ focused on success, praise of success, or on behaviour that is, from a dispassionate perspective, inappropriate.

According to some theological systems, the very range of things on which god’s *phthonos* can focus is too diverse for it to be considered a ‘coherent’ theory of divine action. It embraces various visions of divine action that Plato would insist on keeping conceptually distinct: palliative punishment of crimes and transgression (by a good god)—the correct vision of divinity—and the arbitrarily infliction of suffering on the innocent (by a capricious, immoral, and oppressive god)—an incorrect vision. This Platonic distinction, also found in Aeschylus (above n.47), is largely adopted by early Christian humanists (§1.2-5) and many more recent scholars (§1.9). But this impression is, I would suggest, the result of imposing foreign theological categories onto the *Histories*. The notion that ‘god is *phthoneros*’ attributes a single, ultimately
anthropomorphic disposition to god, and unmixed luck, great wealth, and high self-esteem are precisely the objects towards which *phthonos*, in its prototypical sense, is directed. The use of *phthonos* by Themistocles and the narrator to describe divine resentment of things which the speaker also resents is less typical (and seems to be largely an effect of context), but falls within attested usage. To insist that Herodotus is confused or inconsistent for subsuming under a single concept (or word group) god’s resentment of arrogance and impiety and god’s resentment of success—because the former looks ‘moral’ and the latter ‘immoral’, and because a divine being, unlike a human being, cannot behave both morally and immorally—is to look at the text with very foreign theological concerns.

Yet the *phthono*-words should be distinguished from one another. While *phthoneros* is always a strongly pejorative term, *phthoneô* and *epiphthoneô* are open to more positive associations, as is the case with *phthon*-words used of humans. The speeches which describe god as *phthoneros* elaborate different aspects of the core idea. Rhetorical exigency is often clearly the reason: while Artabanus’ first speech focuses on Xerxes’ explicitly boastful words and ambitions by cautioning against ‘thinking big’, Solon focuses on god’s propensity to disrupt established prosperity in the face of Croesus’ self-contentment, and Amasis focuses on the necessity of misfortune when faced with Polycrates' run of unmixed good luck.

The latter part of Solon’s speech to Croesus (1.32.5-9) is markedly more optimistic than either the words of Artabanus at Abydos, or his own story of Cleobis and Biton (1.30.3-31), in which the perpetual menace of terrible misfortune makes death preferable to life. By introducing the factor of wealth, whereby the poor man makes himself less vulnerable to human *sumphorê* than the rich, Solon is able to imagine a man of ‘moderate means’ who is able to avoid most of the misfortunes that characterize the human condition. For a man in such an unenviable financial position, a life without misfortune seems theoretically possible, if uncertain and rare, and Solon enumerates the blessings that such a man might achieve if he is lucky: he will be ‘unmaimed’, ‘without sickness’, ‘not suffering ills’, ‘with good children’, and

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140 A difference observed by Wehrli (1931), 37.
‘good looking’ (1.32.6). This list stands in contrast to a great deal of Greek thought that stresses the inevitability of misfortune, physical suffering, and illness. The introduction of modest means as a compensating factor for the other benefits recalls the surviving fragments of Solon’s poetry. If Solon’s doctrine of divine phthonos at 1.32 tends towards a cautiously optimistic tone in the face of the bleak facts of life, that of Artabanus at Abydos is one of the more extreme examples of pessimism in Greek literature. Yet both visions of human life are appropriate to their context: Solon wishes to stress the instability of wealth and the blessings of modest means, while Artabanus and Xerxes contemplate the nature of humanity as distinct from god, in distinctly Iliadic and epinician tones.

In the light of the long-standing debate on the relationship between the behaviour of the ‘phthoneros divinity’ and ‘divine justice’, it is worth directly exploring whether there is any relationship between these two ideas as they appear in Herodotus. The term ‘justice’ is, of course, capable of being construed in various ways. I, like Herodotus, shall not use the abstract term ‘just’ to refer to systems of control which are deemed to be unfair but are backed by power or the status quo. Importantly, Herodotus opposes a procedural use of the word ‘justice’ to the abstract idea of ‘justice’ or ‘justness’. Just as English allows us to say that the ‘justice system’ or the ‘Lord Chief Justice’ is ‘unjust’, Herodotus is able to say that Cambyses killed one of his judges ‘because he dispensed unjust justice’ (ὅτι ἐπὶ χρῆμασι δίκην ἄδικον ἐδίκασε, 5.25). Herodotus is, in fact, the first author to use three abstract nouns that would become important in later discussions of justice: dikaiosunê (‘justness’), adikia and adikêma (both ‘injustice’). The description of Deioces, who attempts to become king by practicing the art of dikaiosunê among his fellow villagers until he is acclaimed ruler, illustrates several aspects of Herodotus’ concept of justice. Deioces seems something of a sophist theorist about justice: he knows, Herodotus tells us, that ‘unjustness is opposed to [or "enemy of"] justness’ (τῷ δικαίῳ τῷ ἄδικον πολεμόν ἔστι, 1.96.2). Herodotus describes his methods: ‘if he

142 One might define ‘justice’ merely as ‘the interest/desire of the stronger’, but in the context this is a confusing usage, for this is not how Herodotus conceives of the abstract term.
143 The term appears 8 times (1.96.2; 2.151.1; 6.86α.2, 3, 4; 7.52.1; 164.1, 2), as opposed to dikê which is much more common. Cf. Havelock (1978), 296-7.
perceived anyone committing *hubris*, he would send for him, and deliver a judgement that was worthy of each injustice’ (κατ’ ἀξίην ἐκάστοιν ἀδικημάτως ἔδικαίειν, 1.100.2). Justice, then, appears to be a proportional and careful response to individual acts of *hubris*. Herodotus’ interest in ‘proportionality’ also emerges from his praise of the Persian custom of not killing a subject or slave for a single transgression, but rather considering (λογισάμενος) how their injustices (ἀδικήματα) compare to their services (ὑπουργήματα), and not indulging their anger (θυμόν ἀράτω, 1.137.1).

Herodotus does, on several occasions, suggest that the gods act as overseers of ‘justice’—rather than merely ‘piety’—as when he states in general terms that the gods answer ‘great injustices’ (μεγάλοιν ἀδικημάτων) with ‘great punishments’ (μεγάλαι... τιμωρίαι, 2.120.5). Here we see the use of ‘justice’ vocabulary to describe the crime and the response, and the idea of proportionality (particularly stressed by καί), both of which make it particularly appropriate to describe this passage as referring to ‘divine justice’, as long as it is clear that this is purely punitive justice (nowhere in the Histories is there any suggestion that the good receive rewards or protection from the gods for virtuous behaviour towards their fellow men). In the case of Pheretime, too, Herodotus makes a similar suggestion when he states that ‘overly great punishments’ are *epiphthonos* to the gods (4.205), and describes the terrible death she suffered after the excessive punishments she inflicted on the people of Barca.

But there is a vast gulf between what Herodotus describes as ‘justice’ and the oppressive world-view associated with the statement ‘god is *phthoneros*’ outlined by the warners before the great misfortunes of the work. The vocabulary used to

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144 It is important that, while Deioces’ motives are megalomaniacal, the justness of his decisions is the very means by which his ambitions are realized, and the source of the irony which the story is clearly intended to foster. Deioces’ justness qua judge is not called into question by his association with tyranny. Fisher (1992), 129 and 344 (with n.10), is, I think, closer in seeing the *hubris* which Deioces punishes as ‘a generic name for many types of serious offences’, rather than (as he writes later) ‘serious crimes that threaten the regime’ or ‘failure to obey orders, or hints of revolt’; the emphasis here is firmly on the proportionality and exemplarity of his dispensing of justice; cf. Giraudieu (1984), 74.

145 Croesus is, it seems, θεοφιλής (1.87) because of his piety to Apollo (cf. 1.90.3; further §4.3).

146 See also the case of Hermotimus, 8.105-6, where the gods are explicitly said to be concerned with justice (again, punitive).
describe Deioces’ justice comprises moral terms which take account of desert: wholly negative terms for the crimes (débriz, ãdíkêma) and positive ones for redress (κατ’ âzíyn, κατά τὸ ὀρθὸν δικάζον). For the gods, by contrast, the warners and the narrator use terms which connote amoral or immoral emotions and responses: the divine reaction to great wealth (πλοῦτος), prosperity (δλβος/εὐδαμωνίη), success/good luck (εὐτυχίη), and ‘thinking big’ (μέγα φρονεῖν) is a ‘resentment’ that is prototypically not linked to morality or desert (φθόνος, the result of a 'grudging' or 'resentful' disposition, φθονερός), which leads to an automatic ‘pruning’ (κωλούω) or interference (cf. ταραχωδής), which the narrator and Artabanus explicitly describe as inflicting disproportionate suffering (ἀναχίως). Solon, Amasis, and Artabanus make no attempt to moralize god’s phthoneros nature by mentioning human crimes or transgressions, or assimilating the role of ‘the divinity’ to the enforcement of ‘justice’ in a human society (whether democratic or monarchical). Nowhere is the language favoured by the moralizing shade of Darius in the Persae used, that of ‘punishment’ (kolazô) or ‘correction’ (euthunê) of hubris, words borrowed from the language of Athenian law (Pers. 820-31). While god’s phthoneros nature remains fairly abstract in the speeches of Solon and Amasis, in Artabanus’ first speech god is implicitly compared to a jealous tyrant. In most of the episodes examined the misfortune which follows the warning that the divine is phthoneros befalls exceptionally prosperous individuals, but Artabanus’ words at 7.46 conceives of the gods’ phthoneros disposition as indiscriminately resentful, causing suffering to all irrespective of provocation.

Herodotus, then, puts a series of dramatic and poetic speeches into the mouths of his warners before the fall of Croesus, Polycrates, and Xerxes, which primes the audience for the pathos and injustice of the misfortunes they will suffer. (It is not, contrary to a common misconception, the use of a pthon- root word per se that creates this effect, but use of the adjective phthoneros and the details of the description.)147 For several reasons, this conclusion may appear strange. Herodotus is aware of theological traditions that were associated with divine philanthrópeia, namely helpful prophecy and the idea that animals were created by the pronoia of a

147 For this view cf. §1.6.1-2.
wise divinity to make life ‘liveable for humans’ (further §2.12). He also gives voice to the principle that the gods are proportional punishers of injustice (2.120.5, cf. 4.205, 8.105-6), although in practice the gods are invariably described as taking personal vengeance for impieties upon their own property, or the violation of institutions they protect.\(^{148}\) Herodotus is, moreover, telling the story of the triumphant salvation of Greece from Persian invasion, a story that would seem to lend itself to a presentation as the glorious reward of the virtuous Hellenes at the expense of the dastardly barbarian. Why, then, does Herodotus choose to make his warners talk of god as φθονερός rather than as distributer of δίκη and vindicator of the righteous? This question troubled Herodotus’ critics in antiquity no less than it troubles some modern scholars, for at all periods readers have felt that Herodotus should really have been (and probably was) writing a story in which the gods rewarded the virtue of the Greeks at the expense of the impious and unjust Persian tyranny, by upholding the cause of righteous justice. It is this, more than anything else, that has tempted scholars to assimilate the prominent dialogues on god’s phthoneros nature to ‘divine justice’ of one sort or another and (unlike Herodotus) to describe narratives associated with the phthoneros divinity using the English vocabulary of ‘justice’ and ‘punishment’, suggestive of a world under fair and providential divine guidance.

More strangely still, Herodotus presents himself as a radical sceptic about some aspects of traditional religion, and is both aware of and sympathetic to the idea that the anthropomorphic conception of divinity particular to the Greeks was invented by Homer and Hesiod, whose statements are emphatically not to be interpreted as containing any universal truth (§2.2, §2.11). To conclude that Herodotus ‘believes’ in the reality of divine phthonos (particularly in the case of Artabanus’ anthropomorphizing formulation in the War Council, 7.10ε) would seem to be in

\(^{148}\) Harrison (2000), 108-9, characterizes this generalization well when he says ‘the category of actions likely to receive [divine] retribution is broader (potentially, at least) than just the narrow class of acts of sacrilege’. Mikalson (2003), 142-3, objects that all divine action that looks to be punishment for injustice can be interpreted as punishment for impiety (‘Herodotus’ gods are concerned with actions that affect them and their property and specific human institutions under their protection. They do not, in broader terms, attend to all matters of justice among human beings.’). While Mikalson is largely correct (but note 8.106.3), it cannot be denied that at 2.120.5 Herodotus chooses to generalize not about the divine punishment of ‘impiety’ (as he might well have, cf. Alexander's violation of guest friendship and oaths of xenia) but of ‘injustice’.
tension with his statements elsewhere. These oddities are the subject of the next two sections, which explore the literary origins of the ideas explored above, and the theological implications of his appropriation of this motif.
3.6. The Literary Roots of Herodotus’ Phthoneros Divinity

The idea that god feels \textit{phthonos} first appears, in those exact terms, in Aeschylus and Pindar. Yet the types of divine action and attitude and the vision of human life with which Herodotus connects the \textit{phthoneros} nature of god have a much longer history in Greek thought, as has already been hinted above. The word \textit{phthonos} is not linked with the gods in Homer, but there are numerous references to the gods feeling \textit{agê} (using the verb \textit{agamai}) as an explanation for unhappy outcomes. Penelope tells Odysseus that a god begrudged them that they should spend their lives together (\textit{Od.} 23.210-12):

\begin{quote}
θεοὶ δ᾽ ὀπαξόν ὀξύν,
οἳ νῦν ἀγᾶςαντο παρ’ ἄλληλοισι μένοντε
ἡβῆς ταρπήναι καὶ γῆραος οὐδόν ἴκέσθαι.
\end{quote}

The gods sent woe,
For they felt \textit{agê} that we should remain beside one another
To enjoy our youth and reach the threshold of age

Menelaus says the same about his separation from Odysseus (\textit{Od.} 4.181-2). In the \textit{Iliad} the narrator notes that Menelaus would have borne off the arms of an enemy in victory, had Apollo not felt \textit{agê} at him (\textit{ἐἰ μὴ οἱ ἀγάςατο Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων, Il. 17.70-1}). This unexplained resentment of certain human triumphs or contentment seems to resemble some of the later instances of the \textit{phthonos} of the gods, and indeed the notion of divine \textit{agê} survives into the classical period. The chorus of Aeschylus’ \textit{Agamemnon} pray that no \textit{agê} from god should overcast the Trojan expedition (τις ἄγαθεότεν, 134) before they relate the feast of the eagles which arouses the anger of ‘malignant’ (ἐπίφθονος, 135) Artemis.

Yet, as we have seen, Herodotus’ conception of the \textit{phthonos} of the gods is broader than the divine \textit{agê} of specific instances of human happiness. Homer did not explicitly associate divine \textit{agê} with the idea that no human can enjoy lasting or unending prosperity. Although poets often made this observation in entirely non-
theological terms, \[149\] it was frequently explained by reference to the gods’
determination to keep man in his place by ensuring that, unlike the gods, mortals
experience suffering and misfortune. At the close of the *Iliad*, when Priam arrives to
beg Achilles for the body of his son, Achilles describes the wretched lot of humanity
in theological terms is the speech of Achilles in Book 24 of the *Iliad*:

\[\text{ὡς γὰρ ἐπεκλώσαντο θεοὶ δειλοῖς βροτοῖς}
\text{ζῶειν ἄχυμένοις· αὐτοὶ δὲ τ’ ἀκηδέες εἰσὶν.}
\text{δοιοὶ γὰρ τε πίθοι κατακεῖται ἐν Δίως οὐδεὶς}
\text{δῶρον οἴα δίδοσι κακῶν, ἔτερος δὲ ἐάων·}
\text{ὁ μὲν κ’ ἀμιζέας δῶῃ Ζεὺς τερπικέραυνος.}
\text{ἀλλοτε μὲν τε κακῷ δ’ γε κύρεται, ἀλλοτε δ’ ἐσθλῶν·}
\text{ὁ δὲ κε τῶν λυγρῶν δόῃ, λοβητὸν ἐθήκε,}
\text{καὶ ἐκακῇ βούβρωστις ἐπὶ χθόνα διὰν ἐλαύνει,}
\text{φοιτᾷ δ’ οὕτε θεοῖς τετιμένος οὕτε βροτοῖσιν. (525 -33)}\]

For the gods assigned to wretched mortals
That they should live grieving, while they themselves are without suffering.
For two jars lie on the floor of Zeus,
And one gives bad things, and the other good.
And he to whom Zeus who delights in thunder gives a mix,
Will sometimes meet with ill, at other times good.
But the man to whom Zeus gives only a baneful lot is
disgraced,
And fell poverty drives him over the noble earth,
And he meets with honour from neither gods nor men.

The idea that the gods have set an oppressively low limit on human happiness is
common in lyric and tragedy and sometimes associated, from the fifth century
onwards, with the notion of *nemesis* or the *phthonos* of god. 150 The divine motivation
is often left obscure, although some mythical aetiologies do explain why the gods
should insist upon mortal suffering.151 In Hesiod’s *Theogony* Zeus determines to
punish man for Prometheus’ plan to unequally divide the sacrifices to the gods’
disadvantage (Zeus κακὰ δ’ ὄσσετο θυμῷ/ θνητοῖς ἀνϑρώποις, τὰ καὶ τελέεσθαι

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149 E.g. Bacch. 5.50-5; S. Ant. 611-14; Theog. 659-66; (cf. Il. 14.480-1).
150 Cf. Simonides 521 PMG; Pi. P. 3.81 (ἐν παρ’ ἕκαστον πῆματα σύνδον διάντοι βροτοῖς ἄθάνατοι), P.
10.21-7 (θεὸς ἐφ’ ἀπήμον κέαρ... ὁ γάλλεος οὐρανὸς οὗ ποτ’ ἄμβατος αὐτῷ); on nemesis in Pindar see
§3.4.2, §3.5.2.
151 Cf. the Orphic notion of the *archaiê pathê*, perhaps alluded to in Pindar’s second *Olympian* (ποινὰς
ἐπισαμ, O. 2.58) for Theron of Akragas. This has been linked with Orphic (and possibly Pythagorean,
cf. Hdt. 2.81) burial tablets found across Magna Graecia, including the Hipponian tablet from
When his plan to withhold fire from mortals is frustrated, again by Prometheus (561-7), Zeus responds by crafting yet another evil for mortals: perpetual domestic trouble in the form of woman, a ‘great pain for mortals’ (πήμα μέγα θνητοῖς, σὺν ἄνδράσι ναυετάουσαι, 592). This etiology for mortal suffering is linked to Prometheus’ refusal, as the agent of humanity, to grant the gods their proper timē. Nowhere in Herodotus’ work is there any trace of the idea that the suffering that characterizes the human condition represents a punitive requital by just divinities keen to redress a primal affront for which humans remain responsible.

Divine motivation is equally obscure in Pindar’s description of the mystical transience of heaven-sent good fortune, and the ephemeral nothingness of humanity:

ἐν δ’ ὀλίγῳ βροτόν
τὸ τερπνὸν αὐξάται· οὗτοι δὲ καὶ πίπνει χαμαι,
άποι ρόποι γνώμης σεσεισμένων.
ἐπάμεροι· τί δὲ τίς; τί δ’ οὗ τίς; σκιάς ὄναρ
ἀνθρωπος· ἀλλ’ ἄτον αὐγλα διόςδοτος ἐλθη,
λαμπρόν φέργος ἐπεστὶν ἄνδρόν καὶ μείλιχος αἰῶν.
(P.8.93-7)

In a short time man’s pleasure grows, and thus falls to the ground again, shaken by an adverse thought.
Creatures of a day. What is one? What is one not?
Man is but the shadow of a dream.
But whenever a Zeus-given gleam of splendor comes to men,
The brilliant light shines upon them, and their days are blessed.

Divine phthonos in the Histories is associated with narratives which Herodotus chooses to highlight not as examples of the apportioning of ‘just deserts’ but as tragic tales of disproportionate suffering which illustrate the sufferings inherent in the human condition. These narratives encourage the audience (like the internal spectators) to feel ‘pity’ for the characters as they are brought to their ruin or death: Croesus, though he has every reason to wish for vengeance upon Adrastus, feels pity for Adrastus when he surrenders himself, for he recognizes that the Phrygian is not truly responsible for the murder of his son but merely an unfortunate agent (κατοικτίρει, καίτερ ἐὼν ἐν κακῷ οἰκημίῳ τοσούτῳ, 1.45, compare S. Ai. 120-1, further §4.2); Cyrus, too, is struck by the similarities between Croesus and himself,
by fear of tisis, and by the instability of the human condition—their common humanity, in other words—and orders Croesus, the enemy who had attacked his empire, brought down from the pyre (1.86.6); the defeated Egyptian king Psammehtus, on having his relatives and friends paraded past him in slavery, cries out only when he sees an old drinking companion because he was ‘worthy of tears, since he fell from great good fortune (eudaimôn) to beggary on the threshold of old age’ (3.14.10, cf. ἀνακλασαῖς, 3.14.8); Psammehtus’ words in turn move Croesus and the Persians to tears and Cambyses to pity (3.14.11: δακρύειν μὲν... δακρύειν δὲ... ἐσελθεῖν ὁικτόν τινα); Xerxes, on beholding the Persians assembled at Abydos, begins to weep (ἦδακρυσε, 7.45) and is moved to pity by considering the brevity of their lives (ἦσῆλθε γὰρ μὲ λογισάμενος κατοικτήρα, 7.46.2), which prompts Artabanus’ lament of the human condition which is even more pitiable than Xerxes had said (οἰκτρότερα, 7.46.1); likewise, the Persian who shares Thersander’s couch in a mixed Theban/Persian banquet before the battle of Plataea weeps and bids him look around at their comrades who will mostly be dead the next day, before lamenting the curse of powerless knowledge (μετέναια πολλὰ τῶν δακρύων, 9.16.3). All these scenes show characters across great divides (of status, fortune, and nationality) recognizing in the impending or actualized misfortune of another a truth about the human condition and feeling sadness, pity, and sometimes fear at the spectacle. By showing essentially good characters suffering beyond their deserts Herodotus encourages his readers, too, to look across the temporal, ethnic, and status gaps that divide them from these unfortunate rulers and see them as emblematic of the sufferings that characterize humanity in general, and to feel pity for them. The good qualities of Croesus, Polycrates, and Xerxes are, in fact, given special emphasis in each narrative.152

Sophocles, too, represents characters feeling pity to guide and mirror the audience reaction.153 When the exultant Athena invites Odysseus to contemplate the mad figure of Ajax as an illustration of the power of the gods to ruin even the most

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152 Cf. 1.87.2 (Cyrus learns that Cyrus is καὶ θεοφιλῆς καὶ ἀνήρ ἀγαθός), 3.125.2 (Herodotus’ epitaph of Polycrates, to whom no Syracusan or Greek tyrant can be compared in magnificence), 7.16.α (Artabanus on Xerxes’ good nature, perverted by wicked counselors, as further illustrated by his repentance and the dream sequence). 153 See also S. Trach. 934-5, 1134-42.
prudent (*pronous*) and valiant (*Ai. 118-19*), Odysseus refuses to gloat at the downfall of his enemy. Instead he pities him, generalizing about the nature of the human condition, and fearing for himself:

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ΟΔ. ἖γὼ μὲν οὐδέν' οἶδ' ἐποικίτηρο δὲ νῖν δύστηνον ἔμπας, καίπερ ὄντα δοσμενή, ὅθονεκ' ἄτη συγκατέξευκται κακῇ, οὐδὲν τὸ τοῦτο μᾶλλον ᾧ τοῦμὸν σκοπὼν. Ὄρῳ γὰρ ἡμᾶς οὐδὲν ὄντας ἀλλο πλῆν εἰδεν' ὃσιπέρ ζώμεν, ὕ κούρην σκιάν.
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ΑΘ. Τοιαῦτα τοῖνυν εἰσορὸν ὑπέρκοπον μηδὲν ποτ' εἰπής αὐτὸς ἐς θεοὺς ἐπος, μηδ' ὤγκον ἀρή μηδέν', εἶ τινος πλέον ἢ χειρὶ βρίθεις ἢ μακροῦ πλούτου βάθει- ώς ἡμέρα κλίνει τε κάναγει πάλιν ἀπαντα ταύρωπεα- τοὺς δὲ σώρουνας θεοὶ φιλόσει καὶ στυγοῦσι τοὺς κακοὺς. (121-33)
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[Od] I know of none [more prudent and valiant than he]; but I pity him, In his misery, though he is my enemy, For he is yoked to an ill até, And I think of my own lot no less than his. For I see that we are nothing other than phantoms, We who are alive, or fleeting shadows.

[Ath.] Behold these things and never yourself Speak a boasting word to the gods, Nor assume any swelling port, if you surpass another In hand or in depth of great wealth. For a day humbles all human things, And raises them up again; but the sound thinkers Are loved by the gods, and the evil abominated.

We might call these and similar moments in the *Histories* ‘tragic’ (though they are anything but restricted to the Great Dionysia of Athens) in that they portray sympathetic, even noble characters suffering beyond their deserts for provoking the hatred and anger of the gods. 154 This is a central feature of the way Herodotus,

154 For pity as the emotion elicited by seeing people suffer beyond their deserts see Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* (1386b.9-11: [τὸ] λυπεῖσθαι ἐπὶ ταῖς ἀναξίαις κακοπραγίαις) where *eleos* is, like *nemesan*, correlated to desert and felt by those of good character. In the *Poetics*, ‘fear and pity’ are presented as the essential characteristics of tragedy and Aristotle stipulates that ‘pity stems from the unworthiness
undoubtedly in imitation of Homer, and perhaps also of Sophocles, chooses to dramatize the human past. This decision necessitates a certain vision of the powers that control the world, and it is one that is irreconcilably at odds with those vision of ubiquitous ‘divine justice’ in which all get their ‘just deserts’, and a good or benevolent divinity inflicts righteous and proportional punishment only upon the criminal and wicked for their transgressive arrogance and crimes. To attempt to fit Herodotean narratives into this latter pattern not only requires the suppression of numerous details (see further §3.5.3, §3.7, §4.2), but also fundamentally changes the tone of the narrative in search of a more black and white, moralizing story. Herodotus, by contrast, often chose the pathos and emotional complexity of tragedy and epic over the triumphant tone of patriotic rhetoric, and much of the greatness of the work lies precisely in the melancholy of his narratives.

The many scholars who see Solon’s wording as ‘tactful’ (above, §3.5.2 n.86) are, I think, right to argue that talk of god’s phthoneros nature tends to present the misfortunes that fall upon the wealthy and powerful in a manner that is sympathetic to the unfortunate individual. (As argued above, however, I think that Herodotus ultimately endorses this vision, and uses these speeches to set the theological and dramatic tone of many of his narratives.) Thus Aeschylus’ Agamemnon and Pindar make apotropaic prayer that their words or deeds should not provoke divine phthonos, Pindar portrays his successful patrons as particularly liable to divine phthonos, and the messenger of the Persae describes Xerxes as victim of divine phthonos and Greek guile (see §3.4). A more condemnatory interpretation is always possible, usually by suggesting that great wealth or success are inherently amoral and criminal (or inevitably lead their possessor to act criminally), and such interpretations tend to use the vocabulary of hubris, recklessness (atasthalia), impiety (asebeia), and injustice (adikia) to describe humans, and that of

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[of the misfortune], and fear from the similarity [between character and spectator]’ (1453a). Thucydides’ Thebans insist that pity necessitates that suffering is unjust, while justified suffering does not elicit οἴκτος (‘pity’) but is ἔπιξαρτος (‘causing joy’, 3.67.4). Konstan (2006), 201-218, however, notes that pity and injustice are not always linked, and that Greeks often associate pity with vulnerability, magnitude of suffering, and the ability to imagine the same occurring to oneself.

155 Pity and the realization of shared humanity is precisely what Priam seeks from Achilles (Il. 24.503-4), and receives (24.516)

156 The thesis defended by, e.g., Lattimore (1939a), Bischoff (1932), Meuss (1888), 4.
‘punishment’ (*kolasis*), ‘justice’ (*dikē*), and ‘correction’ (*euthuna*) to describe the gods. Such visions of monarchs do, of course, emerge at some points in the *Histories*, particularly in the latter stages of Xerxes' campaign against Greece, and in the mouth of Greek speeches before war.\(^{157}\) But, as the evidence from Pindar shows, divine *nemesis*, like divine *phthonos*, typically characterized the human as the pitiable victim of the resentment of overly harsh divinities.

The vision of humanity with which Herodotus associates the idea that the gods are *phthoneros* is one that emerges from epic, lyric, and tragedy, and it is thus no surprise that, in the *Histories*, divine *phthonos* and pessimistic contemplation of the human condition appear only in the speeches of characters which are conducted in a particularly elevated tone. Although the narrator implicitly endorses the message, he leaves the dramatic and emotional exploration of the human condition to his characters, limiting himself to more epistemologically cautious and restrained comments (1.5.4), and the implicit and explicit validation of the warners’ messages in the course of dramatic narratives. The narrator does, of course, directly endorse Solon’s speech in his characteristically cautious way by stating the truth of his words (1.30.2) and conjecturing that ‘*nemesis* from god took Croesus because he thought himself too happy’ (1.34)—but he does so using the term *nemesis*, whose less overtly negative associations were discussed above (§3.5.2), rather than divine *phthonos*.\(^{158}\)

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\(^{157}\) See particularly 7.46, 8.109, themes that have been amply dilated on at all periods in scholarship (further §1.5, §1.9). The complexity of Xerxes' character well explored by Pelling (2006b), Baragwanath (2008), 249-53.

\(^{158}\) Herodotus’ concern to not speak impiously of the gods manifests itself elsewhere: 2.45.3, 9.65.2.
3.7. Tragic Historiê: Learning, and Suffering

Quem deus vult perdere prius dementat

It is often argued that Herodotus has no philosophy or theory of history. On the contrary, I shall argue that Herodotus clearly elaborates a basic principle that human fortune is cyclical and good fortune cannot stay in one place. Although it is often objected that Herodotus holds numerous very specific metaphysical views which logically prelude one another, I have argued that the notion that god is phthoneros, the ‘circle of human affairs’ which allows none to be indefinitely ‘lucky’ (eutukheein, 1.207), and the transience of human eudaimoniê (1.5.4) are all focused (in a more or less poetic and pessimistic fashion) on the basic instability of the human condition and impermanence of human prosperity (§3.5-6). This has an important implication, missed by those who seek to find the ‘responsibility’ for misfortune in transgressive overreaching and crimes, which (as it is often contended) should have been avoided in line with the sage council of the warners. The assumption implicit in attempts to blame characters entirely for the great reversals of fortune is that, had the characters in question been sufficiently rational, wise, modest and so on, they could have avoided the disasters that follow.

I shall argue that Herodotus repeatedly stresses the idea that the gods allow no ruler or empire to remain in a position of static prosperity, and that the Histories depict the

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159 A view long held (cf. §1.6.1) but much criticized on the grounds that the cosmic forces behave in a ‘moral’ fashion (§1.9) or that the idea is trivial and not condoned by Herodotus (§1.6.2).

160 Herodotus’ observation about human prosperity ‘not staying in the same place’ (τὴν ἄφθοροπην ὄν ἑπιστάμενος εὐδαιμονίην εὐδημὰ ἐν τῶν τῶ μένουσαν) may implicitly stress the difference between man and god: the phraseology seems to echo Xenophanes’ statement that the ‘one greatest god’ (εἷς θεὸς... μέγιστος, fr.23 DK)—who is so unlike humans and lesser gods—remains ‘always in the same place, never moving’ (αἱ ἄν τοῦτο μέγιστε κινοῦμενος οὐδέν, fr.26 DK), and Parmenides’ statement that τὸ ἐν Ἀνθρώπων ‘remains the same in the same place’ (τὸ καθ’ ἑαυτὸ τὸ καθ’ ἑαυτῷ ἐκεῖ, fr.8.29-30 DK) parallels suggested by Stein (1883/94), ad loc; cf. Reinhardt (1960 = 1940), 136.

161 The idea also occurs at 5.4, 7.203.2; cf. 2.78, 5.9.3, 4.195.2, and Harrison (2000), 60-1.

162 For the misfortunes of Croesus, Polycrates, or Xerxes as inevitable: Fornara (1971), 76-7, Versnel (1977), 46, Röttig (2010), 52-70; for the explicit statement that they are avoidable: Meuss (1888), 8-9; Van der Veen (1996), 6; Munson (2001b), 43; Pietsch (2001), 13-18; Schulte-Altedorneburg (2001); Chiasson (2003), 31; Löffler (2008), passim; for the implication that they are avoidable: Marg (1982), Marinatos (1982), 260, Barker (2006), Kindt (2006), 40-1 (but not 42).
gods forcing reluctant rulers into doomed undertakings against their will or inclination, thereby causing their tragic downfall. The cyclical nature of prosperity can, like the idea of divine phthonos, be paralleled in contemporary literature. In a Sophoclean fragment Menelaus likens his own fate to the cyclical motion of the moon.¹⁶³

When the Chorus of the Trachiniae note that Zeus has ordained that no mortal should be free of pain (analgês), they liken the cycle of pain and joy to the circling of the stars (126-31) in a manner evocative both of Croesus’ metaphor of the ‘circle of human affairs’ (1.207) and Amasis’ characterization of the nature of human life overseen by a phthoneros divinity (διαφέρειν τὸν αἰῶνα ἐναλλάξ ρήσσων, 3.40).

Although the notion of the instability of human prosperity and the impossibility of total success were both connected with divine phthonos (and to a lesser degree with divine agê) before Herodotus, it seems to be Herodotus’ innovation to connect the cyclical nature of human success and the mixed condition of the mortal lot with the basic rule of history. This resonates, if only in the most general sense, with Heraclitus' statements that everything is in flux (cf. 22 B 12 DK).¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ On this connection: Immerwahr (1966), 152-4.
Both Polycrates and Xerxes heed the advice given them by Amasis and Artabanus and attempt a course of action which will avert divine phthonos: Polycrates enacts Amasis’ apotropaic ritual (3.41), and Xerxes announces to his subjects (who are much cheered by the news) that the expedition to Greece will not take place (7.13.2-3). But both attempts are in vain, and the individuals in question are destroyed ‘unworthily of themselves’ (3.125.2; 7.10ε). Polycrates’ discarding of the ring is rejected by its ‘divine’ return and his spree of unmitigated good luck continues until, in reckless disregard for the prophecies, he travels to Oroites’ court and is crucified, from which the narrator draws conclusions about the nature of good fortune. In Xerxes’ case it is direct intervention by the gods which forces him to proceed with a disastrous war that he no longer desires, after he has repented his initial ‘big thinking’. Artabanus gives an understanding summary, alive to the pathos of the situation:

Ἐμὲ δὲ ἀκούσαντα πρὸς σέο κακῶς ὡς τοσοῦτο ἐδακε λύπη, ὅσον γνωμέων δύο προκειμένων Πέρσης, τῆς μὲν ὑβριν αὐξανόσης, τῆς δὲ καταπαυόσης καὶ λεγούσης ὡς κακὸν εἴη διδάσκειν τὴν ψυχήν πλέον τι διζήσῃ αἰεὶ ἐξίν τοῦ παρεόντος, τοιούτων προκειμένων γνωμέων, ὅτι τὴν σφαλερωτέρην σεωτῇ τε καὶ Πέρσης ἀναιρέο. Νῦν ὄν, ἐπειδὴ τέτραψαι ἐπὶ τὴν ἀμείνο, φῆς τοι μετεῖν τὸν ἐπ’ Ἑλλήνας στόλον ἐπιφοιτήσαν ἄνειρον θεοῦ τινος πομπῆ, οὐκ ἐδοντά σε καταλύειν τὸν στόλον. (7.16.α2-β1)

I was not so troubled by your criticism of me as I was by the fact that when two choices lay before the Persians, one which increased hubris, the other which put a stop to it and said that it is worse to teach one’s soul to always seek more than it has, that you chose the one which was more perilous for the Persians. But now that you have turned towards the better course and abandoned the expedition against Greece you say that a dream sent by some god visits you, and will not allow you to dismiss the expedition.

Artabanus proposes to test the divinity of the dream: it then appears to him as well and threatens to put out his eyes with hot pokers, leaving him convinced that a ‘god-driven destruction’ is fated for Greece (7.16-18). It is a remarkably little-mentioned fact that the ultimate decision to go to war—the most structurally significant decision of the work—is actually taken by Artabanus (rather than Xerxes) when he addresses the king after seeing the dream. Artabanus tells Xerxes to be punctilious in carrying out what god has commanded, and Xerxes (who does not speak after acceding to
Artabanus' test) is said to follow Artabanus' instruction (7.18.2). This is how Xerxes' great campaign begins. In fact, Artabanus proclaims his assent as the main clause of a quite remarkable sentence which begins by stating (in sub-clauses) the various gnomic truths which Herodotus, Solon, Amasis, and he have expounded, and which had ultimately persuaded Xerxes to retract his decision once he overcame his youthful rashness. Artabanus says that, as a human, he still knows that smaller armies defeat greater ones (cf. 7.10e), that it is bad to desire a great deal (cf. 7.16α.2), and that the expedition against the Massagetae was almost disastrous. Although he had been convinced that Xerxes would have been the most blessed (μακαριστόν) of all men if he remained at home peacefully (ἀτρεμίζοντα, contrary to the Persian nomos, cf. 7.8a.1), Artabanus bows to the 'daemonic impulse' (δαιμονίη τις...ὄρμη), the 'god-driven destruction' (φθορή τις...θεήλατος) that is ordained for Greece, and consents to the expedition. 'Even I have had a change of heart', says this paradigmatically cautious, Solonic advisor, 'and alter my opinion' (ἐγὼ μὲν καὶ αὐτὸς τράπομαι καὶ τὴν γνώμην μετατίθεμαι, 7.18.3).

Herodotus is well aware of the many reasons that might motivate lesser men to wish for a Persian campaign against the Greeks (compare the motives of Mardonius, 7.6.1), but his narrative is quite emphatic that these are not the reasons for which Artabanus and Xerxes commit the Persians Empire to war against Greece. Xerxes, with reflection, overcomes the youthful folly that had provoked his earlier plans, and submits to the governance of his wise uncle. Artabanus forgives Xerxes and notes that he was influenced by the 'crowds of bad men' and, like the sea stirred up by winds, not allowed to consult with his own nature (7.16α, cf. A. Pers. 753). Ultimately, then, Xerxes and Artabanus go to war despite their misgivings because, as the narrator puts it, they are 'urged on by the vision' (ἐπαρθέντες, 7.18.4 a rare

165 See further Shapiro (1994), 353-4, against the enduring misreading by Stahl (1975), that Artabanus 'forgets' his Solonian knowledge.
166 7.18.2-3: οἷα ἁνθρωπος ἴδὼν... ἐπιστάμενος... μεμινημένος μὲν... μεμιθημένος δὲ... ἐπιστάμενος ταῦτα... Επει δὲ δαίμονή τις γίνεται ὀρμή... 167 Although Xerxes soon regains his optimism about the campaign—presumably encouraged by the dream—when he later refers back to the episode he makes it clear that he would have deferred to Artabanus' opinion had the dreams not appeared: 'if the vision of the dream had not appeared so clearly, would you have held to your former view, not allowing me to campaign against Greece?' (οὐκ ἔδω με στρατεύεσθαι, 7.47.1).
168 7.13.2: (Xerxes) φρενόν τε γὰρ ἐς τὰ ἐμευωτοῦ πρῶτα οὐκ ἀνήκο...ἡ νεότης ἐπέξεισε. Cf. n.120.
word which Croesus uses twice of the oracles that induced him to attack Cyrus thereby leading to the downfall of the Lydian empire, 1.87.3, 90.4) and because they are, as Croesus was, anxious to obey the commands of god without realizing their destructive nature (τὰ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ πεμπόμενα... τοῦ θεοῦ παραδίδοντος, 7.18.3, cf. §4.2).

This central feature of Herodotus' narrative has long been suppressed by scholars who, since Melanchthon, have interpreted the defeat of Xerxes' Greek campaign as just punishment for his impieties, his recklessness, and his imperial ambitions. This exultant and clear moral dynamic seems intolerably compromised if Xerxes, with the consent of the wisest character in the Histories, relents from the youthful rashness stirred up by self-interested villains, and perceives the better course of action but is then forced to go to war by the gods, thereby shedding the blood of innumerable innocents.169 Scholars have employed countless tactics to incorporate Herodotus within a tradition of theological benevolence that would allow the defeat to be 'punishment': the dreams are frequently left out of discussion,170 or interpreted as a 'test',171 or as a dramatization of Xerxes' own psychology and expansionist desires.172 Alternatively, they are interpreted not as an instrument of the gods but as the embodiment of the Persian nomos of expansion,173 or they articulate a true political reality that Xerxes cannot now cancel the expedition without a domestic crisis,174 or they describe as an alternative level of explanation alongside the

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169 This is, however, the line taken by Lloyd-Jones (1971), 62-3: 'this happens because he is “presumptuous and impious”.' But Lloyd-Jones recognizes the chronological difficulties and offers a second explanation: ‘the dream is sent to force him to invade because he has inherited from Cyrus and his successors, who have themselves inherited it from Croesus, the stigma of being an aggressor against the Greeks.’ Xerxes, then, is not personally responsible, but inherited the responsibility from his ancestors, and thus is forced to commit injustice, so he can then, in recompense, be destroyed. One must, I think, have a very particular set of theological concerns in mind to insist (unlike Herodotus) on describing this as 'just cause' (1971), 63.


171 Schulte-Altedorneburg (2001); Pietsch (2001), 217; see criticism in Röttig (2010), 52-60, esp. 57. The 'test' explanation is an ancient one, offered by scholiasts to Homer on the temptation of Pandarus (bT Il. 4.66a ex.).


174 Von Fritz (1956), 126; Saïd (2002), 144; Pelling (2006a), 149, considers the dream to articulate both a political and a divine necessity. Such a reading is hard to support: the Persians are characterized as reluctant to campaign, relieved when it is cancelled, and worried when it is under way (above n.121).
'human’ or ‘rational’ explanation that precedes which is (in dramatic terms) redundant, and leaves Xerxes as the hubristic and arrogant monarch entirely responsible for starting the war.\textsuperscript{175} Several explanations may be used in tandem to protect the dogma that the gods apportion just punishment to Xerxes for events which he freely chooses and can be considered entirely ‘responsible’. In the twentieth century the re-interpretation of the dream sequence seems to derive less from theological motives than from the preference for simplicity and polarity amongst those literary scholars working within the constraints of ’structuralist’ theories. To advocate a series of polar dichotomies in the \textit{Histories} requires significant distortions, and this fact alone reveals the complexity of Herodotus' thinking, compared with the neat, abstracted world of certain recent intellectual movements. Those seeking dichotomies typically map these onto a 'good/bad' framework in which the good succeed and the bad are punished. It is thus the literary theoretist of today who unselfconsciously assumes what the Christian humanist of the past strenuously asserted: the consistently providential and just nature of divine action.

The story of Xerxes' decision to go to war, however, cannot be divided up into two ‘parallel’ explanations—one ‘human’ one ‘divine’—for the simple reason that the narrative is continuous, and there is no sign of any such distinction in the text. After the persuasion and the council (in which oracles and 'god' played a significant part) Xerxes changes his mind and the dreams force him to change it back again. If we remove the divine element the story becomes a nonsense, for the story peters out at the point when Xerxes has decided not to go to war. That both Xerxes and Artabanus see the dream and that Artabanus’ rationalizing interpretation is aired and then quashed (according to his very own standard of proof) preclude the psychologizing

\textsuperscript{175} Pohlenz (1937), 127, ‘Die menschliche Erklärung ist für den Geschichtschreiber die erst Aufgabe. Die metaphysische mindert nichts an ihr, sondern verhilft nur zum tieferen Verständnis, zur Sinndeutung des Geschehens’; De Ste Croix (1977), 140-1 (‘Herodotus has given a perfectly good set of human motives…which establish a completely satisfactory scheme of causation, without a trace of supernaturalism. The Dream merely prevents Xerxes from changing his mind…’, but see also his following remarks); Bichler (2000), 322. For the assertion that there are 'parallel sets of causation, one human, the other supernatural, neither of which renders the other inoperative’ see Gould (1989), 70-1, who adduces parallels from Evans-Pritchard.
readings offered above. The narrative could not be more explicit on this point. Nor can Herodotus’ attribution of the dreams to a Persian source be taken as a ‘distancing’ tactic designed to frame this story as a piece of Persian apologetics (7.12.1). Xerxes’ change of heart is asserted by the narrator as part of the mimetic and entirely sourceless narrative that precedes: what is asserted by the narrator (that Xerxes changes his mind) and what is attributed to the Persians (that a dream appears to him and forced him to change it back) forms a contiguous whole. This reading is confirmed by the conversation at Abydos (another mimetic piece for which no sources are adduced), where Xerxes asks Artabanus if he would have changed his mind or whether—had the dreams not appeared—he would have continued ‘not to allow’ Xerxes to campaign (7.46.1). The dream narrative, then, is a central feature of how Herodotus chooses to dramatize Xerxes’ decision to invade Greece. The campaign is not the result of Xerxes’ unadulterated ‘hubris’ or arrogance, or his blindness to the truth, or inability to heed good advice. It is the result of divine compulsion which will not allow him or Artabanus to relinquish the plans made in a moment of youthful folly under the influence of manipulating advisors, or allow Xerxes' respect for age and wisdom to triumph over disaster. The motif of the disastrous dream, of course, is highly literary, and recalls the ‘destructive dream’ (sent to Agamemnon by Zeus early in Homer’s narrative of the Trojan Wars, which will, of course, resound largely through Xerxes’ procession through Greece (e.g. 7.43.1)).

The explanation for the frequent omission of the dream narrative and Artabanus’ prominent role in the final commitment to war seems clear: it spoils the themes of

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176 Contra Munson (2001b), 44: the dream ‘reflects [Artabanus’] deeply held cultural convictions of what he “should” do and of his proper station as a slave of the king'; cf. Pietsch (2001), 215. Commentators, however, have not pointed to any particular details which evoke such ideas in the passage at hand.

177 How & Wells (1912), ad 7.12.1 (‘κου expresses doubt (3.40.1), and throws the responsibility for the story on the Persians’), echoing Macan (1895), ad loc (who, however, offers some qualifications). Shimron (1989), 49-55 (esp. 51), keeps Artabanus a ‘rational’ character, and thinks Herodotus does not vouch for the dreams; cf. Lateiner (1989), 284 n.48. Contra Christ (1994), 194 & n.83, who actually examines the use of καὶ δὴ κου elsewhere (6.11.1, 128.2, 9.113.1) and concludes that it indicates ‘absence of specific details, not doubt concerning the veracity of the information reported'. The tactic of seizing on one or another insignificant element in a particular story (which the scholar cannot believe Herodotus believed) is familiar from all periods of scholarship; see, e.g., Harrison's criticisms of theories about the 'intrusive oblique infinitive', (2000), 248-50.
‘retribution’ and ‘divine justice’ that have dominated readings of the *Histories* since the Renaissance. An interest in questions of ‘guilt’ and ‘punishment’ has obscured an essential fact that unites all these narratives, one implicit in Croesus’ metaphor of the ‘circle’ of human affairs: that on each occasion the gods (in diverse ways) raise people up, and urge them on ceaselessly, even against their will, until they are destroyed. Croesus, after his initial inflated self-evaluation and misfortune (i.e. the warning of Solon and the death of Atys, 1.30-45), deploys excessive caution before campaigning, and finally does so in faithful and pious obedience to a deceptive oracle which he misinterprets (the narrator’s words, see §4.2). Polycrates attempts to follow Amasis’ advice, but his symbolic self-abasement is rejected by the gods, and he too dies horrifically after being deceived by a man who conceived an unholy emnity against him, and lured him to his death by exploiting his avarice and ambition (3.123). Xerxes entirely abandons his grandiose dreams, but he and Artabanus are forced, full of foreboding, to carry out the expedition and its terrible bloodshed by a divine dream.

The Persian War Council and dream scenes elucidate the tragic level on which Herodotus emplots his narrative: the circle of human affairs cannot plateau in a state of stable prosperity, just as divine phthonos, once awoken, cannot be averted. Once an individual has aroused the phthonos the gods they ruin him, unconcerned with any contrition or apotropaic rituals on his part, or by considerations of proportionality or collateral damage. No amount of human ingenuity or wisdom can alter this. The characters, like the audience of the *Histories*, can only watch as the pattern of rise and fall unfolds. The gods are content to allow learning only by suffering, as the poetic cliché runs, not the intervention of human wisdom: Croesus only understands the full import of Solon’s words as he sits atop the pyre, and he can say later to Cyrus: τὰ δὲ μοι παθήματα ἐόντα ἀχάριτα μαθήματα γέγονε (1.207, cf. A. Ag. 176). Amasis concluded that it was impossible for a man to save another man from...

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178 It is tempting to see in ἀχάριτα reference to the continual disappointment of reciprocity (*kharis*) that characterizes Croesus’ story, as well as the surface sense—‘unpleasant’. Croesus is the archetype of the man who does not get what he deserves in return: his kindness to Adrastus is repaid not by the protection but by the murder of his son, as is stressed by Adrastus’ ominous words (ὅτι τοῦ ἀριστεροῦ, ὁφείλω γάρ σε ἀμείβεσθαι χρῆστοις, 1.42.2) and Croesus’ lament (συντεταραγμένος μᾶλλον τι ἐδεινολογέοτο ὅτι μὴ ἀπέκτεινε τὸν αὐτὸς φόνον ἐκάθηρε, 44.1). Likewise Apollo, whom Croesus...
what must happen: ἔμαθε ὅτι ἐκκομίσαι τε ἂδύνατον εἰς ἄνθρωπον ἂνθρωπον ἂνθρωπον ὁ μέλλοντος γίνεσθαι πρήγματος (3.43.2, cf. 3.65.3). But the curse of Cassandra is most dramatically introduced before the battle of Plataea. A Persian who shares a couch with his Theban ally, Thersander, bids him survey their comrades in their revelry, and tells him that in a short time few of them will be alive, and then wept a great deal (9.16.3, closely echoing the emotional progression of Xerxes at 7.45). When Thersander asks him why he does not tell Mardonius what he knows, the Persian replies, echoing Amasis’ realization:

Friend, it is impossible for a human to avert what must come from god. For no one wants to believe those who speak trustworthy council. Many of the Persian know this, but we follow regardless, compelled by necessity. It is the most grievous pain amongst men to be full of knowledge but to be powerless.

Homer, too, knew of the futility of foreknowledge and prophecy, but the idea is most familiar from the tragic stage, famously evoked by the lament of Teiresias when he first appears in Sophocles’ Oedipus Tyrannus: Φεῦ φεῦ, φρονεῖν ὡς δεινὸν ἔνθα μὴ τέλη/ λόῃ φρονοῦντι. (316-18: ‘Alas, how terrible it is to understand, when understanding brings no end to troubles’). It is quite beside the point that Herodotus elsewhere tells stories which have different theological assumptions, for example, that of the Ethiopian Sabacus and the Cymeon Aristodicus, both of whom disobey a divine command (via dream and oracle respectively) and thereby avoid disaster (1.158, 2.139). The Histories are not to be mistaken for a work of systematic theology, in which any dramatic tale can be read through the theological prism of any other part of the work, any more than we can ignore the notion of predestination in Sophocles’ Oedipus Tyrannus by reference to the words.
of a character in the *Philoctetes*. Herodotus' theological assumptions, as we saw in the last chapter, are mutable, and often subordinate to his literary concerns.

God’s grudging nature, moreover, expressly works in a cyclical fashion. Not only do the gods prevent the prosperous from remaining still and prospering, they propel them into prosperity by granting protection and unmixed success. Although their motive remains as unexplained in Herodotus as in earlier poetry, it seems that god intentionally shows good fortune to mortals before taking it back (cf. Solon at 1.32.9, Artabanus at 7.46.4). Two characters, in particular, are represented as mistaking the first stage of the cycle as the beginnings of a longer, unbroken rise to ever-increasing success. Xerxes, the last Persian ruler Herodotus mentions (cf. §3.5.5), and Cyrus, the first. Cyrus, like his eventual successor, mistook the remarkable good fortune he enjoyed as a babe (cf. κατὰ δαίμονα, 1.111.1) and then as an adult (cf. ὡστε θεοβλαβής, 127.2), as the sign that the gods watch over and protected him, an idea suggested to him as a young man by Harpagus (124.1-2). When, shortly before his death, Cyrus sees the dream of Darius’ succession he, just like Croesus and Xerxes, assumes that he is receiving a communication from a divinity that is looking out for his best interests. As it turns out, he sees a vision of what will happen after his own demise. In his misapprehension he says to Hystaspes, as he confronts him about his son Darius and the rebellion of which he believes he has been forewarned (1.209.3):

> ὡς δὲ ταῦτα ἀτρεκέως οἶδα, ἐγὼ σημανέω. Ἐμέοι θεοὶ κήδονται καὶ μοι πάντα προδεικνύουσι τὰ ἐπιφερόμενα.

How I know this beyond doubt, I shall reveal. The gods care for me and show me all that is brought to pass.

It is, perhaps, quite natural that Cyrus should make such a mistake. But while his discussion with Croesus quashed any erroneous beliefs that he might have entertained about being ‘more than human’ (1.207.2, cf. 1.204.2) his belief that he was favoured and cared by for the gods was based on his own limited experience of human fortune, rather than the cyclical vision that Croesus had attempted to impress.

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upon him (1.207.2). At the point where Cyrus reaches the peak of his prosperity the gods who had once seemed to care for him desert him. It was against this fate that Pindar had warned Hieron, and which the chorus of Aeschylus’ *Persae* lament.\(^{182}\)

It is significant that Herodotus does not divide up ‘Solonian’ wisdom along national lines, as often claimed:\(^{183}\) Solon warns Croesus, Croesus Cyrus, Amasis Polycrates, Artabanus Xerxes, and Thersander is warned by his Persian dinner partner of the impending defeat. The wise speakers are thus a Greek, a Lydian, an Egyptian and two Persians, while those they inform are Greeks (Polycrates and Thersander), Persians (Cyrus and Xerxes), and a Lydian (Croesus). The differences are hardly cut along national lines.

Herodotus, then, at key points in the work, dramatizes the stories of Croesus and Xerxes, rulers of the two great eastern empires whose rise and fall he describes, as stories of the cyclical and impermanent nature of human success, the grudging nature of the divine, and the wretched lot of human kind. He chooses to narrate these stories on the tragic pattern of the *Iliad* and Sophoclean tragedy, and in doing so conceives a tragic vision of the human past.

It is necessary to return at this point to a question raised in the last chapter (§2.10). Harrison’s assessment of role of divine *phthonos* in Herodotus’ religious views is primarily a functional one: Herodotus’ belief in divine retribution is described as ‘a complete moral system whereby unjust actions meet without fail with a just,

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\(^{182}\) O. 1.106-10: ‘a god who is overseer of your cares makes plans, Hieron, with this as his concern. If he does not leave you quickly, I would hope for yet sweeter...’ (θεὸς ἐπίτροπος ἔων τεάζει μὴ ἕπταται ἔχον τοῦτο κάδος, Ἰέρων, μερίμναισιν· εἴ δὲ μὴ ταχῦ ἔλπις, ἐτέ γυλυκτέραν κεν ἔλποιμαι), cf. A. *Pers.*157-8, 942-3

\(^{183}\) Harrison (2000), 61, for whom the Persians are ‘noticeably lacking in Solonian fatalism’. Harrison notes that they celebrate their birthdays (1.139.1, contrast the Trausi at 5.4), that Cyrus (1.204.2) and Xerxes (7.8.a) are optimistic about the future, and cites Artabanus as an ‘exception’. However the Persians rejoice when Xerxes abandons the campaign (7.13.3) and Thersander is told by his dinner partner that many Persians know of the impending doom, but understand (unlike Amasis and Thersander, who instinctively desire to avert disaster) that necessity cannot be altered by human means (Περσῶν συχνὸι ἐπιστάμενοι, 9.16.4). The Persians who follow Xerxes (who follows the dream) thus seem particularly notable for their fatalism and reluctance to campaign. For the Greek/Barbarian dichotomy as fundamental to the misfortunes of Herodotus’ characters see, e.g., Asheri (2007), 98, E. Barker (2006), Hartog (1999), 191, Long (1987), 64; Redfield (2002 = 1985), 30, who sees this as a particularly ‘Hellenic’ wisdom.
proportional response’, which is sustained in the light of contradictory experiences by various let-out clauses:¹⁸⁴ that ‘divine retribution can operate through human agency’, that divine retribution can be delayed, and that there is an ‘alternative explanation of human suffering... other misfortunes are interpreted only as illustrations of the mixed and unpredictable nature of human fortune.’ For Harrison it is ‘the potential for two contradictory but parallel forms of explanation, that allows for the belief in the possibility of divine intervention to be maintained’, and ‘the selection of one of a number of divine explanations of a misfortune takes place... subliminally’.¹⁸⁵

The evidence reviewed in this chapter suggests that this explanation for the theological diversity of the Histories needs to be modified. While, in itself, a coherent and plausible theory, the above analysis suggests that the mutability of human fortune is anything but an idea of which Herodotus was unconscious. It is, in fact, placed in a series of inter-referential and highly poetic speeches in the run up to the most momentous shifts in imperial power which the work describes, as well as in the narrator’s opening remarks (1.5.4). If there is a contradiction between the notion that human prosperity is limited and transient (whether due or not to the gods’ grudging nature) and the notion that the gods punish injustice, it has yet to be demonstrated—the assumption that the gods must be either wholly moral or wholly immoral is, as we have seen, one that seems to have emerged from a tacit acceptance that the opposing interpretations of classical theology proposed between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries were logically exclusive of one another. While these two principles are, indeed, different from one another, they do not, in fact, logically preclude one another.

Finally, it is difficult to sustain a functionalist interpretation of the variation between different schema of divine action in the Histories, namely ‘punishment for crime’ and ‘reversal of fortune from grudging or hostile divinities’. Although it seems quite reasonable to conjecture that these two different explanations for misfortune sometimes were used as competing theological explanations for events according to

¹⁸⁴ Harrison (2000), 110-12.
¹⁸⁵ Harrison (2000), 115-16.
pragmatic concerns—though not necessarily only in the context of staving off atheism—in the *Histories* it seems that Herodotus was not so much *compelled* to resort to the latter explanation because the former could not be made to fit the events he described, but rather because his literary aims were quite different.\(^{186}\) Herodotus could, with the greatest of ease, have told the stories of Croesus, Polycrates, and Xerxes as straight-forward illustrations of impiety and punishment, or interpreted them as *uncomplicated* narratives whereby consistently arrogant and unrepentant tyrants are destroyed by the gods in requital for the injustices they commit on their suffering neighbours. There is little sign, I think, that Herodotus failed to do so because he felt constrained to adhere literally to his sources and thus to include the speeches of Solon and Artabanus, the conversations of Xerxes and Artabanus at Abydos, the letter of Amasis, Croesus’ trust in deceptive oracles, and the dreams sent to Xerxes and Artabanus. These very mimetic, largely sourceless, and highly poetic narratives, which direct the audience’s sympathy towards characters who are about to suffer misfortune, are an essential part of the complexity of Herodotus narrative, and I suggest that they are introduced primarily for literary reasons. Theology, here, follows narrative.

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\(^{186}\) Harrison’s choice to make the gods’ resentment of prosperity, success, and big thinking a ‘let out clause’ to a more fundamental belief that the gods were always proportional and just in their punishments (rather than the other way around) is not, in my view, adequately supported. Harrison also generalizes Herodotean comments about ‘great injustices’ and ‘overly great vengeance’ to statements about *all* impieties and injustices. Given the conception of the divinity as *phthoneros* (resentful) it may be that ‘greatness’ is an important part of arousing divine vengeance.
Chapter Four
Theology in the Croesus Logos

‘Then the prophecies of the old songs have turned out to be true, after a fashion!’ said Bilbo.

‘Of course!’ said Gandalf. 'And why should not they prove true? Surely you don't disbelieve the prophecies, because you had a hand in bringing them about yourself? You don't really suppose, do you, that all your adventures and escapes were managed by mere luck, just for your sole benefit? You are a very fine person, Mr. Baggins, and I am very fond of you; but you are only quite a little fellow in a wide world after all!'

4.1. The Clash of Theological Principles

This chapter looks at the way that the theological ideas discussed in the last two chapters interact in the course of a largely self-contained narrative, to better understand how Herodotus negotiates the different dynamics and ideas of his contemporary world in crafting his narratives of the past.

Solon’s speech to Croesus in the prosperous city of Sardis, as we saw in the last chapter (§3.5.2), dramatizes a clash of values that, in various forms, often recurred in Greek thought: the soundness of modest means as opposed to the dangers of great wealth in a world governed by grudging gods. The rest of the Croesus logos stands as an illustration of Solon’s ideas, first through the story of the death of Atys and suicide of Adrastus (‘presumably because Croesus thought himself the happiest of men’, 1.34-45), and second through the fall of Sardis to Cyrus (1.46-90).

The narrative of Atys and Adrastus contains numerous thematic and verbal resonances of the speech of Solon, particularly the frequent recurrence of the word sumphorê (seven further times in the four OCT pages that tell the story of Atys’

1 References, particularly to the fragments of Solon, in Harrison (2000), 37-9.
death at the hands of Adrastus). Croesus’ loss of his son contrasts with Solon’s comment that those who have middling means and good luck are fortunate in their children (ἐὖπαις, 1.32.6, cf. Τέλλῳ... παιδὲς ἤσαν καλοὶ τε κἀγαθοὶ, 1.30.4); Croesus looses the only child he recognizes (εἰς γὰρ μοι μοῦνος τυγχάνεις ἐών παις, 1.38.2). Croesus’ ‘perturbation’ (τῶ θανάτῳ τοῦ παιδὸς συντεταραχμένος, 44.1) at his son’s death recalls Solon’s statement that god is ταραχώδης; both share the same ταραχ- root often associated with human and divine phthonos (cf. §3.5.2 and n.102).

Adrastus has a glorious patrimony and, in addition, strength (καὶ προσέτι ῥώμη ὑπάρχει, 1.41.3); Cleobis and Biton are of humble birth, but likewise of great (or greater) physical prowess (βίος τε ἄρκεων ὑπῆν καὶ πρὸς τοῦτο ῥώμη σώματος, 1.31.2). Such similarities seem to highlight their contrasting fortunes. The narrative thread opened by Solon’s departure and the dream vision, representing the nemesis of the phthoneros divinity, superficially closes with the dream’s fulfilment through the death of Atys, Adrastus’ suicide, and Croesus’ two-year-long period of mourning (1.46.1).

Yet Croesus’ first explicit reflections on the truth of Solon’s warning are only reported as he sits atop the pyre, about to be burned alive, having seen his empire fall and his city sacked, and throughout this narrative of imperial disaster, too, Solonian motifs loom large. During the sacking of Sardis Croesus was so beset by the ‘present sumphorê’ that he was indifferent to life itself (1.87.1), and it is here that he is miraculously saved from death by his mute son’s shout, which was destined (so the oracle had warned him) for a day that was anolbos (1.85). The rainstorm that puts out the fire saves a man who realized that Solon’s words were ‘spoken with god’, and Solon is aptly paraphrased as saying ‘not a thing about living creatures is olbios’ (μηδένα εἶναι τῶν ζωόντων ὀλβιον, 1.86.3). But just when Croesus’ fortunes lie shattered as an apparent illustration of the truth of Solon’s words—when the ideas might seem to tie themselves up quite neatly—a quite different theological thought rears its head. The seeds of this idea were sown in the narrative of the accession of Gyges who, by murdering his master under compulsion, bequeathed an ancestral curse to his fifth-generation descendant, Croesus. Sardis, it seems, had to fall under

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2 Solon 1.32.4 (‘man is entirely sumphorê’), also at 35.1, 35.4, 41.1, 42.1, 44.2, 45.1, with the climax in the superlative βαροσμφορόστατος (45.3), on which see Chiasson (2003), 15.
Croesus’ rule, according to the laws of moira proclaimed by the Delphic oracle at 1.91. But ‘none took any account of this story, until it came to pass’ (ἐπετελέσθη, 1.13.2). By his long silence on the issue Herodotus, as Pelling has noted, seems to put the reader in a similar situation to Croesus, who was also caught by surprise.³

The possibility of a rather neat division between Croesus’ two misfortunes has occurred to some commentators: nemesis sends Croesus the dream about Atys’ death thereby bringing it about (1.34, cf. 1.45.3), while the fall of Sardis is a tisis for Gyges’ crime (1.13) that represents Croesus’ moira and cannot be averted (1.91.1).⁴ But it is clear that Herodotus also presents the downfall of Croesus’ empire as a validation of Solon’s warning about the nature of the gods and human prosperity and the necessity of ‘looking to the end’. Is it mere coincidence that Sardis was at the peak of its prosperity (‘ripe’, as it were, for the reaping, 1.29.1) at the moment when its ruler was destined to atone for an ancestral curse? One can imagine that these two principles might often conflict with one another. Herodotus offers no reconciliation of these two apparently quite different theological ideas, or why they should happen to co-occur, and it seems that he did not consider their coexistence a problem. Of course, it need not be, for if we are to credit this coincidence to the working of gods whose nature is—as Herodotus’ admits in his most candid moments—utterly unknown to mankind (2.3.2), then it might not seem particularly implausible that these powerful divine forces should bring such coincidences about. To the outsider, however, it looks very much as if Herodotus is employing two rather different principles which do not fit together particularly neatly: the notion of an inherited curse incurred by an unavoidable crime, and the notion that great good fortune and prosperity are inevitably followed by a disruptive reversal. To make matters worse (from our point of view) a third quite different theological principle rears its head at the end of the Croesus logos: the personal relationship of divine/mortal kharis (reciprocal ‘grace’ or ‘favour’) between Croesus and Apollo of Delphi, which has, Croesus complains, been violated (1.90.4, esp. ἄχαρίστοσι... εἴναι). We shall return to the relationship between these three theological ideas shortly (§4.3), but first it is important to look carefully at what is not present in the Croesus logos but more

³ Pelling (2006b), 162-3.
⁴ E.g. Lloyd-Jones (1971).
frequently discussed than any other theological theme. I shall argue that we do not find any trace of the idea that each character gets their ‘just deserts’, nor does Herodotus suggest that the misfortunes suffered are to be viewed as ‘punishments’ for ‘guilt’, ‘sin’, or ‘crime’ (in the sense in which these terms are commonly understood), nor that the behaviour of the gods is guided by a principle of ‘justice’, appropriateness, or ‘benevolence’. Ideas of this sort about divine action can be seen synchronically in Greek thought, and were particularly developed by the figure of Socrates in the writings of Plato and Xenophon (see §1.2, §2.12), but it is essential to the understanding of the narrative patterns of the Croesus logos to observe they are absent from this story, precluded by Solon’s statements about the nature of god and the Delphic oracles’ deceptive encouragement of Croesus to attack Persia. There are, for sure, principles that look ‘retributive’ at work in the Histories, but they are ones that must be contextualized within a vision of divinity that is generally grudging, disruptive, and deceptive, and inflicts unmerited or excessive destruction upon essentially good characters. If Croesus’ suffering was in some sense ‘caused’ by himself or an ancestor, it remains excessive and worthy of pity. In a word, Croesus’ story is a tale of tragedy not divine justice.
4.2. The Character and Sufferings of Croesus: 
Tragedy and Theodicy

As shown in chapter one, the role of divine phthonos in the Croesus logos has long been suppressed or subsumed under the vague heading of ‘divine justice’, 'punishment', or 'vengeance'. It is thus worthwhile making the case in detail that interpretation in terms of ‘divine justice’ typically involves two distortions, one theological—that the gods are benevolent and just (two ideas that are often linked) in their behaviour, only visiting humans with misfortunes in response to ‘crimes’ or ‘guilt’—and one emotional—that we should feel satisfaction rather than pity on witnessing Croesus’ misfortunes, or in other words that we recognize the validity of the divine sanction and endorse its application as fair and proper.\(^5\) I shall argue that the oppressively phthoneros nature of divinity, working in tandem with the subordinate theme of ‘atonement’ for an ancestor’s crime, is explicitly foregrounded as the explanation for Croesus’ fate, which is presented as a tragedy that should evoke our pity. The tacit assumption that Croesus’ sufferings must correlate with

\(^5\) Clearly commentators use the term ‘divine justice’ to mean different things. Some appear to conflate ‘gods who punish injustice’ with ‘gods who are just’ (both of which might casually be referred to as ‘divine justice’), and take examples of divine punishment of crime (or vengeance for impiety) as proof that all misfortune is a palliative punishment imposed by a benevolent divinity (cf. §1.9 n.218). These are, however, distinct theological positions, though the confusion is easy in cultures where the belief in god is invariably alloyed to the belief that the world is benignly or benevolently governed. Rarely, however, is a clear or stable definition of ‘divine justice’ given.
desert—what Lurie calls ‘the denial of tragedy’—has led scholars to vilify Croesus to a greater or lesser degree, and to impose themes upon the narrative that are demonstrably absent, so as to make his misfortunes appear to be the ‘fair’ and appropriate punishment for his flaws in judgement and character, or even to present his disasters as entirely self-incurred events for which the gods cannot be considered responsible in any way. A theological dogma has thus given rise to a particular reading of the narrative dynamic and Croesus’ character which can be traced to a tradition of apologetic scholarship that reached its akmê in the late nineteenth century.

Herodotus justifies beginning his inquiry with Croesus by the statement that he is ‘the first man of whom I know to begin unjust deeds against the Greeks’ (1.5.3) and subjected them to paying tribute: before Croesus all the Greeks were free (1.6.3, claims which Herodotus has to frame carefully and qualify to fit with his other statements). Later he tells how Croesus attacked the Ionians and the Aeolians, ‘bringing various charges against each: inventing greater charges against those whom he could, but petty charges against others’ (1.26.3). But this important theme, by which Herodotus justifies beginning his Histories with Croesus and imposes a semi-formal structure on the work, has been inflated into an all-encompassing expansionist mania, which causes Croesus to campaign against Cyrus and misinterpret the Delphic oracle (1.53-6) blinded by a ‘desire for land’ (1.73.1). En route to Persia, it is often claimed, Croesus unjustly attacks and enslaves the innocent Syrians (1.76), and justice is finally served when Croesus is defeated by Cyrus and admits that he is himself aitios (1.91), thereby accepting the ‘guilt’ for the fall of his empire and the death of Atys (1.43-5) and recognizing the error of his former impious claims that a god was responsible (aitios) for both (1.45.2, 1.87.3-4).

It can be admitted at once that, by picking out individual acts of injustice and the subsequent misfortune, it is possible to reassemble the component parts of Croesus’ story into a divine-justice montage whereby the maniacal imperialist gets his deserts from divinities who cut the tyrant down to size (or alternatively that—in the world of this story at least—those who are unjust and foolish destroy themselves and thereby
get their comeuppance). But it is important to recognize that Herodotus chooses a fundamentally different narrative pattern for most of the story of Croesus, and that interpretations like the fabrication given above (or the countless variants that have been proposed from the sixteenth century to the present) do not stand up to close examination.

The story of Atys and Adrastus, as scholars have long appreciated, contains particularly tragic elements in both the colloquial and the formal senses of the word.\(^6\) Attempts to introduce interpretations in terms of ‘crime’, ‘guilt’, ‘error’, or ‘sin’ and consequent ‘punishment’ have been unpersuasive.\(^7\) While *nemesis* and the ‘*phthoneros* god’ are, Solon implies, to be acknowledged, at no point do the narrator or characters suggest that the ‘misfortunate’ nature of the human lot is a state of affairs that corresponds with ‘justice’, or that ‘thinking oneself the happiest’ is anything more than rather insufferably arrogant—there is no cause for conflating it with ‘impiety’ or ‘injustice’. To urge ‘caution’ in the face of man’s lowly position in the cosmic order is not equivalent to stating the ‘justice’ of the system.

\(^{6}\) For tragic features in the story of Gyges and Candaules see Fohl (1913), Lesky (1953), (1977), Stahl (1968); for those in the story of Atys and Adrastus see Meunier (1968), Rieks (1975), Chiasson (2003); for tragedy in the story of Croesus see Page (1962), Laurot (1995).

\(^{7}\) It cannot be accepted that Croesus’ pity (κατοικτίαρσι, 1.45.2) of Adrastus (resulting in the latter’s suicide), like his purification of Adrastus of his accidental murder on his arrival in Sardis (1.35), is a transgression of the rules of ‘divine justice’ which Croesus contravened by not dismissing or killing Adrastus (urged by, e.g., Ranulf (1933/4.1), 40-1, and Darbo-Peschanski (1987), 61). The ritual purification of the foreigner with accidental blood-guilt is performed in accordance with Lydian *nomoi* (which are very similar to the Greek, Herodotus notes, 1.35.1-2), not a ‘misplaced compassion’ that ‘threatened’ the entire community by allowing Adrastus to ‘escape punishment’ (Ranulf (1933/4), 41). Croesus’ recognition that Adrastus is merely a blameless and unfortunate instrument of divine *nemesis* (1.45.2) is an almost perfect repetition of the narrator’s comments (1.34), rather than an interference with ‘divine justice’ (cf. Darbo-Peschanski (1987), 61: Croesus lets Adrastus off, ‘mais les dieux ne l’entendent pas ainsi et n’ont de cesse qu’Adraste meure. La justice humaine est donc privée de toute efficacité quand elle interfère avec celle des dieux’). Those who assert Croesus’ culpability for misinterpreting the dream and proposing only a ‘short-termist’ solution (‘kurzfristig’, Lößfler (2008), 19) to the prophecy of Atys’ death miss the point. Croesus’ response to the dream is only incorrect in that he attempted to evade what was inevitable by trying to save Atys’ life, an error we might forgive a father fearing the death of his only acknowledged son. As Herodotus tells it, no solution could have worked (ὡς οἱ τὴν ἀληθείαν ἔδειξαν τῶν μελλόντων γένεσθα κακῶν, 1.34). Contrast Meuss (1888), 8-10 (who cites the dream’s warning of Croesus as an example of ‘benevolent’ divine warning); Lößfler (2008), 19 (developing Marg’s (1953) claims of ‘selbstsicherheit’): ‘Es fällt auf, dass Kroisos sich nicht darum bemüht, Informationen über den Traum zu bekommen: keine Deutungen werden eingeholt, er stellt keine Frage nach der Ursache und Bedeutung des Traums. Er gibt sich mit seiner Interpretation zufrieden und unterlässt es, mögliche andere Erkenntnisergebnisse einzuholen. Er zieht nicht in Betracht, dass seine Interpretation unzureichend sein könnte.’ There is nothing in the text that encourages us to see in Croesus paternal concern ‘another attempt to cross the boundary of the humanly possible and to usurp a quasi divine position’ for which Croesus must then be punished, Kindt (2006), 42.
At 1.46 the narrative moves on to the expansion of the Persian empire, which rouses Croesus from his two-year period of mourning, and Croesus’ subsequent campaign against the Persians, which results in the sack of Sardis, where Solon’s speech is explicitly recalled (1.86-8). The prophecy ‘given to Croesus in his former good prosperity (ἐὔσεστοι)’ (but postponed for obvious thematic reasons until sack of Sardis) that his mute son would speak ‘on a day that was anolbos’ echoes both the concepts and the terminology of Solon’s speech. It is clear, then, that Solon’s warnings about the ‘grudging’ and ‘troubling’ nature of god inform the fall of Sardis as well.

Yet there are important differences between the story of the death of Atys (as the manifestation of the nemesis that took Croesus) and the attack on Persia. After his initial arrogant overconfidence and dismissal of Solon (1.30-3), for which he is so terribly punished, Croesus seems to suffer a significant knock to his confidence, contrary to an enduring misreading first set in print by Heinrich Meuss in 1888. Meuss argued explicitly what many subsequent commentators have tacitly assumed: that Croesus, motivated by expansionism and blinded by foolishness, misinterprets the helpful advice offered by the Delphic oracle, and himself brings about his own downfall. This claim, as nineteenth-century commentators were aware, is directly linked to the thesis of divine benevolence and closely related to the originally Platonic dogma that god is good: if something goes badly for Croesus it is to be explained by his own shortcomings, which fully cause and justify his misfortune.

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8 Meuss (1888), 9-10: ‘Wenn in anderen Fällen der richtige Sinn des Orakels nicht getroffen wird, so ist das von Herodots Standpunkt aus nur die Schuld des Empfangenden, nicht die des Gebenden, wie es Kroisos richtig erkennt (1.91), und nur ein Wahnsinniger wie Kleomenes kann dem Gotte Betrug vorwerfen (6.75; 80). So erweisen sich die Orakel und sonstige Vorandeutungen durchweg als Äusserungen einer Gottheit, der es daran liegt, Wahrheit mitzuteilen, das heisst doch, einer wohlwollenden Gottheit’ (my italics); Likewise Darbo-Peschanski (1987), 74-82: ‘Le texte de l’oracle est toujours l’objet d’un contre-sens ou de la negligence des consultants, et l’abondance du vocabulaire de l’erreur dans ce context le prouve assez’ (75); Kindt (2006), 41 (my italics): ‘Because he overlooks the difference between the human and divine spheres, Croesus deprives the oracular language of its semantics. He cannot benefit from the oracular knowledge. He does not make use of the independent perspective of the gods to find out what is going on in his world’. Before Meuss, those who defended the story of Croesus as an exemplum of ‘divine justice’ tended, far from ignoring the deceptive oracles, to view them as punishment for crimes (further §1.5)—the position revived by Lloyd-Jones (1971), 60-4—rather than as ‘helpful’ advice misinterpreted.

9 Meuss (1888), 11, 21 cited §1.5 nn.109-10.
But Croesus emerges from the death of Atys a changed figure who is actively deceived by successive oracles into attacking the Persians and suffering defeat. Aware of the threat constituted by Cyrus, Croesus is now extremely cautious in deciding on a course of action to destroy the Persian power before it grows too great (1.46.1). He therefore engages in the elaborate testing of the oracles, followed by the propitiation, and almost excessive questioning of the two whose answers lead him to consider them *apseudês* (‘without lies’, 1.49) and from whom he believes he received *alêtheiê* (‘the truth’, 1.46.3, 55.1). Croesus is, of course, wrong: the oracles will, ultimately, be neither *a*-pseudês (‘not-lying’) nor, in its etymological sense, *a*-lêthês (‘true’, literally ‘not-hiding’), for when it comes to consultation for which the test was merely preparation—what to do about the threat of the growing Persian might?—the oracles give a misleadingly ambiguous answer in concert with an instruction which promotes misinterpretation. ‘If he campaigns against the Persians’, begins the oracular reply, ‘he will destroy a great empire’. The advice continues: he should ‘make an alliance with those whom he found to be the strongest of the Greeks’ (1.53.3). When Croesus then asks again whether his monarchy will be ‘long-lasting’ (πολυχρόνιος, 1.55.1) he uses a term that echoes his words to Atys (σε ὀλιγοχρόνιον ἔσσησαι, 1.38.1, cf. Theogn. 1020), reinforcing the impression that Croesus’ newfound caution is consequent to his bereavement. As the conflict with Persia draws near the narrator comments repeatedly that the oracle is Croesus’ prime

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10 Croesus’ great caution in these episodes is astutely stressed by Lloyd-Jones (1971), 61-2; for the narrator’s implication (1.55) that ‘Croesus’ barrage of enquiries was excessive’—contrary to the claims of the Pythia at 1.91—see Parker (1985), 313, and Pelling (2006b), 153 and n.46. The oracle, in fact, has a slightly different emphasis from the earlier narrative: the Pythia blames Croesus for not consulting a second time to discover which empire he would destroy (1.91.4). But Croesus did, in effect, do this when he asked whether his monarchy would be ‘long-lasting’ (πολυχρόνιος, 1.53.4). In return, of course, he received another riddle. On whether the testing of the oracles is ‘impious’, a common but unsubstantiated claim, see Christ (1994), 190-1 (with bibliography at 190 n.67), who convincingly argues that it is not.

11 Kindt (2006), 38, thinks the second line of the oracle ‘is meant to hint to Croesus that Apollo can see more than he, and that things can turn out to be different than they appear at first sight. Croesus, however, seems to turn a blind eye to such hints.’ Likewise Barker (2006), 11-12: ‘To measure the immeasurable and comprehend the dumb signifies—if we can say it signifies any one thing—an excess of signification. It demands careful reflection and interpretation, yet Croesus pays it no heed’. I am as oblivious as Croesus to the rule that a statement of oracular omniscience is to be read as a warning of impending oracular deception and hidden meanings. The oracle’s superior and superhuman knowledge is the basic assumption of all consultants of all oracles (cf. Xen. *Mem.* 1.1.6-9) and the oracle replies in poetic but crucially literal and comprehensible language, without a hint of deception.
motivation for war (singled out by the word *malista*, ‘especially’), to which his desire for land and to avenge his Median kinsman Astyages are secondary:

Ἅστρατεύετο δὲ ὁ Κροῖς ἐπὶ τὴν Καππαδοκίην τῶνδε εἴνεκα, καὶ γῆς ἵμερῳ προσκτήσασθαι πρὸς τὴν ἐωστοῦ μοῖραν βουλόμενος, καὶ μάλιστα τῷ χρηστήριῳ πίσυνος ἓων, καὶ τείσασθαι θέλων ὑπὲρ Αστυάγεος Κύρον. (1.73.1)

Croesus led the expedition into Cappadocia for the following reasons: because, in his desire for land, he wanted to add another portion to his own, and in particular because he trusted in the oracle, and because he wanted to take vengeance on Cyrus because of Astyages.

A rather guileless trust is thus repeatedly highlighted as the salient characteristic that leads Croesus, like the Spartans (*χρησμῷ κιβδήλῳ πίσυνοι*, 1.66.3), to pursue disastrous expeditions. ¹² Both the oracle given to Croesus and to the Spartans are, in turn, described as *kibdēlos* (‘deceptive’):

Τὰ Κροῖσος ἑπιμεμφόμενον τῷ Κύρῳ ἐγς τε τὰ χρηστήρια ἑπεμπε εἰ στρατεύηται ἐπὶ Πέρσας, καὶ δὴ καὶ, ἀπίκομενον χρησμῷ κιβδήλου, ἐλλίπος πρὸς ἐωστοῦ τὸν χρησμὸν εἶναι, ἐστρατεύετο ἐς τὴν Περσέων μοίραν. (1.75.2)

Croesus, blaming Cyrus for these things [i.e. the fall of his Median ally, Astyages], sent to the oracle to ask whether he should campaign against the Persians, and when the deceptive oracle arrived, thinking that it was favourable towards him, he campaigned against the land of the Persians.

The numerous attempts to ignore the word *kibdēlos*, ¹³ to translate it neutrally (e.g. as ‘ambiguous’) so as to allow room for Croesus’ self-deception, ¹⁴ or actually to reverse

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¹² ‘Trust’ (or at least the verb *πιθομαι*), it should be noted, is the typical response to oracular commands, aside from a few cases where individuals disobey or ignore deceptive oracles or dreams and thereby escape disaster (Sabacus, 2.139.1; Aristodicus, 1.159-60). For a much-contested and ultimately successful interpretation described as ‘obeying/trusting’ the oracle/god see the Athenian response to the Wooden Wall oracle: Ἕθος ἡ σφ.\.\.\.βουλευομένοι ἐπίντα ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα τὸν βάρβαρον δέκεσθαι τῆς νησί πανδημία, τῶν ἰδίων πιθομένος (7.144.3).

¹³ Most who deny divine responsibility and stress the theme of self-destruction do not mention the narrator’s comments, instead choosing their own substitutes: Marg (1953), 1105, Kirchberg (1965), 26-7, Christ (1994), 191, and Saïd (2002), 136 call the oracles ‘ambiguous’/zweideutig. Nagy (1990), Munson (2006b), 42, Kindt (2006), and Eidinow (2011), 93-118, do not mention the term. Meuss (1888), 9, seems to appreciate the awkwardness of this word for his theory but rests content with implying that it might mean something other than the obvious (it is a ‘mehrdeutigen Sprach’).

¹⁴ Pelling (2006b), 154 n.49, citing Kroll (2000), 89, argues for *kibdēlos* as meaning something of ‘mixed’ quality, by analogy with debased coinage (made by mixing more and less valuable metals), rather than ‘false’: Croesus must, he implies, separate the wheat from the chaff.
its implications remain unconvincing. The word is used three times in the Histories, once of a bribed oracle (5.91.2, cf. 63.1, 66.1, 90.1), and twice of genuine oracles which lead the Spartans and Croesus into disaster, both of which are actively deceptive rather than neutrally ambiguous. Whether or not the term has its origin in archaic forging techniques, its wholly negative metaphorical sense was established early on: kibdélos is found in Plato in opposition to ‘true’ (ûληθής), and Theognis states that kibdélos money finds its human analogue in ‘lying’ (ψυδρός) and ‘deceptive’ (δόλλον) friends. The minority of scholars not committed to the assumption that Herodotus’ gods are benevolent have recognized in kibdélos a direct statement by the narrator that Croesus, like the Spartans, was deceived. Several scholars attempt a direct contrast between Croesus’ unsuccessful interpretation of this oracle and the successful interpretation of the Wooden Wall oracle by Themistocles and the Athenians. It is often claimed that this comparison indicates the superiority of interpretation within a ‘rational’, ‘Hellenic’, or ‘democratic’ context (as opposed to a pleasure-driven, monarchical, oriental context). This comparison is misleading in several ways. More importantly, an analysis of all the

15 Löfler (2008), 32, argues that the narrator compares the oracle with false coinage and thus indicates that the responsibility for ensuring the validity of the oracle lies with the checker of the coinage, not the provider (and that Croesus should have availed himself of more information). This simply assumes what it claims it demonstrates: that when doing business with a thief one is morally obliged to keep a close eye on one’s pocket, and the thief bears no responsibility. Only according to this peculiar definition of ‘Schuld’ is Löfler’s exculpation of Apollo successful. Croesus is clearly deceived by the god, and the impulse to attack Cyrus is encouraged and consolidated by the oracle. This point is clearly made by, e.g., Schuler (1869), 40 (cf. §1.5).

16 The Spartan oracle (1.66.2), whose deceptive nature is never doubted, comes within the excursus on Sparta (1.65-70) and is thus masterfully nested within Croesus’ story, providing a proleptic paradigm for the oracular deception of Croesus (1.53).

17 Laws, 728d1: τὰς δ’ αὐτής τιμάς δὲ σκοπεῖν, καὶ τούτων τίνες ἄληθες καὶ ὅσια κιβδήλοις, τοῦτο δὲ νομοθέτου.

18 Theognis 119-23, see also 975. Democritus 68 B 82 (DK) writes that: ‘Those who in conversation do everything, but in action do nothing, are kibdélos and hypocrits’ (κιβδήλοι καὶ ἀγαθοφανεῖς οἱ λόγοι μὲν ἄπαντα, ἐργοὶ δὲ οὐδὲν ἐργοντες). Here kibdélos shares with agathophanês the implication of seeming, but not being, good. Particularly aposite is Democritus’ warning: ‘If you bestow a kharis, check in advance that the recipient is not kibdëlos and will not give you bad things in return for good’ (B 93 DK: χαριζόμενος προσκέπτεσ τὸν λαμβάνοντα, μὴ κακὸν ἄντ’ ἄγαθον κιβδῆλος ἐδών ἁπόδον.)

19 Flower (1991), 71 & n.96 considers the term a ‘pejorative’ criticism indicating deception. Harrison (2000), 152 n.109, and Barker (2006), 15-16, seem inclined to understand the term as ‘deception’, but suggest that this need not be critical. But see discussion below.

20 Kirchberg (1965), 92-3, sees ‘das genaue Gegenbild’ of the rational Athenians at 7.142-3 (characterized by ‘überlegenden Abwägens’) in Croesus’ reckless trust (characterized by ‘unbesonnenen Vertrauen’). The comparison is also made by Meuss (1888), 10, and Barker (2006), 19-23.

21 Contrary to Kirchberg’s claims (1965), 93, the Histories does not offer two polarized paradigms of interpretation (‘sober interpretation’ versus ‘frivolous error’ followed respectively by ‘acquiescence’ and ‘rebellion’) which explain and assign blame to any subsequent disasters. If Themistocles were to
oracular consultations and interpretations in the *Histories* (many of which are famous narratives from diverse sources, used in different narrative contexts) does not reveal a neat set of ‘rules’ about what sort of debates will be successful, and which unsuccessful. Herodotus, as argued in appendix seven, clearly allows several views about what sort of messages oracles deliver: some are the classic ‘deliverance from evil’ (λύσις κακῶν) which tend to be helpful, unambiguous guides to the future, while others are expressly described as visions of what will happen and cannot be avoided (these are typically considered more literary—they serve a clear dramatic purpose, and are known from Homer through to tragedy).\(^{22}\) It is only by eliding the difference between these fundamentally different (if not logically incompatible) ideas of what oracles do and insisting that all oracles are ‘helpful’ that Meuss was able to claim divine ‘benevolence’.\(^{23}\) The notion of ‘helpful’ oracles was probably connected with divine *philanthrôpêia* in Herodotus’ lifetime (see Xen. *Mem.* 1.4.15, 4.3.12, cf. §2.12), and Herodotus may have known of it and perhaps even made this connection (6.28, 98). In his dramatic narratives, however, he often adopts the ‘curse of Cassandra’ model of prophecy (almost always the case in dreams, but also sometimes with oracles): they impart a tragic foreknowledge that merely compounds suffering perhaps with the exquisite irony of being self-fulfilling (e.g. 1.34, cf. §3.6-7). To conflate these fundamentally different logics of divine communication is to miss a great deal of Herodotus’ dramatic art.

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\(^{22}\) Dramatic function noted by, e.g., Harrison (2000), 231. These two types of prophecy/oracle are discussed in appendix 7.

\(^{23}\) Above n.8.
The case that Croesus’ defeat is ‘just punishment’ for his ‘imperialism, gratuitous aggression and cruelty’ is further undermined by the fact that a desire for land is only once ascribed to Croesus where it is subordinated to the trust in the deceptive oracle (note μάλιστα at 1.73.1), while the three other discussions of Croesus’ motives mention his desire to forestall the growth of the Persian empire (clearly defensive in purpose, 1.46.1), his ‘mistaking the oracle’ (hamartanó, 1.71.1), and finally his blame of Cyrus for overthrowing his kinsman Astyages alloyed to the arrival of the kibdêlos oracle (1.75.2). Desire for land and conquest is a late and subordinate motive, offered alongside a desire for defence and revenge, and two mentions of trust in oracles. Rather than revealing a ‘progression’ in Croesus attitude, it occurs in only the third of four discussions of his motivation. When we recall that the basic plot Herodotus accepts for Croesus' downfall is that the Lydian king is defeated after having first invaded the Persian empire, we appreciate the lengths to which Herodotus goes to avoid a simplistic narrative of 'just deserts'. It is to ignore Herodotus’ emphasis and to impose one’s own concerns with crime and punishment to say, with Löffler:

Bei Kroisos steht der Wert ‘Expansion’ im Vordergrund, was durch die späte Einführung der Vergeltungsabsicht unterstrichen wird. Kroisos benutzt die Möglichkeit, Vergeltung zu üben, um dem übergeordneten Wert Expansion zu folgen.

Yet this reading is very old. We can see a tendency towards moralizing vilification of Croesus in the first English translation by B.R., where Croesus’ motives are portrayed as expansionist from the start, and the reference to trust in the oracle at 1.73.1 is simply omitted (like Solon’s reference to divine phthonos at 1.32.1),

26 The ‘progression’ interpretation is offered by many, e.g. Marg (1953), 1105; Immerwahr (1966), 158; Stahl (1975), 10; Fisher (1992), 358 n.74. It is criticized by Pelling (2006b), 153-4 and n.46.
27 Löffler (2008), 35. Cf. Dumézil (1985), 67, for whom Croesus’ story is a moralistic fable of three mistakes with three punishments, with his primary ‘sin’ being hubris; Barker reverses the motivation: ‘Croesus attempts to enlist divine sanction for his expansionist project’ (2006), 2.
28 1.46.1: ‘Revolving and castying with himselfe what meanes he might use to atchieve the government of Persia, before it grew to be bigger’. Faith in the Delphic oracle is simply left out at 1.73.1: ‘Croesus…was greatlye desyrous both to joyn unto his owne kyngdome a land so battle and plentifull, and then also to revenge Cyrus in the behalf of Astyages…’ (Valla, from whom B.R. translates, does not omit this: ‘Cupidus cum hanc partem soli foecundi suo adiciendi, tum vel magis, fiducia oraculorum, Cyrum ulciscendi’, cited from Stephanus (1566)).
anticipating the tenor of many recent discussions. Although Croesus himself raises the possibility of invasion, the very act of asking a trusted oracle an open question (‘should I do x?’) rather than a closed question (‘how can I best do x?’)—which assumes the oracle’s assent) implies a willingness to abandon the plan if the answer is in the negative. Both question formulae were regularly put in the classical period (Croesus is thus immune to Socrates’ rebuke of Xenophon), and this too tells against the position that it is an unstoppable expansionist mania that sends Croesus to war.

It is clear that the suppression of oracular deception has developed from a self-conscious attempt to prove the ubiquity of divine benevolence in the *Histories* to an unselfconscious assumption on the part of scholarship that the gods generally help those who deserve it, and do not use underhand methods like deception. These theological assumptions have had a profound influence on the interpretation of the narrative pattern and characterization, and alternative explanations for Croesus’ failure have been found: indeed Meuss’s thesis of self-deception has been adopted and expanded.

In tandem with the scholarly stress on blind ‘imperialism’, Croesus’ ‘irrationality’ and devotion to pleasure have been the focus of numerous commentators: Croesus, it is argued, shares with Polycrates the flaw of allowing ‘pleasure’ to dominate his own ‘rationality’.

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29 Xen. *Anab.* 3.1.5-7. Parker (1985), 308, discusses these oracular types.

30 Marg (1953) holds Croesus’ ‘self-confidence’ (*Selbstsicherheit*) and ‘self-favouring bias’ (*Selbstbefangenheit*) to be the dominant factors. Huber (1963), 50-1, see a ‘Verblendet[e]r Selbstsicherheit’ in Croesus. Kirchberg (1965), 18, 23, argues that we should talk not of the god’s deception (*Verblendung*) of Croesus, but of Croesus’ own blindness (*Blindheit*), and self-deception (*Selbsttäuschung*). Kindt (2006), 40-1, sees ‘excessive pleasure’ and ‘blindness’ as the cause for his failure to ‘benefit from the oracular knowledge’. Discussing the themes of 1.32, Pelling (2006a) 105-6, argues that Croesus emerges as ‘particularly likely to act in ways that will encompass his own destruction’.

31 The thematic opposition between ‘pleasure’ and ‘truth’ is stressed by Flory (1978), 150, who admits only two exceptions to the rule that laughter and pleasure indicate a ‘character flaw’ which *gives rise to* their preordained misfortunes (exceptions being 1.31, 3.22, although the former does not, in fact, problematize the ominous note he sees in the word); the opposition is also found in Kirchberg (cf. n.32, below), Lateiner (1977), Van der Veer (1996), 21-2 (cf. §3.5.3), Kindt (2006) 40-1, and Löfler (2008), 24 (nn.64 & 67), 173, who sees ‘das Irrational’ as an important aspect in the disasters suffered by Croesus and Cyrus. Munson (2001), 184, sees similar hints in Solon’s speech: ἄτη and ἐπιθυμίη imply respectively ‘the mental folly of one who has brought misfortune on oneself as a result of
to feel *hêdonê* (in intensifying compounds or formulae) on receiving both of the riddling oracles (1.54.1: ὑπερήσθη; 1.56.1: πολλὸν τι μάλιστα πάνων ἦσθη), but the opposition with ‘reason’ is manufactured. The sensation of *hêdonê* is perfectly compatible with the heeding of sage and moderate advice: at 1.27 Croesus is ‘greatly pleased’ (κάρτα... ἦσθη) at Sandanis’ logical argumentation (*epilogos*) against an expansionist plan, and abandons his naval expedition. *Hêdonê* is found in compound with ὑπερ- in the context of reasoned deliberation at 1.90.1 (ὑπερήδετο, ὦς οἱ ἐδόκεε εὖ ὑποτίθεσθαι),32 where it describes Cyrus’ pleasure at Croesus’ suggestion that the Persians should be ordered to dedicate a tithe to Zeus to forestall Persian *hubris*. To feel pleasure at someone’s words clearly indicates approbation (whether emotional or intellectual) and need imply no suspension of reason or an absence of moderation.33 Long, too, has urged another flaw in Croesus: his ‘lax’ attitude is manifested in his conversation with Solon. The expression ‘on the third or fourth day’ (1.30.1) is, Long argues, focalized through Croesus and contrasts Lydian imprecision with Hellenic accuracy (as represented by Solon’s mathematical tour-de-force, 1.32.2).34 This loose formula, however, is a regular feature of Herodotus’ narratorial voice (e.g. 1.1.3, 126.1, 3.42.1). The consistent attempt to make Croesus ‘guilty’ and ‘responsible’ for his misfortunes through flaws in character and judgement (which enable misfortune to be categorized as punishment or self-destruction) has led to the deployment of excessive ingenuity, as it has in the analysis of the character of Xerxes at the start of Book 7 (cf. §3.6-7) and the story of Polycrates and the ring (cf. §3.5.3).

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32 Indicating that Kirchberg’s (1965), 92-3, opposition between Croesus’ ‘pleasure’, ‘expectation’ and ‘trust’ and the Athenians’ ‘thought’ and ‘consideration’ (embodied by the verbs βουλεύεσθαι und δοκεῖν amongst others) is foreign to Herodotus. The concepts co-occur here as they do at 7.144.3: Ἐδοξέ τε σῷ μετὰ τὸ χρηστῆριον βουλευομένους ἐπίδοτα ἑπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα τὸν βάρβαρον δέκεσθαι τῇ σι νησὶ πανόμηι, τῷ θεῷ πεθομένους.  
33 Flory (1978), 146, must significantly simplify Herodotus’ mental world to make it amenable to these polarities. While literary motifs are an important part of his writing, it is overly reductionist to insist that Herodotus can have only one association with any word or concept and that, in every case, ‘joy, laughter, and self gratification arise from gratification of the senses’.  
34 Long (1987), 69.
The vision of Croesus’ story I argue for here is more tragic than that which has flourished amongst Herodotus’ interpreters since the sixteenth century. This has both a theological implication—that the world within which the story unfolds is not one governed by benevolent divinities in which all get their deserts—and a dramatic or emotional one—that our sympathies lie with Croesus and, in the crudest terms, that his sufferings are greater than his errors deserve. I thus resist both the theological and the emotional presentation of Croesus’ story by those who assert or assume divine benevolence and lay all responsibility for misfortune on the crimes, irrationality, and self-deception of the unfortunate individual himself. This is the express thesis of Meuss, to whom many of the tendencies note above seem to owe their origin (see §1.5, §1.9).

As a final thought for this section I would like to return to the fact that, at the close of the Croesus logos, Croesus is identified as αἵτις for the ἁμαρτάς that leads to his misfortunes. The word ἁμαρτάς occurs in two different contexts in Croesus’ interaction with Cyrus and the oracle: once to describe what Croesus inherited from Gyges (1.91.1, where it refers directly to the ancestral curse that Croesus inherits), and once in Croesus’ acceptance that the ἁμαρτάς was his own and not the god’s (1.91.6), presumably here referring to his error of judgement in reading the oracle (cf. the narrator’s comment: ἁμαρτῶν τοῦ χρησμοῦ, 1.71.3). These words are commonly taken to be equivalent to ‘sin’ or ‘guilt’ and adduced as support for the interpretation of the scene in terms of ‘divine justice’, and as a ‘correction’ of Croesus’ statement to Adrastus that it was not Adrastus but rather some god (θεὸν κοῦ τις) who was aitios for the death of Atys (1.45.2, cf. Il. 3.164). Likewise, it is suggested that the oracle rebuffs Croesus’ claim that his invasion occurred because ‘it was somehow dear to (a/the) daimôn that it should happen thus’ (1.87.4) and indicates that god was, in fact, not involved in or responsible for any of Croesus’ disasters.

The meaning of ἁμαρτία (of which ἁμαρτάς is the Ionic form) has been much debated in the context of tragedy and Aristotelian tragic theory. In the Poetics a misfortune caused by a hamartia (which Aristotle sees as proper to tragedy) is
opposed to one arising out of ‘baseness’ or ‘depravity’ (1453a7-12); the long-standing interpretation of this passage to make *hamartia* a grave moral or condemnable character flaw can be traced through Christianizing interpretations of Aristotle and tragedy that emerged in the sixteenth and subsequent centuries. Although Aristotle’s discussion has perhaps led to this word having an exaggerated association with tragedy in the modern mind, the notion of a grave, unintentional or unavoidable ‘error’ (perhaps predetermined and predicted in a self-fulfilling prophecy) which leads fortunate and well-reputed individuals to experience pitiable and disproportionate suffering is found in both Sophoclean and Aeschylean tragedy, as well as Herodotus' Croesus *logos*. But the conceptual framework in which the word *aitios* (‘responsible’, ‘cause’) and *hamartas* (‘error’) are situated is not the same as the conceptual framework which surround Christian notions of ‘guilt’ and ‘sin’, which are typically conceived of as arising completely independently of God, situated in a world under benevolent divine guidance, and as serving a punishing or corrective role. This is not the theological world in which Croesus’ drama unfolds.

The first *hamartas* is the result of two wrongs—one against Candaules’ Queen, one against Candaules himself—which the victims impose upon one another by means of their reluctant servant, Gyges. This *hamartas* is inherited from Gyges by Croesus without any personal control. The second *hamartas* is Croesus’ ‘mistaken’ interpretation of the oracle (*ἁµαρτῶν τοῦ χρησµοῦ*, 1.71.3) which was itself ‘deceptive’ (*ἀπικοµένου χρησµοῦ κιβδήλου*, 1.75.2).

In this sense, then, Croesus suffers the exquisite irony of being the ‘cause’ of the fall of Sardis (through oracular misinterpretation), as well as the cause of his son’s death (by thinking himself the happiest and incurring *nemesis*, 1.34) and by purifying his son’s future killer and appointing him as guardian (1.44.1). Just as Croesus, in his pity, says to Adrastus ‘you are not *aitios* of this evil, except in as much as you did it unintentionally, but rather some god, who long ago showed me what would happen’ (1.44.2: implying that one can be *aitios* in the technical sense, but not truly ‘responsible’, as it were), we can say of Croesus that he was *aitios* in that his were

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35 μήτε διὰ κακίαν καὶ μοχθηρίαν μεταβάλλων εἰς τὴν δυστυχίαν ἄλλα δι’ ἁµαρτίαν τινὰ..., see Lucas (1968), *ad loc*.
36 See Lurie (2004), 78-91, (2012);
the hands and the mind that brought the events to pass, but the ultimate cause lay elsewhere. This is a sense very distant from the sense in which one bears ‘guilt’ in a Christian framework. It is, I think, the attempt to make the Greek paradigm cohere with the Christian one that has led to the tendencies observed throughout this chapter and the last: to remove the gods from Croesus’ destruction (except in so far as they ‘punish’ a ‘guilt’ that arises from him and him alone) and make Croesus’ character wholly ‘responsible’ or ‘guilty’ for the misfortunes he suffers.

37 As pointed out by many Christian commentators, e.g., J. Müller (1844), 325 (cited at §1.6.1 n.146).
4.3. Fate, Phthonos, Kharis, and Curse

The tale of Croesus, then, is a story with multiple causational threads tied to ‘supernatural forces’, which may strike the modern reader as something of a motley collection. These are: first, the ‘allotted’ downfall of Croesus predicted by the Delphic oracle (1.13), an inherited curse or tisis whose fulfilment is confirmed by another oracle at the end (1.91); second, Croesus’ personal relationship of reciprocal kharis with Apollo resulting from the king’s vast dedications which lead him to expect help in difficult circumstances and helpful guidance in oracles (implicit in Croesus’ charge that Apollo is ἀχάριστος, 1.90.4, denied by the oracle in the same terms: ἐχαρίσατό οἱ, 1.91.3); third, Solon’s statement that human olbos is transient, because god is phthoneros and tarakhôdês and man is sumphorê (1.32.4), which expresses in poetic and theological terms the narrator’s statements about the impermanence of human eudaimoniê and Croesus’ speech to Cyrus on the ‘circle of human affairs’ which does not allow the same people to be fortunate (εὐτυχεῖν) all the time (1.207.2); fourth, numerous localized stories which display the pattern of impiety/destruction of temples followed by divine affliction until the crime has been expiated or made up for on some other way (e.g. Alyattes’ affliction by an illness for destroying the temple of Athena Assêsï, 1.19-22).

The conflict between two of these strands was perceived by Herodotus himself, and presumably by the original source of the oracle given at 1.91: that Croesus, the most lavish benefactor of Apollo, should be so utterly undone in his military enterprises, undertaken on Delphic advice, seems to contradict the principle of kharis (which necessitates divine support). This, in turn, leads to the piece of theological apologetics which Herodotus cites at the end of the story, upholding the efficacy of divine/mortal kharis by maintaining the immutability of ‘the allotted distribution/fate’ (τὴν πεπρωμένην μοῖραν, 1.91.1): Loxias manages to postpone the sack of Sardis by a small period of time, and saves Croesus through the rain storm on the pyre showing that he is ‘dear to god and a good man’ (θεοφιλὴς καὶ ἄνήρ ἠγαθός,
This oracle does not clear up Herodotus’ view of several things we might, from a theological perspective, like to know. Were the oracles intended to deceive Croesus (while, perhaps, not lying outright, so that Croesus can still be said to be in some sense aitios, the cause of his own misfortune)? That Croesus accuses the oracles of ‘encouraging him’ (ἐπάρας, 1.87.3, 90.4), and that narrator calls the oracles ‘deceptive’ (κίβδηλος 1.75.2), would seem to suggests that this is the case. Apollo in Delphi, in other words was faced with a direct conflict of interests: he was the mouthpiece that was to lead Croesus to disaster, and he was the benefactor of Croesus and thus obliged to do him service. Whether or not we are satisfied with the answer to this theological conflict, it is clear that Herodotus anticipated this problem and crafted his narrative so as to emphasize it, before introducing the oracular 'solution'.

Another potential difficulty, which Herodotus gives no sign of recognizing, is that the great prosperity of Croesus and Sardis (1.29) is implicitly related to the ‘nemesis from god’ (1.34) which takes Croesus (and the phthoneros and tarakhôdês nature of god, 1.32.1), and yet Croesus’ prodigious generosity, which is enabled by that same wealth, earns him the favour of Loxias Apollo at certain points (delay of the sack of Sardis by three years and Croesus’ personal salvation on the Pyre, as the Lydians and the Delphic oracle tell it, 1.87.1-2, 91.3). We might well wonder whether wealth brings a lavish dedicator divine phthonos or divine kharis, and feel sure that it cannot bring both at once. While these problems are not logically insurmountable (if one is prepared to deploy theological rationalization of the sort found at 1.91 and, for example, subordinate kharis to divine phthonos as divine kharis is subordinated to moira in that oracle) it can fairly be said that this question receives no answer in the

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38 This notion of being ‘beloved to god’ on the basis of one’s services to god is, apparently, attacked by Democritus in favour of the gods as lovers of the just: ‘the only people dear to god are those who are enemies of injustice’ (B 217 DK: μόνοι θεοφιλέες, ὃσοι ἐχθρὸν τὸ ἀδικεῖν). But it is an explicit theological assumption in the Hippocratic Airs, Waters, Places where an ingenious case is made against the argument that the ‘female disease’ is particularly ‘divine’ (22). If it were particularly divine, the argument goes, the disease would affect all people equally, or even affect the rich less than the poor, ‘if the gods rejoice when they are worshipped by men, and give kharis in return’ (εἰ χαίρουσιν οἱ θεοί καὶ θαμμαζόμενοι ὑπ’ ἀνθρώπων, καὶ ἀντὶ τουτέων χάριτας ἀποδιδόσαν). But in fact the disease affects only the rich and therefore it is not divine.
text, and illustrates a natural tension between two fundamental assumptions of Greek religious thought, though perhaps ones that typically operated in different explanatory and literary contexts.

Two strands of thought which, to modern eyes, simply do not add up (or, rather, add up to too much) are the clear implication that Sardis is in particular danger of attracting divine *phthonos* because of its prosperity, and that it falls because of the ancestral curse on Croesus. Here we seem to see two different explanations for the fall of Sardis (one implicit, the other explicit), each of which we would consider sufficient. As has long been often observed, this type of ‘overmotivation’ is common to archaic religious thought, and is also common to modern thinking which is capable of sustaining multiple different explanations without choosing between them.

In chapters one and two we saw many attempts by scholars to form a synthesis of the theological principles just described focusing on ‘balance’ (*tisis*), ‘divine justice’, divine ‘benevolence’, divine ‘malevolence’, or the immutability of Fate (see esp. §1.5, §2.9). While such synthesizing or reconciling tactics are clearly not foreign to Herodotus (for he cites an elaborate example at 1.91), to create them on his behalf does not aid our understanding. The scholarly tendency to synthesize, order, and suppress individual ideas so as to forge a unity to which the author nowhere points has been eloquently criticized by Harrison and Versnel. But the fact that consistency in the form of explicit rationalization is frequently absent from the text does not indicate that Herodotus is unaware of or unconcerned by inconsistency, or a lack of literary ‘unity’. It is remarkable, in fact, how much care Herodotus takes to avoid the difficulties that could easily have arisen, and to confront directly those that seem particularly troubling. Inherited curse (i.e. *tisis*) is explicitly reconciled with

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39 It is, I suspect, no coincidence that Croesus’ great dedications are made after the death of Atys so as to avoid having a prodigiously pious Croesus suffering *nemesis* from god, which might muddy the waters.

40 Dodds (1951), 30-2; Versnel (2011), 174 n.54; Harrison (2000).

41 Versnel (2011), esp. 187-90; (1990), 1-30, drawing on especially on Skinner (1969); Harrison (2000), cited at §1.6.2. I have not, however, seen a convincing proof for the implication that a diversity of metaphysical explanations is particularly characteristic of ‘religious’ thought; that is, that ‘secular’ thought does not allow numerous types of causational explanation to coexist without rationalization (cf. §1.8).
kharis (1.91). The fall of a terrible ‘nemesis from god’ (1.34-45) is brought to a close before Croesus begins his campaign of monumental pious dedication (1.50-2, 54). (And his lavish dedications to the shrine at of the Branchidae—which failed the test, 1.46.2-3, cf. 1.49—are postponed until after the close of the Croesus logos so that the dissonance is no longer striking, 1.92.1-2.) The inherited curse/itisis falls in the very generation when Sardis was at its peak in wealth and Solon visited Croesus, along with all the leading sages of Greece, to warn him of the phthoneros and tarachôdês nature of god. Individual acts of impiety and punishment occur, but are typically tied to smaller and more self-contained narratives: Alyattes’ destruction of the temple of Athena Assêsîê, affliction by a disease, rebuilding of the temple, and consequent recovery seems to have no wider contact with any other strands of theological thought (1.19-22).

Much of Herodotus’ narrative art, then, lies in weaving the many and diverse theological principles of his literary and cultic world into a coherent narrative, confronting some clear dissonances, and avoiding others by placement and emphasis, whether entirely consciously or subconsciously we cannot, of course, be sure. Recalling the themes raised in §1.7-8, the question of ‘contradiction’ must be carefully framed. Gould and Versnel assume that numerous words and phrases can each indicate very specific metaphysical positions, and that many of these are logically incompatible with one another. Yet almost any metaphysical position is capable of being framed so as to be compatible with any other, as the many attempts by scholars have shown (the syntheses of Hoffmeister, Lloyd, Lloyd-Jones, and Darbo-Peschanski examined in this thesis, for example, fail not in being internally inconsistent, but in the absence of textual validation). Yet the insistence by several scholars that Herodotus’ many theological ideas are often irreconcilable has been pushed too far. I see no reason to assume that, in Herodotus’ mind, Solon’s statement that ‘man is sumphorê’ indicated the type of true randomness that would seem to logically preclude every other type of metaphysical causation (cf. §1.8, §3.5.2). Likewise, to argue that moira at 1.91 refers only to inherited curses, and is always formed independently of the gods (and cannot incorporate the notion of mixed prosperity associated with the statement ‘god is phthonos’) is a very particular
theological view to attribute to Herodotus. It is, surely, made less plausible by the fact that Herodotus allows the *phthonos/*misfortune schema and the curse-atonement schema to operate in tandem. The answer, to my mind, is not that Herodotus simultaneously held a series of highly specific, logically incompatible theological propositions, but rather that he held a series of views which communicated certain ideas which have somewhat different implications, but yet were malleable enough to be reconciled when he felt it necessary. Crucially, too, Herodotus sometimes *did* feel that it was desirable to reconcile these positions. The fact that he often did not do so in the course of his highly dramatic and poetic narratives does not indicate that Herodotus could not, when he wished ‘look through the bones and sinews’ of Solon’s speech or any other in the appropriate context.\(^{42}\)

\(^{42}\) Harrison (2000), 40.
This thesis has several distinct but mutually reinforcing goals. The first chapter reviewed the vast literature on Herodotus' gods over the last few centuries, and argued that, on the topic of divine *phthonos*, there are several competing interpretative traditions, which predispose scholars to employ particular methodologies, or to find particular types of answer. It is hoped that, in addition to filling in the details of some very specific and very old scholarly arguments, this overview enables us to better understand the reception of Herodotus in Christian Europe, and encourages a more critical debate on how one should set about confronting the interpretative difficulties that inevitably occur in attempting to understand an ancient text. In the second chapter I argued that Herodotus' writing reveals a close connection between narrative typology, characterization, and theology, and that certain stories, genres, and narrative traditions entail particular visions of the metaphysical world which the narrator takes up and lays aside as he changes guise, topic, or style. This 'literary' or 'social' explanation for theological diversity is, I feel, often underappreciated in discussions of Herodotus' theological inconsistencies, where they are viewed primarily in theological terms as serving a role in the preservation of belief. The third chapter looked in detail at a long-debated idea—divine *phthonos*—and its role in Herodotus' dramatization of the human past and its relationship to his theory of history. My conclusions argue for a reading of the warner dialogues and the great misfortunes of the *Histories* as the tragic and literary centrepieces through which Herodotus communicates a particular vision of human life and history. This view has been defended at several points in the last three centuries, but is currently largely abandoned in favour of a moralizing reading, or one in which the warner dialogues lack any particular coherence or message. In the fourth chapter, I look at how the various theological principles in the *Histories* outlined in the earlier chapters are blended together in the context of one particular literary narrative, and offer an interpretation of the story of Croesus, in line with the ideas laid out in chapters two and three.
It has often been suggested that Herodotus attributes several different dispositions to the divine and imagines god(s) to act in a number of quite different ways, and thus would seem to lack a capacity for profound or systematic thought. A fair rejoinder might be that, if the gods are—at least in part—a means for exploring the experience of being human, we should expect Herodotus' divinities to be inconsistent, and to behave in various incompatible ways—sometimes rewarding the good and just, sometimes destroying them, sometimes being kind and helpful to man, sometimes unspeakably cruel. Anxiety about the apparent capriciousness of divine behaviour can, of course, be observed throughout Greek thought. To argue for a uniformly good or uniformly malevolent divinity would seem to require one to ignore, or explain away, much of one’s own experience, or else have recourse to various mysteries by which the diversity of experience is resolved to a single pattern. The lack of such dogmatic theological 'consistency' in the stories of the Histories would, on this view, seem to indicate Herodotus' realism rather than his lack of reflectiveness.

An empiricist Plato was not, and his objection to the idea of divine phthonos is 'philosophical' par excellence: based on abstract ideas about what god must be like, not on testimonies of what actually happens in human life. Herodotus’ conception of divine phthonos has often been attributed to his refusal to ignore the evidence of his senses, namely the fact that, in the real world, good people, like all people, suffer, and thus that the gods must logically be, to some degree, hostile towards humans or arbitrary in some sense. While there may be some truth in this, the evidence reviewed in the last chapter points to a quite different source for Herodotus’ pessimistic reflections on the nature of the human condition, namely the literary tradition in which he worked. It is in Herodotus’ most self-consciously ‘literary’ moments, where he adopts his most dramatic and least empirical narrative persona, that ideas of divine phthonos, the inevitability of human suffering, and the transience of happiness emerge. If it was Herodotus’ personal experience that gave him his view on human prosperity, it was an experience which he, like the tragedians, intentionally presented through the lens of the Greek literary tradition.
A consideration of the diverse theological assumptions of the *Histories*, attempted in the second chapter, suggests that the plans outlined in the *Republic* to debar many forms of popular literature were based on an astute assessment of the theological principles underlying particular types of narrative that survive from epic, tragedy, and Herodotean *historiê*: stories that were 'tragic' in the sense that they depicted basically good people being destroyed, or, more often, suffering disproportionately for their errors at the hands of divinities who could deceive, threaten, or tempt people to their doom. While Herodotus seems, in the context of intellectual enquiry, to be familiar with theological ideas such as a providential divine care for humanity—an idea otherwise first attributed to Socrates (by Plato and Xenophon)—his dramatic narratives assume a quite different set-up, in which god's *phthoneros* disposition makes human life inherently miserable and causes undeserved or excessive suffering.

Yet the tension between Herodotus' comments on divine *pronoia* and his characters' speeches on divine *phthonos* need not be accidental or indicative of a lack of thought. If we (unlike Herodotus) seek to reconcile these statements explicitly there are several solutions more plausible than the total syncretism whereby *phthonos* simply becomes a synonym form of god's just and providential balance, or his requiting justice. Arguably, Herodotean man holds a position between animals, disposed for his benefit, and gods, jealous of their own privileges. Man is characterized, above all, by ephemerality and suffering. Pope was neither the first nor the last to present man as a creature of stark contradictions, endowed with incredible faculties alongside unbearable suffering and desires,¹ but Pope, unlike Herodotus, worked in a theological tradition in which god was emphatically not considered responsible for man's suffering. Man's partly blessed, partly cursed position would seem, in fact, to be the explicit point of several Herodotean speeches to characters at the pinnacle of their good fortune, recalling the tradition of epinician poetry. As Artabanus says, although god has given humans a *taste* of the sweet life, he has ultimately proved grudging of it (7.46.4, cf. 1.32.9).

¹ Compare, e.g., Melanchthon’s Christmas sermon (1834/60.24), 119 (cited at §1.3 n.54), Shakespeare *Hamlet* (II.2.285-300), Pope’s *Essay on Man* (1734).
Scholars of Greek religion frequently draw a contrast between ancient religious explanations, which work in 'parallel', and modern explanations, which (to pursue the analogy of the electric circuit) presumably work in 'series'. Thus 'the circle of human affairs'—or the phthoneros nature of god—are often said to operate alongside other explanations which are, in themselves, quite sufficient, like the curse Croesus inherits from Gyges, or the deceptive oracle which Croesus misunderstands and which leads him to his downfall. But the labels created for these types of co-existing explanation—'double motivation', 'overdetermination', and so on—risk giving an air of the exotic to what, in most cases, should be perfectly familiar. 'The circle of human affairs', like divine phthonos, is not a specific explanation for an event, but rather a pattern, stated in a gnomic and poetic fashion, which leaves room for specific causes. We think about causation in substantially the same way today. Were I to observe, for example, that no human empire can last forever, and no human avoid some sadness in their life, I might be thought to have an unfortunate vice for generalizations, but even a most uncharitable listener would not suggest that I was denying that the cause of imperial ruin or misery may be different in each case, or claiming that this generalization is in itself sufficient explanation for every example that conforms to the patterns I claim. The same could be said of the circle of human affairs, or the belief that god must by nature be grudging and interfering. Generalizing statements about the nature of god, history, and humanity are frequently combined with very particular circumstances and causes.

Returning to the many tensions between theological concepts observed in the course of this thesis as a whole, the fact that in different intellectual contexts, and for different literary purposes Herodotus uses different conceptions of divinity (to whose differences subsequent tradition has certainly made us particularly sensitive) accords with what we know about the nature of 'religion' (and most human thought). It also fits with Herodotus' statements about the purpose of the Histories, which is not to engage in systematic debate about the true nature of gods, but rather to describe τὰ γενόμενα ἐξ ἀνθρώπων.
Appendix One

Pierre Henri Larcher on Divine *Phthonos*

The views of Larcher on Herodotean religion and divine *phthonos* undergo a peculiar development, which merits its own examination. In his translation and commentary of 1786 Larcher, who had seen Valckenaer’s note on *phthonos* (*ad* 3.40, cf. §1.5), observes the incompleteness of the Abbé Geinoz’s defence in the area of religion and sets out to finish it himself in the full apologetic tradition of the French Anciens. In his notes on the speech of Solon (*ad* 1.32),¹ Larcher argues that, for Herodotus, divine *phthonos* does not represent the gods as ‘jealous’ (*jaloux*), but rather indicates God’s hatred of pride, and his tendency or obligation to remind men of their mortality by afflicting them with troubles, in a manner ‘similar to scripture’. Larcher defends this interpretation of Solon’s speech (1.32-3) by quoting the words of Artabanus in the war council (7.10.ε): that the *phthonos* of the gods falls upon the biggest and those who ‘think big’. He concludes his defence by stating that Plutarch was wrong to criticize Herodotus, and, having apparently demonstrated that Plutarch and the philosophers had misunderstood the meaning of divine *phthonos*, goes on (*ad* 3.40) to express his certainty that ‘Hérodote avoit de la Divinité, des idées aussi saines que Plutarque’.² Herodotus, properly interpreted, was on a level footing with Plutarch’s Platonism.

¹ French cited from the edition of 1802. Larcher’s comments were translated into English in 1829, and violently abridged by W. D. Cooley in 1844. (The English citations here are my translations from the French.) See (1802.1) 243-5 n.85: ‘Les Païans n’avoient pas anciennement des notions justes de la Divinité. De-là cet plaintes amères contre les Dieux, dont Homère et les Poètes tragiques sont pleins. Hérodote a peut-être suivi les idées reçues de son temps sur la Divinité. Les Philosophes en ont donné en apparence de plus justes. “L’envie, die Platon, ne se trouve point parmi les Dieux”...Hérodote explique lui-même ce qu’il faut entendre par la jalousie des Dieux, livre vii.10. Ceux qui entendoient par jalousie ce trouble, ce chagrin qu’éprouvent les envieux à la vue de la prospérité des autres, ne pouvoient s’empêcher de condamner ce sentiment. C’étoit un vice de la nature humaine, qu’ils étoient bien éloignés d’attribuer à leurs [presumably ‘the ancients’, as the Eng. Trans. Supplies] Dieux et même à Némésis. Ils vouloient seulement dire par cette expression, que la Divinité par sa nature étoit enemie de cet orgueil, qui même dans les gens de bien, étoit un mal en lui-même. D’allieurs, les hommes, et sur-tout les Grands, oublient communément dans la prospérité, qu’ils sont des hommes semblables aux autres hommes. Dieu le leur rapelle souvent par les disgraces qu’il leur envoie. Tel est le language de l’Écriture. Il est à presumer que telle étoit la manière de penser d’Hérodote, lui qui dit, livre 7.§10: “Dieu se plait à abaisser tout ce qui s’élève et se glorifie”. Plutarque a donc eu tort de reprendre notre Historien.’

² Larcher *ad* 3.40 = (1802.3), 307-8, n.78.
But quite a different view of divine *phthonos* emerges from Larcher’s comments on Geinoz’s first ‘Defence of Herodotus’ (appended to the reprint of the 1802 edition), which seem to have been written at a later date.\(^3\) Here Larcher argues that Solon’s words on divine *phthonos* could *in theory* be interpreted in line with orthodox Christianity—citing two biblical parallels—but then argues that neither can have been Herodotus’ meaning because he ‘cannot have had notions of Divinity as salutary as we do, for these were confined to the Hebrews alone in Herodotus’ day.\(^4\) Larcher’s biblical parallels for divine *phthonos* are two very different ideas: first the ‘jealous’ (*zêlôtês*) God who doesn’t want other gods to be worshipped (citing Exodus 20:5), second the God who ‘deposes the powerful and exalts the humble’ (citing Luke 1:52, offering a similar interpretation to the Valckenaerian view that Larcher had earlier defended):\(^5\)

This maxim [i.e. divine *phthonos*] would certainly be impious, if we took it in the sense that we give it when we say that one man is jealous (*jaloux*) of another. But since we are speaking of God, one understands that God does not want us to give homage to any but him; or that, if we give it because of duty, we always ultimately relate [*rapporter*] it to the Supreme Being. That also means that one must not glory in one’s successes, and that it is necessary to attribute [*rapporter*] them to God, who is their author. ‘I am your powerful God, Jealous (*Zêlotes,*’ (Exodus 20:5); God detests [*hait*] the proud and delights in the humble. ‘He deposes the powerful from their seat, and raises up the humble’ (Luke, 1:52). For this reason I would not dare to condemn this maxim, although I am convinced that Herodotus, who could not have had ideas about the Divinity as sound as ours, did not understand it in exactly the sense we do.

\(^3\) Larcher (1802.6): nn. ad 550 & 552-3.
\(^4\) Larcher (1802.6), 550 n.a: ‘Il est hors de doute que Solon et Hérodote n’avoient pas des idées bien justes de la Divinité, et que tous les peuples connus, à l’exception des Hébreux, n’en avoient pas alors des meilleures. Cependant il est certain que cette maxime est susceptible d’un sens très-orthodoxe, sur-tout si on la traduit ainsi qu’elle doit l’être. “La Divinité est jalouse du bonheur des humains, et se plaît à le troubler”,’
\(^5\) Larcher (1802.6), 552-3, n.a: ‘Cette maxime seroit certainement impie, si on la prenoit dans le sens que nous lui donnons, en disant qu’un homme est jaloux d’un autre. Mais lorsqu’on parle de Dieu, on entend que Dieu ne veut pas qu’on rende hommage à d’autres qu’à lui; ou que, si on en rend par devoir, on le rapporte toujours ultérieurement à l’Être Suprême. Cela signifie aussi qu’il ne faut pas se glorifier de ses succès, et qu’il faut les rapporter à Dieu qui en est l’auteur. *Ego sum Dominus tuus fortis,* Zelotes. Exod. Cap. xx. vers. 5. Dieu hait les orgueilleux et se plaît avec les humbles. *Deposuit potentes de sede et exaltavit humiles.* Luc. Cap. 1, vers 52. Je n’ose par cette raison condamner cette maxime, quoique je sois persuadé qu’Hérodote, qui ne pouvoit avoir de la Divinité des idées aussi saines que nous, ne l’a pas tout-à-fait prise dans le sens que nous lui donnons.’
It is notable that, as the basis for declining these biblical interpretations of Herodotean divine *phthonos*, Larcher does not draw any attention to evidence within the *Histories* themselves, but rather repeats what seems to be an article of faith, this time one that was central to the project of the Modernes: that it is implausible that Herodotus should have held the same views as revealed to the Jews and later the Christians. There is a marked contrast between Larcher’s position here and in his earlier commentary, where Herodotus was said to have held views *as good as* Plutarch who (Larcher suggests) himself derived his religious ideas *from the gospels*, and surpassed the ancients in his religious understandings. In Larcher’s wrestling with divine *phthonos* we see a man moving between quite different schools of thought regarding the nature of pagan philosophy and theology, and reformulating his reading of Herodotus accordingly.⁶

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⁶ It is, I suspect, to this change that Powell refers (1949), xxvi n.2, when he says: ‘The 1st ed., produced when the author was 64, contained anti-Christian utterances recanted in the second’.
Appendix Two
Theological Discourses, Cognitive Dissonance, and Belief

It is important to place the notion of discourse shifting (as outlined at §1.8 and §2.10) carefully in anthropological and linguistic literature, particularly with regard to the notion of ‘cognitive dissonance’ to which Versnel references several times in the course of *Ter Unus* (1990) and *Coping with the Gods* (2011).

Numerous experiments conducted in Europe and North America since the 1950s have demonstrated that people feel a sense of discomfort, dubbed ‘cognitive dissonance’, when they feel that their actions are incompatible with their self-image as a rational, consistent individual. Since the 1970s psychologists have attempted to test the universality of cognitive dissonance across different cultures, and experiments returned the initially surprising result that the sense of cognitive dissonance (as indicated by attempts at ‘dissonance reduction’) is much stronger in America and Canada than in Japan, South Korea, or Taiwan, where many tests (though not all) suggest that it is hardly to be observed. It is now widely thought that cognitive dissonance is greater in cultures that stress the independence rather than interdependence of the self. In some East Asian societies, the argument goes, decisions are made less with an eye to ‘remaining true’ to one’s individual self; instead the ability to adapt oneself to the demands of the situation is more highly regarded. Presumably a Japanese person feels less discomfort at behaving adaptively than an American because he has a clear and respectable reason for doing

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1 The term was coined by Festinger, Riecken & Schachter (1956), and elaborated by Festinger (1957). More recent summaries in Cooper & Fazio (1984); Heine & Lehman (1997), 389.

2 There is a concise review of the results of numerous tests on cognitive dissonance in East Asian countries in Heine & Lehman (1997), 392-3, on a range of experiment types: the peg-turning test (imitating Festinger, Riecken & Schacter, (1957)), personality rating tests, forced compliance tests, and responses to failed prophecy (imitating Festinger 1956).

3 See Markus & Kitayama (1991); Rosenberger (1992); Heine & Lehman (1997); Kitayama & Markus (1999); Kangawa, Cross & Markus (2001), working with experimental data; Suh (2002), working on self-assessment.

4 See Kangawa, Cross & Markus (2001), 91-2, for a review of studies suggesting that, in comparison to Northern European and American subjects, East Asians are more likely to describe themselves by institutional affiliations and activities, to be more self-critical, and to be more attentive to the expectations and criticisms of others. Conversely the former group have a greater tendency to describe themselves in terms of ‘inner psychological traits’ or emotional states, and to view self-criticism negatively (as an indicator of low self-esteem).
so: behaviour that in America is perceived negatively (as weak or lacking in character) is perceived positively in Japan (as adaptable and harmonious), and thus unlike a Japanese person, an American interprets his own inconsistencies as a threat to his positive self-image and responds with dissonance reduction (i.e. changing his statements/beliefs or actions to make them consistent) or self-affirmation.⁵

But the lack of a drive towards dissonance reduction in East Asian countries can, I think, also be observed in America and other countries with a relatively independent construction of the self when it comes to social arenas where the ability to adapt is regarded positively. (This, incidentally, seems to lend further support to the hypothesized link between the drive to dissonance reduction and the social construction of the self.) One such area is discourse shifting, and for this reason it seems unhelpful to examine this phenomenon in terms of cognitive dissonance, at least in the sense the term has acquired in the specialist literature. An atheist, Western academic who prides himself on his independence from ‘normal’ and perhaps irrational thought feels little discomfort at talking in ‘ordinary’ language and making use of various ‘folk-theories’, as they are known. In fact, he does this with the greatest of ease. Sometimes he may have given the matter explicit thought, but often his alteration of discourse is entirely automatic. If confronted with the inconsistency of calling a table a ‘semi-permeable assemblage of atoms’ in the laboratory, but ‘solid’ at dinner, the physicist feels no discomfort at all, for his movement between different explanatory levels is not merely socially acceptable, it is a social necessity.⁶ (Were he not to do so a not-insignificant negative affect would be experienced by all those who joined him in imbibing carbonated fermented beverages.) The evolutionary biologist talks of ‘trees’ in most contexts, despite the fact that they do not exist from the point of view of biological systematics.⁷ Although trees, like grasses, look like they belong to a natural kind (and were once thought to), the resemblance tells us no more about their evolutionary history than does the resemblance between a shark and a whale. But, accused of inconsistency, a biologist

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⁵ On self-affirmation, another outlet for dissonance reduction see Steele (1988); Spencer, Josephs, & Steele (1993).
⁶ This example is offered by Davies (2004), 10, citing Horton (1993). My discussion here follows a path he suggests.
⁷ See Atran (1990), 67.
is unlike to blush. ‘Tree’ is simply too useful, and too common a word to someone brought up in our culture.

The boundaries between different ways of talking and thinking are, in many cases, firmly established and the movement between them is a required feature of social existence. To confront someone with certain types of inconsistencies is more likely to cause amusement than embarrassment in cases such as these. For this reason it seems mistaken to attempt to analyse discourse shifting in terms of cognitive dissonance (a term reserved for inconsistencies that people dislike and attempt to reduce)—it is so obviously motivated and explicable that people neither feel discomfort, nor attempt to reduce the dissonance. Rather it is mixing up the discourses that is socially unacceptable, a point eloquently articulated by Versnel in the case of Greek religion, although he does not, to my knowledge, observe that this is a fundamental feature of modern thought.¹

We should, then, not be surprised if the Greeks typically display no ‘cognitive dissonance’—that is, neither a sense of discomfort at dissonant actions/behaviours/statements nor an attempt to reduce the inconsistency—in a literary context when they move between numerous theological discourses that they do not explicitly reconcile.⁹ They make their shifts in thought-paradigm and vocabulary effortlessly. On occasion discourse shifting is self-consciously done for effect (e.g. the first statement of my imaginary cognitive anthropologist, §1.8),¹⁰ but it is mostly done unselfconsciously. Neither the work of recent cognitive anthropologists nor reflection on my own personal practice suggest to me that, in this, the ancient Greek differs from the modern atheist who engages with folk theories of physics, epistemology, causation, psychology, biology, and so on, mostly without consciously focusing on it, although when asked to address the topic they would profess beliefs

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¹ Versnel (2011), chapter one.
⁹ Versnel’s use of dissonance theory is somewhat unclear. He treats it as a human universal, and focuses on the fact that it motivates people to ignore their inconsistencies altogether. He neglects the fact that, in the specialist studies he cites, dissonance also prompts rationalizations and alterations of behaviour and belief to reduce inconsistency. This part of the ‘universal’ is precisely what he (elsewhere) claims the Greeks do not display.
¹⁰ For the ‘ludic’ element in religion and ritual see the discussion and bibliography in Versnel (2011), 470-5 (esp. 473 & nn.106-7). On Versnel’s definition ‘the ludic’ is: ‘the capacity to deal simultaneously and subjunctively with two or more ways of classifying reality’.
that are quite different from those that their words had seemed to imply. As so often, the sense of difference that scholars imply we should feel when contemplating the metaphysical beliefs of an ancient author derives not (or not only) from the interpretation of the ancient evidence, but from a dubious estimation of our own intellectual prowess and the way we think.11

I touch in the first chapter on the notion of belief, a concept besieged from all sides over the last half-century. Some philosophers have advocated language-centred definitions that rather implausibly deny beliefs to babies and animals but attribute them to silent adults in the same situation,12 while others defend object-centred definitions that see a belief as a mental attitude towards a state of affairs that can be deduced from one’s actions,13 and yet others have dismissed the notion of ‘belief’ as an outmoded folk-concept of limited use in the scientific examination of the human mind.14 Within classics a quite different controversy has raged in the wake of the bemusing claim that to talk of ‘belief’ in the context of ancient religion is fundamentally ‘Christianizing’, a view succinctly rejected by Harrison, King and Versnel. Versnel, with others, concludes that to question the Greeks’ belief in their divinities is ‘intrinsically absurd’, and that it is legitimate to talk of a Greek belief in their gods in a ‘low intensity’ sense of the word.15 While I consider this conclusion largely sound, the concept of “belief” is clearly one that must be used carefully, for dividing someone’s divergent utterances in various contexts into ‘beliefs’ and ‘not-

11 This is perhaps unsurprising: it is commonly observed that participants in psychological studies have an inbuilt bias to overestimate their own capacities. In a poll conducted amongst American professors 94% rated themselves as better than the average American professor, cf. Cross (1977). It has been claimed, however, that the positively biased view of the self is not a human universal, but particular to the Western psychology undergraduate students upon whom most such tests are conducted, see Henrich et al. (2010), 71.
12 Davidson (1975). Fodor’s (1975) suggestion that beliefs are linguistic propositions framed in the language of thought, or ‘mentalese’, surmounts at least this difficulty (while creating many more) by allowing linguistically-framed beliefs to be attributed to the linguistically non-competent.
13 Marcus (1990), a view obviously difficult to use with regard to literary texts.
15 See Price (1984), 10-11, criticized by Harrison (2000), 18-23, and Versnel (2011), appendix 4 (with bibliography on the debate at 546 n.21). Cf. King (2003). Price and others often seem to conflate what I (like others, I believe) would refer to separately as ‘belief’ and ‘faith’: the latter expresses the fideistic notion that some religious propositions must be accepted without evidence. But ‘belief’ and ‘believe’ seem to be used by Christian and non-Christian alike in normal conversation, even if they also play a role in formalized credal affirmations. Davies (2011) continues to argue that the term ‘belief’ is used in an inherently dismissive way. In some cases he is clearly right, but we cannot, I think, avoid sharing words with those with whom we disagree.
beliefs’ is a rather blunt instrument for the task at hand. What it gains in clarity it sacrifices in accuracy. Humans are clearly capable of wholeheartedly committing to statements that are literally true, metaphorically true, or true in some contexts only.¹⁶ In working out ‘beliefs’ from what people seem to ‘take to be true’ in a particular conversational context we must be alive to such distinctions. In literary and poetic speech this applies all the more.

¹⁶ Another area of sociological research seems relevant here, that of ‘institutional logics’, whereby different institutions (e.g. work, family, government, shopping, hosting) employ different conceptual categories and forms of reasoning. On this see Douglas (1986), and Friedland & Alford (1991). In cognitive terms, the ability of humans to process ideas differently in different contexts has been explored under the label of ‘domain specificity’, on which see Hirschfeld & Gleman (1994), DiMaggio (1997), and Zerbuavel (1997).
Appendix Three
Folk Proverbs, Philosophy, and Theology: Plausible Bedfellows?

An idea launched like a javelin in proverbial form strikes with a sharper point on the hearer’s mind and leaves implanted barbs for meditation.

Erasmus. ¹

A. The Proverb

This appendix looks critically at one common way of dealing with the difficulties that arise in studying Herodotean theology: explaining apparent contradictions as related to the ‘proverbial’ status of the ideas in question, a technique that has become increasingly popular since the 1980s.²

The theological use that is made of the ‘proverb’ explanation is sometimes misleading; it can serve as a sleight of hand by which ideas of central importance to a text are trivialized, and particular modes of expression banished to an entirely foreign societies. John Gould’s analysis of Herodotean causality as ‘proverbial’ has been influential enough to be worth quoting at length:³

Herodotus’ audience would have recognized his generalizations as gnomai: the Greek word gnome is not quite what we call a proverb (since it can be the creation of an individual on the spur of the moment), but like a proverb it will have the form of a generalization, a summing-up of human experience (‘divinity is envious’); it will be offered as a truth to be acknowledged by its hearers, and which at a particular moment may seem to explain and pigeonhole some fact, action or event, and bring it within the bounds of meaning... What a proverb does not do, nor will it be supposed by its hearers to do, is require all subsequent experience to bear it out; it does not claim to put forward the sort of general truth that offers what one writer has called ‘a sort of inferential licence’, a hypothesis that is to be verified or falsified by the occurrence or non-occurrence of its predicted consequences; it is not an assertion that any counter-example will render void. It is in this sense that the gnome and the proverb are alike: if I say, ‘he who hesitates is lost’, I am not asking to be rebutted by being faced with examples where quick decisions have led to disastrous results. Faced with these, I say,

rather, ‘Look before you leap’, or ‘More haste less speed’. ‘Look after the pennies; the pounds will look after themselves’ is not a ‘theory’ of economic behaviour like Keynesian or monetarist theory; it exists happily side by side with ‘Penny wise, pound foolish’, just as ‘Too many cooks spoil the broth’ does not exclude ‘Many hands make light work’. They are what one writer has called ‘refined common sense’; they are generalizations, but at the same time they appeal to accepted truth, to shared experiences and to the comfort of familiarity; in some measure they serve to produce a map of human experience. They are intelligible and they reassure.

The Histories do not, as Gould rightly points out, give any indication that Herodotus actively set out to disprove his own theological opinions in the way a scientist observing the scientific method should before, in the course of his professional activity, he upgrades a ‘hypothesis’ to a ‘theory’. On this technical definition of ‘theory’ Gould is justified (if rather strict) in reproving Fornara for his use of word ‘theory’ to describe Herodotus’ cyclical vision of human affairs (as expressed, for example, at 1.5.4 and 1.207.2). It is little cause for surprise that the theological beliefs evinced in an ancient work of literature show no sign of the modern scientific method. But it does not follow that all thought that is non-scientific in this sense is ‘proverbial’ or ‘gnomic’—particularly in the contentious sense that Gould gives it—or that all who profess an opinion using a pithy maxim are equally content to profess the opposite if a suitably pithy and reassuring form can be found for this too. Gould dismisses the notion of divine phthonos as insignificant due to its incompatibility with the context, and argues that ‘reciprocity’ and ‘vengeance’ are the fundamental elements of historical causation in the Histories, thereby allowing a traditional reading of the key scenes in terms of injustice, hybris, or over-extension followed by divine retribution. Gould’s argument, however, rests on a rather stark antithesis between ‘theory’ and the non-logical proverb or gnomê, and an unargued categorization of Herodotean thought (or at least those aspects he sees as insignificant) as the latter.


Note, however, the ubiquitous stress in proverb research on the importance of context to the interpretation and meaning of any proverb: see §1.7 n.175 and, e.g., Siran (1993), Arewa (1970), Arewa & Dundes (1964), Dundes (1964), Firth (1926).

Gould offers his conclusions at (1989), 85.
If we accept Gould’s definition of ‘gnomic thinking’ (which precludes logical thought, reasoning, empirical refutation, and suggests that all proverbs are ‘contradictable’), it must then be argued that Herodotus’ use of phrases like ‘human affairs are a circle’, or ‘god is grudging’ should be included within this definition of the gnômê or proverb. Could it not, rather, be a brief and poetic expression of a consciously urged view which Herodotus the narrator, or the character speaking, would defend? The job that, in Gould’s discussion, should be done by a close analysis of Herodotus’ gnômai is instead done by his definition of the gnômê.

Equally problematic is the fact that Gould’s definition of proverbial thought (in so far as he considers it to overlap with ancient gnomic thought) has no precedent in fieldwork or academic discussion of proverbs. He supports it only by a fleeting thought experiment featuring several English proverbs (cited above), and a brief mention of Solon’s reference to divine phthonos (1.32.1) and the narrator’s comment about nemesis (1.34).

Proverbs can be viewed as pithy encapsulations of various argumentative positions and ways of classifying reality. The existence within the same culture of two proverbs that push in opposite directions tells us little, for the use a thinker makes of proverbs is more significant than the proverbs at his disposal. In the case of ‘too many cooks spoil the broth’ and ‘many hands make light work’, it is not the case that all who use these proverbs understand them to mean different things (that are

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7 Herodotus, incidentally, uses the word γνώµη to mean a consciously professed ‘opinion’ (e.g. 2.56.1, 4.29, 7.147.3), rather than a commonplace or proverb.

8 In §1.7 I discuss the analysis of Gould and Versnel, but their detection of inconsistency is largely feedback of their starting assumptions and interpretative strategies. Neither offers any explanation for the definition they give to any of the words or phrases they claim are inconsistent with one another (with the exception of Gould’s brief discussion of nemesis).

9 Definitions of proverbs tend to focus on oral effects, binary structure, and brevity. I know of none that see inconsistency or contradictability as an inherent part of the proverb, either in Aristotle’s definition of the παροιμία—as recorded by Synesius (Calvit. Encom. 22.85c = Arist. fr. 8 Ross) where the criteria are suntomia and dexiotês, and paroimiai are remnants of the ‘ancient philosophy’—, or in modern definitions. See, e.g., Russo (1983), 121-2 (with n.1) and Shapiro (2000), 93 n.19, for bibliography on the definition of the proverb as a universal phenomenon. Socrates’ tongue-in-cheek discussion of the ρήματα βραχύλογα ἀξιομηνόμενατα (‘short, memorable sayings’) of the sages in Plato’s Protagoras (343a-b) describes this laconic brevity as ‘the style of the philosophy of the ancients’ (οὔτος ὁ τρόπος ἦν τῶν παλαιῶν τῆς φιλοσοφίας, βραχυλογία τῆς Δακονικῆ), endorsed more sincerely by Plutarch Mor. 510c.

10 Gould (1989), 79-80, like most anthropologically-oriented Herodotean scholars, translates ‘the phthoneros divinity’ as ‘divine envy’, and implies that nemesis carries the Homeric sense of ‘righteous indignation’, thereby rendering them inconsistent. This nemesis, he continues, ‘might perhaps be the “envy” of divinity, but Herodotus does not call it so’ (cf. §3.5.2).
incompatible with one another) and consider both these things to be valid when applied to the same situation at the same moment. Each describes a true situation. The question is: which is applicable to the situation at hand? If the dish has been salted three times the head-chef is quite right to order the counter-productive excess of ‘cooks’ out of the kitchen. If the chef is rushed and there are mountains of peas to shell, he can argue for the importance of additional ‘hands’. In this case, proverbs might serve as shorthands for different positions (both valid in application to the appropriate situation), or for a debate about how to analyse the situation. The lazy child may choose to deploy the wrong proverb in a self-interested or rhetorical manner (‘I’d love to help you make dinner, but, you know, too many cooks...’), but he is not thereby rendered immune to refutation, and it is plainly not true that all who use proverbs use them to communicate trivial ideas which they are happy to contradict using any proverb that urges the opposite view. It has often been said that the point of a proverb is to apply it properly. Proverbs are an obviously acceptable way of presenting one’s views (as such they can resemble the effect of rhetorical terms like the ‘slippery slope’).

Erasmus translated the first proverb in his *Adagia*—τὰ τῶν φιλῶν κοινά—which he attributed to Pythagoras, as *amicorum communia omnia* (lit. “friends’ things are shared things”, or “friends hold all things in common”). These three words Erasmus considered to signify, amongst other things, that ‘the sum of all created things is in God and God is all things, the universe is in fact all one’. As he says, ‘an ocean of philosophy, or rather of theology, is opened up to us by this tiny proverb.’ That Versnel describes a Greek lady vacillating in a logically deplorable fashion between various proverbial statements (and that his Greek friends neither identified it as unusual nor rationalized it) does not support Gould’s claim that all proverbial statements are without logic or coherence, any more than an undergraduate’s misapplication of formal logical arguments in the pub is a demonstration that the

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11 Abrahams & Babcock (1977), 415, refer to ‘the primary rule of proverb use in social discourse: that they be used only by those who know when and how to employ them appropriately.’ Similar observations about supposedly ‘contradictory’ proverbs are made by Yankah (1984), 10-11, see also Shapiro (2000), 95-6.

12 Citations from W. Barker (2001), xxx. On Erasmus’ *Adages* see the introduction as a whole.

13 Cited at §1.8 n.191.
whole system is rotten, or a vocal student’s tendency to overuse and misapply the term *lectio difficillior* reveals textual criticism to be a proverbial or illogical art form. The nature of ‘proverbial’ thought can be much broader, coherent, and ingenious than modern scholars typically allow.

There seems to be little to support the assumption that people who say ‘a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush’ are incapable of perceiving what those words entail or of holding this phrase to be true beyond the moment in which they utter the words. Although someone might consider this particular proverb a sensible guide when collecting money owed to him, he would not, I submit, be less likely to act in an incompatible fashion—by, say, investing in the stock market—if he did not know the proverb and instead explained his debt-collection policy in normal artless prose (e.g. ‘it’s worth taking a smaller payment immediately than waiting for a larger one, because that way I know what I’ve got, and I don’t run the risk of being left empty-handed later on’). Essentially, the collection of bad debts and stock-market investment need not necessarily be governed by identical rules. To really understand the proverb, one must understand which situations it applies to; for an outsider to think that a proverb is undermined because it does not apply identically to every area of life and thought may be to misunderstand their nature.

Most importantly, the expressions Gould cites as examples of ‘proverbial usage’ are not at all analogous to those which he seeks to explain (i.e. those in the speech of Solon at 1.32). Those proverbs which are understood so as to be truly *contradictory* typically serve as rhetorical positions in an argument, and are thus (contrary to Gould’s claims) very much open to criticism, and sound strange in juxtaposition. To say ‘penny wise pound foolish’ and then ‘look after the pennies and the pounds will look after themselves’ within the same breath is (on my understanding of these proverbs) a poor use of proverbial thought that would strike all hearers who share my understanding of these proverbs as anomalous. They are not an appropriate

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14 Yankah (1984), 2-6, discusses the long history of observing contradictions between proverbs both in the wider group repertoire and in the individual’s speech, from which some conclude their ‘rhetorical’ function. Gould’s examples of contradictory English proverbs, if juxtaposed, look adversarial: that is, they recommend two different courses of action.
comparison for Solon’s statement that ‘god is phthoneros’ and ‘man is sumphorē’, spoken one after another by the same person in the course of a single argument. If there is a link between ‘inconsistency’ and the brief and memorable forms of expression that are characteristic of the ‘proverb’, ‘maxim’ or gnōmé, it has yet to be demonstrated. The ‘folk proverb’ theory can, at times, seem to be little more than a convenient peg upon which to hang rather condescending evaluations of Greek theology and ‘folk’ thought at large, and a justification for ignoring elements which the interpreter himself sees as insignificant.\textsuperscript{15}

Gould’s thesis of ‘gnomic wisdom’ in the Histories has, however, been re-cast in a completely different form by Susan Shapiro, who places her study of Herodotean proverbs in the context of modern paroemology. Although Shapiro uses the language of Gould and Lang (‘proverb’, ‘maxim’ etc.) she has a keen eye for the placement, speaker, and internal resonances between individual ‘maxims’ or gnomai, and especially for their vindication by the following narrative. For Shapiro, rather than being inherently chaotic, ‘gnomic thought’ is thus one of the important tools in ‘Herodotean historical explanation’.\textsuperscript{16} Her discussion of contradictory proverbs in debates and verbal disputes is informative, but she does not give a view on the ‘contradictions’ claimed between ‘proverbial’ ideas used within the same speech, such as ‘the divine is phthoneros and tarakhôdês’, ‘man is sumphorē’, and ‘no man can possess all things’.

\textsuperscript{15} Studies have demonstrated that people who lack formal training are intuitively good arguers, much as most people who have never studied syntax are as skilled at producing grammatically correct sentences in conversation as grammarians. Much of the time the logician, like the grammarian, merely formalizes and adheres to what people do intuitively. See, e.g., Sperber (2011).

\textsuperscript{16} See Shapiro (2000), esp. 101-6: ‘Herodotus himself does not maintain a neutral position on these issues. The fact that one view is supported by later events is the key to Herodotus’ historical analysis’ (106).
B. A Problematic Word: 'Chance'

The thought experiment of the cognitive anthropologist outlined in the first chapter (§1.8) has the virtue of being relatively simple: confronted with a choice between the four different sentences she would probably claim that the last was ‘more true’ or more literally describes her views than the preceding three. But we can find much more messy instances of ‘proverbial’ thought without departing from an evidence pool of modern, atheist, educated, academics. What perfectly intelligent and articulate atheists mean, for example, when they say (in a discussion of the lottery, a Latin exam, or the Champion’s League final) ‘at the end of the day it’s down to chance’ is often not at all clear, and demonstrates that a truly gnomic form of expression is a more common and complex phenomenon than has been allowed.

It would be rash to argue that all who say ‘good luck’ commit themselves to a metaphysics of random chance (based on quantum indeterminacy or an equivalent up-to-date theory from physics), in the way that Gould and Versnel argue in the case of Herodotus’ statement that ‘man is sumphorê’.17 If taken to task for invoking the concept of ‘luck’ or ‘chance’ in the context of a serious explanation, a determinist—who follows Laplace in claiming that all past and future events in the universe could be deduced from the whereabouts and dynamism of all its constituent parts, were that information known and computable—could give a reasonable defence of his statement, and not only as a conventionalized utterance that should only be analysed for its illocutionary force rather than propositional content (like ‘bless you’, for example). The concept of ‘chance’ does not, he might argue, refer to the random nature of reality, but rather to the apparently random nature of the world to the human observer. ‘Luck’ or ‘chance’ unquestionably exist from a human perspective, and to wish someone ‘good luck’ is a conventionalized way of hoping that the unpredictable arranges itself conveniently. It is only on a superficial level that ‘luck’ seems to suggest ‘randomness and unpredictability’.

17 References at §1.7-8.
But was this explanation in the forefront of our determinist's mind at the time when he uttered his problematic statement about 'luck'? Probably not. If he admits that his justification is retrospective, can we accuse him of inconsistency? Perhaps, though what exactly had happened to his deterministic beliefs at the moment of speaking is far from clear. (Likewise, it is questionable on what grounds we can attribute the very specific idea of ‘randomness and unpredictability’ to him at this point.) The next time he talks of 'luck', is he thereby cleared of this inconsistency? Presumably. What are we to think if, the following week, we catch him writing a sea-shanty called ‘O Fortune, she’s a fickle mistress’, or saying something like this to his little brother: ‘The limit of life for a man I lay down at seventy years, and these seventy years give... twenty-six thousand two hundred and fifty days, and no day brings anything that resembles that which another brings. Thus, young Bob, we are all quite dependent upon what chance throws at us...’

The relationship between the conventionalized concepts that we inherit with our language and liberally use, and our explicitly professed beliefs is rarely straightforward, and often not even as straightforward as the use of ‘more’ and ‘less’ literal discourses, or alternatively ‘scientific’ and ‘folk’ theories. A moment’s reflection on the way we express our own thoughts should caution us against moving from the Solon’s poetic proclamation that ‘god is phthoneros’ and ‘man is entirely sumphore’ or Maeandrius’ statement that ‘Polycrates’ fulfilled his moira’ to Herodotus’ ‘meaning’ or ‘belief’ without some analysis of the context. (And context is, of course, precisely what the scholar who begins from the apparently sound anthropological assumption of inconsistency refuses to engage with.) Scholars who move without discussion from words and expressions to beliefs and opinions are, at present, in danger of judging Herodotus against a caricatured definition of ‘belief’ (whether they use the word or not) that would wreak as much havoc with their own utterances as it is does with their interpretations of Herodotus.

Over the last century many Herodotean scholars have attempted to chart Herodotus’ ‘inconsistencies’ with the assumption that his theological thought, qua religious thought or folk thought, will be inconsistent, and that to rationalize these
inconsistencies would be misguided. It should by now be clear that there are grounds to expect Herodotus’ thought, qua human thought, to display a great variety of theological ideas, and that we should expect these to be tied to their context, and consider the possibility that his ‘failure’ to rationalize them is tied to the fact that such movements were both common and accepted in his contemporary society. We can also assume that Herodotus held self-conscious theories, but that these will not necessarily be accessible from a literal interpretation of his statements in many literary contexts. Crucially, while the inconsistency of one’s statements (if literally interpreted) is accepted to be an inherent and unavoidable feature of human expression over extended periods of time, this in no way denies the presence of self-consciously urged theories about the nature of god or of divine causality, or sustained and consistent narrative characterization. Neither my imaginary material determinist nor my imaginary cognitive anthropologist (both of whose statements are, I hope, sufficiently familiar that all can relate to them) can be assumed to lack self-consciously held ‘beliefs’ or ‘theories’ in the sense that the terms commonly bear in everyday speech, or be taken to be unusually ‘irrational’. Nor can they be assumed not to be expressing ideas which they consider important when they utter phrases whose literal propositions they do not believe. If it is legitimate to talk of universals in human cognition (and Herodotus is in fact a good test case due to his great temporal and cultural distance from the normal test-subjects of cognitive anthropology), we can expect to see novel theories coexisting with more traditional theories, and also to see a link between context, thought-paradigm, and expression.

From the evidence available to us, however, we can only hope to gain a rather bare perception of Herodotus’ religious thought. We are unable to gather crucial information such as how Herodotus would have rationalized the variety of his religious discourses we can detect had we confronted him with his inconsistencies and incoherence. This is an important deficit, for we are ourselves used to the luxury of moving between various different modes of expression (metaphorical, literal, conventionalized),¹⁸ and to thereby maintaining the sense of being consistent and

¹⁸ Notwithstanding his literal and specific interpretations of phthonos, the circle of human affairs, and sumphorê, Gould (1989), 73-7, is perfectly prepared to admit the conventionalized meanings of Herodotean expressions like moira. In the phrase ‘he fulfilled his moira’ Gould sees no evidence for a
rational individuals. We are able to say that—if our conversant insists on analysing our words from *that* perspective, or understanding a particular word in *that* way—further explanation is necessary. In analysing the literary text this option is lost.

belief in historical necessity, but rather a conventionalized performative and narrative function (it is ‘the traditional language of a teller of tales whose tale is structured by his awareness of the shape it must have and who presents experience on the model of the narrative patterns that are built into his stories; the narrative impulse itself, the impulse towards 'closure' and the sense of an ending, is retrojected to become “explanation”.’)
Appendix Four.

A. How Many Supernatural Beings Make a Monotheistic God?

The purpose of this appendix is to explore what a scholar or lay-person might be indicating when they use the terms ‘monotheist’, ‘polytheist’, ‘henotheist’, and so on. I shall argue that, without definition, the terms are so broad in potential application that they are virtually meaningless (aside from indicating some form of theism or deism), that their use satisfies an instinct for categorization, but that the categories themselves are amorphous, and only give us the comforting illusion that some information has been communicated by the labelling process.

As noted in chapter 2.4, monotheism and polytheism appear to be numerical terms, and are often clearly interpreted as such by scholars, who take references to one ‘god’ or numerous ‘gods’ (in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, or Arabic) as the litmus test of whether a religion is monotheistic or not. But the superficially unassailable claim that Jews, Christians, or Muslims (for example) are monotheistic because they only ever call one divine being ‘God’ will not do. (Nor is it true of all who are typically considered Christians and Jews). The vocabulary used by devotees themselves is largely irrelevant to a useful definition of the term. The point can be clearly appreciated by contemplating fragments of the sixth-century poet Xenophanes, who is, according to Aristotle, the first to look for a single principle (ὅ πρῶτος ἐνίσας).

εἷς θεός ἐν τε θεοσί καὶ ἀνθρώπωσι μέγιστος,
οὔ τι δέμας θνητοίσιν οὐδὲ νόημα. (fr. 23 DK)
[There is] one god, greatest amongst gods and men,
Similar to mortals neither in body nor mind.

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1 Hebrew scriptures sometimes recognize the existence of multiple beings called ‘gods’: cf. Judges 11:24 (Kemosh of the Ammonites opposed to Yahweh of the Jews); Psalm 82 (pictures Yahweh amongst the (divine) congregation of El); Psalm 29 (addresses other gods directly); Psalm 49:1 (refers to plural gods). See West (1999), 22-3, 26-7. For the struggle of later Christians to deal with the word ‘god’ in the plural (and their occasional use of the plural) see Frede’s discussion of Arnobius and Augustine, (1999), 58-9. According to Martinez (2013) early Judaism practiced ‘monolatry’ (i.e. the exclusive worship of one god among many) and only became ‘monotheistic’ (i.e. embraced ‘the philosophical principle that there can be only one deity or absolute principle’) as a result of its contact with Greek philosophy.

οὐλὸς ὁ ῥᾷς, οὐλὸς δὲ νοεῖ, οὐλὸς δὲ τ’ ὑκούει. (fr. 24 DK)
He sees as a whole, he thinks as a whole, and he hears as a whole.

ἀλλ’ ἀπάνευθε πόνοι νόου φρενὶ πάντα κραδαίνει. (fr. 25 DK)
But aloof from toil, he does everything
with the soul (phrên) of his mind (noos).

αἰεὶ δ’ ἐν ταύτῳ μίμει κινεῖται ὁ ὅλος,
οὐδὲ μετέρχεσθαι μιν ἐπιπρέπει ὁ ὅλος ὁ ἄλλη. (fr. 26 DK)
He remains always in the same place, not moving at all,
Nor is it fitting for him to move about, now here, now there.

These fragments describe an all-powerful, unmoving, omniscient god, apparently as different from other supernatural beings as the Catholic or Islamic God is from angels or demons. Yet, in the same breath as he proclaims the unique powers of this ‘one greatest god’, Xenophanes refers to other supernatural beings as theoi (‘gods’), using the plural form of the word he used to describe the single greatest theos (‘god’). The Greek tendency to use theos of a number of beings which were categorically different from one another, a tendency found at all periods of Greek theology and philosophy, cautions us against using a religion’s own terminology as the criteria for deciding what is to be classed (in our categories) as a supernatural being in a monotheistic system and what is to be considered a god in a poly- or henotheistic system. The irrelevance of the name given to divinities was recognized in antiquity: Augustine states that the difference between calling a subordinate, created, divinity a deus (with the Platonists) and a daemon (with the Christians) is a linguistic quibble—the far more important issue dividing pagan philosophers from Christians is whether one offers cultic worship to these inferior divinities.

Anthropologists, too, have long contended with this problem.

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3 Harrison (2000), 179 n.84, calls the first line of fr. 23 a ‘paradoxical expression’, ‘no more than the epitome of a common strand in Greek polytheism’. Here, as elsewhere, Harrison suggests that the number of gods is the relevant criterion (cf. the ‘monotheism’ of the Getae: 179, 218-19), but does not indicate what makes a supernatural being into a ‘god’. Wilamowitz (1931/2.2), 209, calls Xenophanes’ a ‘monotheistische Lehre’.

4 De civ. Dei 9.23: ‘Thus there is virtually no disagreement between them and us, because in our sacred literature also we read: “God the lord of the gods spoke.”’ (‘ideo inter nos et ipsos paene nulla dissensio est, quia et in nostris sacris litteris legitur: Deus deorum dominus locutus est’, cf. Fürst (2010)).

5 Tylor, for example, creates a narrow definition of monotheism (precisely, on suspects, in order to be able to restrict the term monotheism to ‘higher’ animism): ‘To mark off the doctrines of monotheism...closer definition is required, assigning the distinctive attributes of deity to none save the
There are, I think, two basic approaches to defining the term ‘monotheism’: theological and ritualistic. Starting with the former, if we are to postulate a categorical difference between (monotheistic) God and supernatural being on the one hand, and (polytheistic) powerful-god and lesser-god on the other, we must seek it in the relationship between the beings in question, which might be based on their creation, their nature, or their power and independence. Some scholars choose to restrict monotheism to religions like classical Judaism and Islam (on the basis that the difference between supreme god and subordinate, created angel is the only one sufficiently stark). Those who admit these often (and with good reason) include Platonism and many schools of Greek philosophy which postulate a single ‘god’ that is categorically different from all other divine beings (which also happen to be called θεοί). Some define ‘monotheism’ so as to include Trinitarian Christianity (accepting the dogma that three can also be one). Some allow ‘weak’ or ‘inclusive’ monotheism to include rationalized versions of traditional Homeric and Hesiodic theology of the sort that was current in Greek literature of the fifth century BC. An all-too-common use of the term is to apply it only to the Abrahamic religions without Almighty Creator. It may be declared that, in this strict sense, no savage tribe of monotheists has been ever known. See Tylor (1891.2), 331-3.

6 Martin West begins his essay as follows (1999), 21: ‘I will define a god…as an entity identified or postulated, by one or more members of the species homo sapiens, as a willful agent possessing or exercising power over events that appear to be beyond human control or not governed by other intelligible agencies.’ Recognizing, however, that one is not a monotheist by virtue of the number of ‘gods’ in which one believes, but rather by virtue of how the gods in which one believes relate to one another and how they act, West offers a separate definition for polytheism (1999), 22: ‘the point of polytheism is that the gods are independent individuals with different interests and different constituencies’. For West, then, early Christianity has many gods (in the form of god, Jesus, demons, the devil, and perhaps angels), and—unless it is argued that demons have no independent will but act in accordance with God’s wishes—it is also polytheistic.


8 See Frede (1999) & (2010). In 1999 his definition of monotheism was: ‘a highest god who rules the universe’ (67) to which ‘the many gods are subordinated... in the appropriate way’, namely by being derived from and categorically different to the first principle or unique god (60, cf. 49-50). He concludes that ‘the vast majority of philosophers in late antiquity believed in one God...who not only enjoys eternal bliss, but... who as a god is unique in that he is a first principle which determines and providentially governs reality’ (55). It is worth noting that Frede defines the term monotheism, as he is quite entitled to, as essentially denoting early Christianity (the argument basically runs: if the Christians were monotheists, so were pagan philosophers).

9 Frede (1999), though he is more cautious in (2010), 70. Martinez (2013), 14, ‘monotheism (in the sense that we use this word today, as the philosophical principle that there can be only one deity or absolute divine principle, called Yahweh, Allah, or the unique and Trinitarian God of Christianity) is not an internal development of biblical thought.’

offering any definition, and to exclude all forms of Greek theology and philosophy, instead labelling these ‘henotheism’, ‘polytheism’, ‘monism’, etc. This is to be strongly resisted, for it strikes an unhappy medium between using ‘monotheism’ as a scholarly term with a precise meaning and using it as an epithet of Judaism, Christianity and Islam that—by definition—cannot apply to ‘pagan’ religions.

The other possible route to defining ‘monotheism’ considers ritual practice rather than theological statements, that is, the nature of worship offered to the supernatural beings whom one recognizes. (More commonly, however, ‘monolatry’ is the term used to describe the worship of only one god, and ‘monotheism’ refers to one of the theological positions described above.) Several recent scholars use ‘monotheism’ in this ritualistic sense, returning the term to its origins in early Christian apologetics. When John North, for example, argues that ‘the religion of the pagans was profoundly polytheistic in its regular ritual aspect’, he implies that ritual practice can itself be viewed as somehow monotheistic or polytheistic. He continues, pre-empting objections of the sort raised by Frede’s work, ‘there is no way out of this conclusion through arguing that pagans worshipping particular deities thought of themselves as really worshipping an aspect of some higher single being, even if individuals occasionally did so.’ Van Nuffelen makes a similar distinction in his

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11 This usage has the most venerable history, although it has been shown to be indefensible: it merely expresses a prior conviction that Christianity and other Abrahamic faiths must be somehow categorically different from all other religions. See, e.g., Nilsson’s comment (1962), 569, that ‘paganism had not produced a fully monotheistic god who would meet the demands of popular religion. Its so-called monotheistic gods were either a summation of all or of several gods, under one of these gods, or a philosophical or theological principle’. See Frede’s analysis of this comment, and Nilsson’s view of Antisthenes (2010), 66-70. Likewise Döllinger (1857), 233-4, considers Xenophanes not a ‘monotheist’ but ‘pantheist’ or rather ‘Material Pantheist’. Tylor (above n.5) takes a similarly partisan route.

12 That Frede considered it necessary to devote two lengthy chapters to demonstrating the (manifestly correct) point that many pagan philosophers were ‘monotheists’ on any theological definition of the term that also includes Christians is clear evidence that, when it comes to these categories and labels, as he puts it, ‘there must be some deep-rooted prejudice at work’ (1999), 43-6, cf. (2010).

13 See, e.g., Martínez (2013); Van Nuffelen (2010), 18-19, who observes that there is still some variety in the usage of this term.

14 Where the main point of polemic between Christian theologian and pagan philosopher was often not theological, or linguistic, but based on the question of cultic practice (see the citation from Augustine, above n.4) but was couched (by Christians) in terms of ‘monotheism’, see Fürst (2010).

15 North (2010), 41. It is not clear whether North means that the individuals in question are to be considered monotheists (but are insignificant in the wider scheme of things), or whether their rationalizations are insufficient to qualify them as monotheists in view of their polytheistic practices (the more natural interpretation).
support of the “‘ritualist’ position’ when he separates ‘philosophy’—under which heading he seems to include most Greek reflection on the unified and single nature of gods—from ‘actual religion’ (a choice that seems to beg precisely the question at hand). Like North, Van Nuffelen does not make clear whether, by his usage, theologically monotheistic philosophers who rationalized and took part in the practices of ‘actual religion’, would be polytheists. On either understanding, however, North and Van Nuffelen use ‘monotheism’ so as to distinguish those who are ritualistically monotheistic (which would, consistently applied, include many early Christians, Muslims, Jews, and those few pagan philosophers who rejected traditional cult and worshipped only one deity) from those who are ritualistically polytheistic, which would incorporate the majority of Greeks (including most pagan philosophers) as well as modern Catholic and Orthodox Christians, on the basis that theological rationalizations for cultic diversity would likewise be irrelevant because ‘philosophical’ or ‘elite’.

In 1928, Ivan Linforth wrote of monotheism and polytheism ‘the division between the two forms of belief is clear and abrupt. Either there is one sole god, or there are many gods.’ On inspection Linforth’s claim that there is a generally accepted and obvious difference between monotheism and polytheism looks wildly optimistic. To talk of monotheism or polytheism, then, requires explanation if it is to do more than to confer a vague sense of familiarity or exoticism onto the subject at hand. The terms invite comparison between different religions—indeed, they are typically defended on the grounds that they enable us better to perceive similarities and contrasts with other religious positions—but, unless defined, they make no precise comparison at all. Both terms are in practice applied by one person or another to the majority of the religious views that survive in ancient literature.

16 Van Nuffelen (2010), 23 (cf. 24-9).
17 For the suggestion that ‘elite’ or ‘philosophical’ views provide little evidence for ‘real’ religion, see Van Nuffelen (2010), 23-9.
18 Linforth (1928), 221-2. No definition is given to the term, which seems to be understood primarily numerically (one or many?), but sometimes also according to the nature of the god (cf. his comment that God is ‘sole and supreme’, my italics). Linforth’s views are discussed below (appendix 4b).
However things can (and should) be further complicated. Herodotus, for example, distinguishes between the cult to be offered to gods and that to be offered heroes (2.44.5, cf. 1.167.2), just as Catholics distinguish between the *dulia* offered to saints, the *hyperdulia* offered to the Virgin Mary, and the *latria* offered only to God.\(^{19}\)

Those who advocate a ritualistic definition would presumably consider both Catholics and Greeks who partook in traditional worship to be polytheists, but it is clear that one might distinguish between different classes of supernatural being by one’s offerings: if I call only one being ‘god’ and offer human sacrifice to her alone (in any of her nine manifestations), but I call other supernatural beings ‘god’s servants’ and offer them only bullocks, a case must be made to demonstrate that I am not, in some sense, ritually ‘monotheistic’. No less in the case of ‘cult’ or ‘ritual’ than in the case of philosophy and theology can we talk of stark and self-evident dichotomies.

The difficulty of definition is compounded when one looks beyond the monotheism/polytheism dichotomy. In the last two centuries scholars have coined numerous additional terms that might be arrayed and defined so as to indicate various shades on a continuum between ‘monotheistic’ and ‘polytheistic’ beliefs. The current vocabulary choice could run something like: polytheism -> oligotheism -> megatheism -> henotheism\(^{20}\) -> soft monotheism -> hard monotheism,\(^{21}\) although in practice there is huge diversity in the definitions given to each.

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\(^{19}\) Cf. Freyburger & Pernot (1997).

\(^{20}\) See Versnel (1990), 35-6, for the history of the term ‘henotheism’, and Chaniotis (2010), 112-13 & n.2, for the recent coinage ‘megatheism’. Chaniotis, however, uses ‘megatheism’ for what Versnel terms ‘henotheism’ (i.e. one god raised above all the others). Chaniotis reserves ‘henotheism’ for the religious view that stresses the *unity* of god, citing *Orphicorum fragmenta* 239 Kern. (The definition is unobjectionable and the Greek citation a good precedent, but an equally compelling ancient Greek precedent for Versnel’s definition can be found, for example, in the first quote cited above from Xenophanes which begins *εἰς θεός...μία τεκνία*.) Two further definitions of henotheism are cited by Van Nuffelen (2010), 18-19 & n.14, who summarizes the confusion neatly by providing an umbrella definition: ‘henotheism is used to designate a focus on a single god within a polytheistic religious framework, be it by identification with other deities, by exultation, or any other. What phenomena precisely are henotheistic seems to vary from scholar to scholar.’

\(^{21}\) For ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ monotheism see Dillon (1999), 69, who sees Islam and Judaism as examples of the former, and applies the latter to ‘the intellectualized version of traditional Greek religion to which most educated Greeks seem to have adhered from the fifth century BC on, according to which Zeus represents something like a supreme cosmic intellect, which can also be referred to, more vaguely, as *ho theos* or *to theion*, but which is prepared to recognize also, on a lower level of reality, as it were, the full Olympic pantheon of traditional deities, and a host of little local gods as well, who can all be,
The issues that underlie categorization are, without doubt, substantive and important ones. But, despite the deconstruction of the simplistic monotheism/polytheism dichotomy over the last two decades, the term ‘monotheism’ (like the rest) still does not serve as shorthand for a particular combination of well-delineated or well-understood religious beliefs. (In the best traditions of negative theology, we can only be sure that monotheism is not, in most people’s usage, simply the belief that only one spiritual being exists.) In defending the scholarly use of terms like ‘monotheism’ Van Nuffelen attempts to tackle this variety not by giving the word a precise definition, but by subsuming its many disparate applications into a more general ‘tendency’.23

Faced by such vagueness and division, to attach the label ‘monotheist’ or ‘polytheist’ to Xenophanes, Augustine, John Paul II, or Herodotus conveys no precise information whatsoever about theology or ritual practice unless accompanied by extensive definition and elaboration. Different scholars would class Xenophanes as a ‘henotheist’, a ‘pantheist’, a ‘monotheist’, a ‘weak (or inclusive) monotheist’, a ‘megatheist’ and a ‘polytheist’, and it remains unclear whether and where they disagree in how they understand the actual Greek text.24 ‘Monotheism’ might indicate the theological belief that there is one supreme divinity, or that behind the

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22 Well illustrated by Frede’s thought experiment with ‘Georgians’ (2010), 57-8.
23 ‘Pagan monotheism can be applied as an overarching term for monotheistic tendencies within Greek and Roman religion, without claiming that it constitutes a single phenomenon with a single manifestation... It will be a term designating a wide variety of phenomena within Greco-Roman religion, not a single movement but rather a tendency expressed in different forms’, Van Nuffelen (2010), 21.
24 ‘Polytheist’: Harrison (2000), 179 n.84 and presumably North (2010); ‘monotheist’, Wilamowitz (1931/2.2), 209; ‘henotheist’, Versnel (1990); ‘megatheist’, Chaniotis (2010), according to his definition (but no discussion of Xenophanes); ‘material pantheist’, Döllinger (1857), 233-4; ‘weak monotheist’, Dillon (1999), 69. On Xenophanean religion see Jaeger (1947), 38-54. Here, too, it seems to be the number of beings called ‘god’ that leads him to view Christians but not Xenophanes as monotheistic: ‘Xenophanes is not to be dismissed with the word pantheist... For understandable reasons Christian writers have always tended to read their own monotheism into Xenophanes’ proclamation of the One God; but while he extols this God as more than human, he also describes him explicitly as “the greatest among gods and men”. This manner of speaking...makes it perfectly clear that besides the One God there must be others, just as there are men’ (43-4). In fact, the least helpful part of Jaeger’s penetrating and complex analysis is his brief use of these undefined labels (although perhaps, in the Gifford lectures at least, it can be assumed that the definition of monotheism is simply the narrowest that will still incorporate the Nicene Creed).
many divinities one recognizes there lies only one divinity that has several diverse manifestations. It might mean that one recognizes the existence of only one supernatural being, or it might mean that only one of the acknowledged divinities should receive cult worship, or a particular type of cult worship from which other, lesser divinities are excluded. Many definitions indicate several of these propositions for monotheism as well as others, for example that the divinity whose uniqueness is thereby established also created the world, or cares for humans providentially. These distinctions are, however, all relevant. To stipulate one or two as the point of ‘monotheism’ can foster the impression that the point at which we impose our own distinctions is somehow particularly significant. To stipulate none, with Van Nuffelen, renders the word hopelessly vague: a tendency towards ‘oneness’ simultaneously defined in three or four (incompatible) ways.

There are further methodological difficulties rarely discussed in the use of these terms, and comparative religious study more widely. The reality that inevitably lies beneath the sentence ‘religion x is a monotheistic religion’ is that the many texts or people usually grouped under the religion in question will contain different assumptions about the number of divine beings, the process of their creation, the unity of their purpose, their relative power, their relationship with one another, the worship they should receive, and the names by which they should be called. These will rarely be static within a single text by a single author, let alone across an entire corpus of work such as the Talmud, the New Testament or the Homeric Hymns, or a group of people generally grouped together as adherents to a ‘religion’ by later scholars or adherents. It should not, then, be the ultimate goal of comparative religious study to firmly place any group of texts or people in one stable category. (That is the job of the systematic theologian.)

To talk in terms of ‘monotheistic religions’ is to conflate people, texts, and creeds. Creeds can certainly be categorized

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25 See e.g. Ratzinger (2007), xviii-xix: ‘the unity of Scripture… is a theological datum. But it is not simply imposed from the outside on what is in itself a heterogeneous ensemble of writings. Modern exegesis has brought to light the process of constant rereading that forged the words transmitted in the bible into Scripture: Older texts are reappropriated, reinterpreted, and read with new eyes in new contexts. They become Scripture by being read anew, evolving in continuity with their original sense, tacitly corrected and given added depth and breadth of meaning. This is a process in which the word gradually unfolds its inner potentialities, already somehow present like seeds but needing the challenge of new situations, new experiences and new sufferings, in order to open up.’
as theological positions, but people and texts will not always conform to the carefully worded dogma accepted as representative of any particular group. For this reason to compare a piece of Greek literature, or an Old Testament psalm with ‘Christianity’ as represented by the Nicene Creed (often the implicit point of comparison for many who say ‘x is not a monotheist’) is not to compare like with like. Many of the foundational texts of Christianity would not emerge as ‘monotheistic’ (by any criterion) unless examined by those working within the Christian interpretative tradition, and not all who consider themselves (and are accepted as) Christians would, if interviewed on these criteria, be found to be Christian. Unless we are clear about this, it is actively misleading to say something like ‘most ancient Greeks, unlike later Christians, were polytheists’.

In the world of cult, there is another important methodological issue, namely that the difference between a ‘polytheist’ (who, say, worships numerous entirely distinct divinities of whom none is preeminent) and a ‘monotheist’ (who, say, considers each divinity a manifestation or subservient creation of a supreme divine principle which he calls ὁ θεός) will often not be apparent from most of what they do and say, except when they approach the specific topic of theology.26 If the person in question is writing a treatise on hunting, bringing a case before the Areopagus, scratching out a curse tablet in traditional formulae, sacrificing a bullock to Artemis, or penning a tragedy, they may well not get around to directly expressing their views on such questions.27 Unless we accept a purely ritualistic definition of the terms, the difference between monotheism and polytheism lies in the way one interprets one’s own actions, not in the traditional prayers, formulae, and religious places one uses.

To summarize this many-pronged attack on the persistent tendency to talk without clarification about ‘monotheism’ and ‘polytheism’, the terms remain beleaguered by largely irrelevant assumptions, particularly about the nature of the Abrahamic religions (especially in their modern forms), and by the lack of accepted definitions.

26 A good example of the latter type would be Porphyry, who remained attached to traditional cults but believed something quite different (much as the Stoics remained attached to traditional Homeric statements about god but incorporated them into an entirely new theology). Porphyry’s beliefs are briefly described in Frede (1999), 66.
27 See Frede’s illuminating description of Galen (2010), 75-81.
They hint at shadowy comparisons and wider narratives of religious development without making them explicit. It was, of course, the general opinion of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars that religions progressed naturally from polytheism to monotheism, and this seems to underlie some contemporary discussions (e.g. Martin West’s ‘Towards Monotheism’). In fact, the development of religious beliefs is not obviously in any particular direction: Catholic and Orthodox Christianity are markedly more ritualistically ‘polytheistic’ today than they were in the second century AD, and ‘monotheistic’ beliefs (on any theological definition of the term that will admit the Christian Trinity as one ‘God’) are preserved from the sixth century BC onwards in the writing of Xenophanes (that is, within two centuries of the arrival of writing into Greece, in one of the earliest texts that we can attribute to a historical individual). The argument that such views did not or could not exist before the sixth century BC has yet to be made. Nevertheless, it is within this developmental schema that the terms monotheism and polytheism entered scholarship, and the same schema often seems to lurk in their shadow today.

After definition the resulting handful of terms should, initially, only be used to describe a statement rather than an individual, because it does not follow from the utterance of a superficially ‘polytheistic’ statement in a literary context that one is a ‘polytheist’, unless one favours the ritual definition (in which case, ‘theology’ requires a completely different treatment). For this reason formalized ritual, prayer, and stylized narratives offer only very limited insight into the theological world of a writer, and those who would discount ‘elite’ (that is to say, ‘literary’) evidence as exceptional force themselves to disregard many of the texts that would enable them to understand how some people, at least, interacted with common formulaic statements and rituals concerning the gods. With definition, however, these terms would become meaningful and could be used to illustrate specific religious changes or contrasts between different statements, texts, individuals, or even groups,28

28 Thus Frede (1999) provides a thoughtful discussion of the term ‘monotheism’ and consequently uses it to good effect in his analysis. His benchmark for monotheism is essentially early Christianity, which is defensible (if arbitrary). Martínez (2013) likewise offers a definition of ‘monotheism’ and thereby coherently describes Judaism’s progression ‘from monolatry to monotheism’.
although for many purposes they remain rather unwieldy conceptual tools, and often dispose us to look at texts in rather anachronistic ways, as the next section argues.

\[\text{footnote} \text{ Even when this is done, I find the answers are of questionable value in Herodotus’ case. West gives a definition of sorts at the start of his article: ‘the point of polytheism is that the gods are independent individuals with different interests and different constituencies’, (1999), 22. On this analysis Herodotus—as has been argued at §2.10—must be classed as varying between monotheism (in explicitly theological statements by the narrator or characters) and partial polytheism (in his recognition of the power of individual god to interact with humans in ways characteristic of that god), and as a repeater of texts which imply ‘full polytheism’ (i.e. oracles containing divine elements actually striving against one another). The use of each term must be explained in every instance, and the description is so individual that it does not facilitate grouping or comparison with the religious thoughts of other thinkers.}\]
4B. Monotheism and the Study of Herodotus: A Historical Inquiry

Having looked in some detail at the protean categories of ‘monotheism’ and ‘polytheism’ and their typical use in scholarship, I would now like to look in detail at the role they have played in the study of Herodotus since the early nineteenth century.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Herodotus’ use of generalizing terms for divinity was typically seen as indicating a nascent ‘monotheism’ shared by the educated classes of Greece, considered as an important preparation for the true monotheism of Judaism and Christianity (further §2.3). In the case of Herodotus, at least, this tendency towards ‘monotheism’ was perceived to be in tension with Herodotus’ more traditional devotion to the individual gods. Herodotus, like most post-Homeric ‘elite’ literature, was perceived to inhabit a liminal space between the many, anthropomorphic, personal gods of Homer and the single, more abstracted divinity of Christianity and Judaism. The use of the terms clearly fostered the idea that ‘polytheism’ and ‘monotheism’ (whatever they were) were distinct conceptual systems and the advocacy of one excluded the advocacy of the other.\(^{30}\) Particularly troubling, for many, was Herodotus’ ability to talk of a female divinity and then to suddenly talk about a masculine ‘god’ (or ‘God’?) evidently with no particular traditional divinity in mind. This seemed plainly contradictory.\(^ {31}\) Herodotus’ translators naturally struggled to translate this habit into modern languages, seeming, as it does, to move between two different classes of religious thought: polytheistic and monotheistic. The anonymous ‘B.R.’ ironed out the inconsistency in Solon’s speech to Croesus by changing ‘the god’ to ‘the Goddesse’, and omitting the reference to ‘the grudging divinity’ altogether.\(^ {32}\) In 1812 the Rev. Beloe avoided the incongruity of \(\text{ὁ θεός}\) by using the sexually ambiguous term ‘the divinity’ (likewise

\(^{30}\) Wilamowitz (1931/2.2), 207, cites Herodotus’ use of both \(\tau θεόν\) and individual personal deities as one of the ‘Widersprüche’ typical of the religious views of most people (cf. §1.6.2).

\(^{31}\) See discussion of Macan and Linforth below.

\(^{32}\) See the reprinting in Whibley (1924), 24 (ad 1.31-2): ‘whereby the Goddesse gave us to understand how much better it was for man to die than live…O king (sayd he) you demaund of me a question as one not altogetheer ignorant that the highest clymers have the heaviest falls’.
In the narrative of Cleomenes and Hera Macaulay’s note runs ‘ὁ θεός i.e. Hera’ and he translates ‘whether she stood opposed to him...’. For Linforth ὁ θεός in such instances was to be considered a ‘professional title’ that indicated the divinity in question without regard to sex: ὁ θεός and τὸ θεῖον, he suggests, indicate a god behaving in a typical fashion: ‘one god is typical of the conduct of all gods’. More recently Scullion has offered a different explanation for Herodotus’ variation between individual and general gods: when Herodotus’ Solon moves from speaking about ‘god’, to ‘Hera’, to ‘the divine’, for example, we see that Herodotus entertains ‘a concept of a divinity “behind”’ the usual gods.

Outside the relatively few passages in which ‘female’ gods alternate with neuter or masculine words for ‘god’, Macan frequently hazarded the names of specific divinities to which ‘the god’ might refer, a policy rightly questioned by Linforth and Harrison. Linforth, though unconvinced by Macan’s solution, was also troubled by those instances in the Histories where (ὁ) θεός is used but the context does not suggest any particular deity, for he takes Herodotus’ ‘fundamental polytheism’ as axiomatic (and thus preclusive of any belief in a generalized singular or abstract divinity). If we give the sense ‘a god’ to the term ὁ θεός in some instances, he argues, we cannot also give it the sense ‘God’ in others.

The division between the two forms of belief is clear and abrupt. Either there is one sole god, or there are many gods. If ὁ θεός means either ‘one god of many’ or ‘God, sole and supreme’ it is illogical to say of any given case, that whereas the former sense is not discarded there is an approximation to the latter.

Having posited these exclusive theological options, Linforth provides solutions to accommodate all instances that threaten to undermine his categorization of Herodotus as a ‘polytheist’. For Linforth, when Herodotus says ‘(the) god’ this must

33 Beloe (1812), ad locc. Beloe still Latinizes the names of the Greek gods (e.g. ‘Juno’ ad 6.82).
34 Macaulay (1890), ad 6.82 (my italics). At 1.31 Macaulay shelters behind the ambiguous translation ‘the divinity’, as Carey (1904) does in both places.
35 Linforth (1928), 230.
36 Scullion (2006), 197. Contrast Mikalson (2003), 131 n.68, 139 & n.8.
37 Macan (1895.1), cxi n.3, suggesting, e.g., Zeus at 4.79, and Apollo at 6.98. Note, above, that Macan does see the ‘monotheistic or monistic tendency’ in Herodotus, which he traces to various external sources (ad 6.27).
38 Linforth (1928), 221-2.
1) mean ‘the divinity in question’ (the explanation favoured, if over-used, by Macan), or 2) be a ‘collective singular’ (as in ‘The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold’), or 3) be a ‘professional title’ (as we say ‘call the doctor’ intending to imply neither ‘that there is only one doctor in the world, nor...that all doctors are somehow merged into one’).

The sense that Herodotus sometimes appears to speak in a monotheistic fashion is, Linforth argues, simply a misunderstanding of Herodotus’ admirable theological caution.

The result is that though the multiplicity of the gods is never called into question, there is a disposition to speak of the divine element in the world as if it were characterized by the indivisibility of the god of the pure monotheist. This cautious and reasonable theological agnosticism is in strong contrast with the imaginative constructions of later schools, such as the Neo-Platonists or the Christians.

Linfirth attempts to reconcile every example of ὁ θεός with a ‘polytheistic’ world view where polytheism is the belief in ‘many gods’, and monotheism a belief in ‘God, sole and supreme’. But the concentration on number, something of a red-herring unless one defines the word ‘god’—as Linforth only begins to by the words ‘sole and supreme’—distracts Linforth from a very obvious way in which Herodotus is a monotheist, on a very popular use of the term.

If ‘monotheism’ is defined so as to admit the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, then Herodotus’ general locutions for divinity strike me as being as amenable to rationalization as monotheism as they are to polytheism. The definition might run: ‘monotheism is the belief that there is only one God (as distinct from other supernatural beings which are created by, subordinate to, and categorically distinct from God), that God can be manifested in different forms and called by different names (each of which is tied to specific contexts or types of action and is not entirely coterminous with the others), but yet shares a single and unified nature.’ A definition of ‘monotheism’ might, of course, be tailored more specifically to Christianity (in any of its many forms) and include other aspects such as benevolence, a divine ‘purpose’, creation of the world, and so on, some of which stipulations would

39 Linforth (1928), 223.
40 Linforth (1928), 218.
preclude the Herodotean ‘divinity’.\footnote{But see 3.108 for the latter two notions, with discussion at §2.12.} I create a minimum definition of ‘monotheism’ here, since providing a very narrow definition applicable only to the Abrahamic faiths would obviously defeat the purpose of using comparative terminology—we have no need of the word ‘monotheism’ to remind us that Herodotus’ belief is not in every respect identical with the Nicene Creed, for example; we require such words to show us specific points of similarity and difference.

To observe that the narrator recognizes the distinct action of individual divinities is no barrier to classing the Histories or the Christian Gospels as a monotheistic on this definition. Portions of the New Testament, too, on the traditional Christian interpretation, describe individual parts of the Trinity acting in their characteristic ways, particularly in narratives set at a time when one member of the Trinity was on earth. At Jesus’ baptism, for example, the voice of God the Father speaks about Jesus (who is, at the time, in the form of a man in a river), while the Holy Spirit descends from heaven in the form of a dove.\footnote{Mk. 1:10–11: ‘And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straight away coming out of the water he saw the heavens opened and the spirit like a dove descending upon him. And there came a voice from heaven, saying, ‘Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’ (KJV): καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν ἕκειναι ταῖς ἡμέραις ἧλθεν Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ ναζαρητ τῆς Γαλιλαίας καὶ ἐβαπτίσθη εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην ὑπὸ Ἰωάννου. καὶ εὐθὺς ἀναβαίνειν ἐκ τοῦ δόκιμος εἶδον σχεδόν γενόμενοι τοὺς ὀυρανούς καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα ὡς περιστερὰν καταβαίνειν εἰς αὐτόν· καὶ φωνὴ ἐγένετο ἐκ τῶν ὀυρανῶν, σὺ εἶ ὦ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδοκίσα.) cf. Mt. 3:16-17; Lk. 3:21-2.} If these three gods can be manifested as distinct divine beings with their own actions and situations in the narrative and (in art) with their own iconography, then it is clear that multiple gods who are in some way distinct can be the object of monotheistic belief if they share the same nature or essence, or are (in some other way) the same. The Gospels name three semi-distinct but united divinities which are conventionally referred to by individual names (‘God the Father’, ‘Jesus’ or ‘God the Son’, ‘the Holy Ghost’), or as a group that is importantly more than numerically one (by the collective term ‘the Trinity’), or by the singular term ‘God’, and yet these are considered to be the same single divinity. Particular actions and circumstances are associated with one member of the Trinity only: ‘Jesus’ did not say ‘let there be light’, the ‘Holy Ghost’ did not die on the
cross, and ‘God the Father’ did not descend from heaven in the form of a dove.\textsuperscript{43} The situation is, in some respects, not much different with Herodotus, indeed there is a greater sense of the unity of the divine in the \textit{Histories} than in much the New Testament: in many instances we find generalizing terminology, whether plural, singular, or abstract. When Herodotus’ ‘particularizing’ register (usually activated by a cultic context) and his ‘generalizing’ register conflict (as it appears to modern observers), the general ‘divinity’ and the individual ‘god’ can be used interchangeably, and seemingly can be involved in the same action, as when Hera and \( \theta \varepsilon \omicron \zeta \) are involved in the deaths of Cleobis and Biton, and the explanation offered is about the nature of \( \tau \omicron \theta \varepsilon \omicron \omicron \omicron \) (it is this third element that persuades me that \( \theta \varepsilon \omicron \zeta \) is not identical in meaning to ‘Hera’, as Linforth would suggest).

There is no need to venture deeper into the issue that caused Christians such difficulty in attempting to produce rationalizing creeds, namely establishing whether the Father and the Son were ‘of the same substance’ (\( \omicron \mu \omicron \sigma \omicron \omicron \omicron \zeta \) or \textit{consubstantialis}) or ‘similar’ (\( \delta \mu \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \zeta \)). Herodotus is, in his enquiry into human affairs, a good deal less interested in the relationship between ‘the gods’ and ‘the divine’ than the creed-builders of the fourth century were in how Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit are related. But if \textit{three} gods can form a monotheistic \textit{one} due to the fact that they share the same nature, there is no reason why the shared nature of an \textit{unspecified} number of gods should not qualify them for a form of monotheism. Herodotus, like many of his contemporaries (not only the elite, I suspect), speaks as if, in their most important aspects, the gods share a unified nature.\textsuperscript{44}

This comparison is, I think, only relevant to our understanding of Herodotus in as much as Christianity informs the way that many approach Herodotus. It is, of course, exactly the kind of discussion that is invited, even required, if we choose to use

\textsuperscript{43} While a belief in the unity of the Trinity necessarily demands that these statements be accepted as true if the Trinity is a single God (if A is the same as B, then what applies to A logically applies to B), it remains the case that this is never the way that these divinities are described in the Bible, or, to my knowledge, by any who consider themselves Trinitarian Christians. Were this not the case, of course, the difficulties that the doctrine of the Trinity seeks to address, and thus the doctrine itself, would be quite different.

\textsuperscript{44} Harrison’s (2000), 178-9 & nn.76 & 78, observation that generalizing terminology is, on occasion, seemingly related to terminology for individual divinities, provides another good reason to conclude that Herodotus \textit{is}, on this common use of the term, a monotheist.
explicitly comparative terminology that is already widely used in some rather specialized, even counterintuitive ways. I know nothing of Ivan Linforth’s personal beliefs but, from a passing comment, it looks very much as if he considered himself a monotheist (or, rather, as if he would have defined monotheism so as to include his own beliefs), and as an American in California in 1928 he may also have been a Christian who professed the doctrine of the Trinity. If, as seems likely, Linforth did consider Christianity and its foundational texts and creeds to be monotheistic, then his attempt to rationalize Herodotus’ beliefs in the direction of ‘fundamental polytheism’ is an extensive exercise in theologically exoticizing Herodotus—who scarcely needs it—for Linforth could have performed the same process upon the Gospels of the ‘monotheistic’ Bible, and the foundational creed of Trinitarianism. As I hope is clear, Herodotus’ rather ambiguous statements are quite amenable to being rationalized in exactly the opposite direction to that which Linforth chooses—namely ‘monotheism’ as defined above—which would then place Herodotus on the same side of a somewhat arbitrary line as many Christians and ancient Greek philosophers.

The purpose of this unorthodox comparison is not to argue that we should define ‘monotheism’ so as to include one potential rationalization of Herodotus’ theological expressions: to do so merely sates our own instincts for categorization, a desire to be able to place Herodotus in one of the rather ill-defined boxes with which we feel comfortable. It is intended, rather, to illustrate how illusory the most common-sense theological comparisons can prove. Trinitarian Christianity (the theological creed, that is) most naturally lies with much Greek philosophy in tending towards a strict theological unity of the supreme divinity which has several distinct manifestations. The Gospels, like Greek literary texts, tend to be much vaguer about how the many divine beings mentioned are related to one another. While Herodotus gives no specific indications of this belief, his text invariably assumes a fundamental unity to the nature of ‘divinity’ (the only exception being in oracles he cites). Likewise, if we want to decide upon Herodotus’ ‘monotheism’ in ritual terms there is little

45 Linforth (1928), 239, who generally talks with great respect of Herodotus, permits himself a brief dig: ‘[H]erodotus] believed in gods and was writing of a world which believed far more about them than he did; but, if we waive the question of the rationality of his fundamental polytheism, we must admit that he maintains with singular success a position of reasonable agnosticism.’ (my italics.)
A point often made by older Protestant apologists for Greek religion is that an ancient Greek is scarcely more lapsed (from Mosaic monotheism) than an unreformed Christian. See, e.g., Bishop Samuel Horsley, writing in the late 18th century, (1816), 47-8: ‘The Roman church therefore hath not renounced the truth, but she has corrupted it; and she hath corrupted it in the very same manner, and nearly in the same degree, in which the truth of the patriarchal religion was corrupted by the first idolaters; adding to the fear and worship of God and his Son, the inferior fear and worship of deceased men, whose spirits they suppose to be invested with some delegated authority over Christ’s church on earth. Now the corruptions being so similar in kind and pretty equal in degree, the idolaters of antiquity and the papists of modern times seem much upon a footing.’ Interestingly, writing in the late 18th century, Horsley does not identify Catholics or Greeks as differing because they are ‘polytheists’, but rather because they practice ‘idolatry’; cf. Schmidt (1985).
is that individual gods behave in a predictable and typical manner and thus that to talk of ‘god’ or ‘the divine’ is equivalent to talking of ‘one of the many gods’: the gods share the same divine nature, but are entirely distinct beings. The second, with Scullion, uses a spatial metaphor: a divinity stands ‘behind’ the individual gods and acts through them; these gods are, perhaps, merely diverse manifestations of the same divine essence which have a certain personality but are yet the same, and thus to talk of ‘god’ or ‘the divine’ is to refer to this essence in its totality.

The differences between these positions are fairly slight, at least until one attributes strongly distinct personalities, characteristics, and wills to individual divinities (which Herodotus does not). It is a question of which metaphor one prefers for something quite intangible. Those with a modest appreciation of their own lack of knowledge about the metaphysical world are, I imagine, unlikely to make ex cathedra announcements about on the topic, and it is not surprising that Herodotus does not do so in view of his self-professed and quite traditional agnosticism about ‘divine things’ (2.3.2). It is, however, across this tiny patch of theological sand that Herodotus’ commentators—armed with the words ‘monotheism’ and ‘polytheism’—are obliged to draw a line if they wish to use these terms comparatively, and wish to define monotheism so as to include Christianity (both of which are surprisingly common). We should be wary lest we allow questions which preoccupied later theological thought press us into taking too definite an interpretation, and beware forcing the rest of Herodotus’ statements about divinity towards one or the other end of one or another of the dichotomies which the terms ‘mono-’ and ‘polytheism imply. Nor should we allow these concerns to tempt us into considering Herodotus a

49 Pohlenz (1937), 102-4, like Scullion, sees a Herodotean reluctance to name individual deities and, further, considers Herodotus’ own personal religiosity to move in the direction of the nameless, impersonal ‘gods’ worshipped by the Pelasgians (2.52; ‘die Urreligion zeigt ihm das Bild, nach dem sein eigener persönlicher Glaube hinstrebt’). The closest Herodotus comes to attributing individual personalities to the gods is in recognizing the attachment of particular deities to particular cults or institutions (see §2.5-6). ‘Traditional’ associations might be seen (if rather intellectualized) between Zeus and rain (3.124-5) and Poseidon and floods/earthquakes (7.129.4, 8.129.3).

50 I recognize that many who deny Herodotus’ ‘monotheism’ may well be using the word in a way so as to preclude Christianity: a perfectly respectable usage, although one that invites misinterpretation unless clarified.

51 As Scullion is (2006), 202, who also (tacitly) eschews ‘monotheism’, ‘polytheism’, etc. for more precise descriptions. A careful note by Immerwahr (1966), 312 & n.14, astutely avoids the pitfalls of these dichotomies.
theological dullard because he does not pronounce on the singularity or multiplicity of the divine. Were our own theological preoccupations different it seems likely that we would be lamenting Herodotus’ abstinence from a different set of abstruser musings.
Herodotus wisely adopted the excellent rule of ‘thinking with the learned, and speaking with the people’...he is too little of a pedant to make war upon current forms of speech.

Thomas De Quincey.¹

In the ethnographic portions of his Histories Herodotus distinguishes consistently and easily between Greeks, Lydians, Persians, Egyptians, Medes, Scythians, and so on. In his narrative of the events of the Persian war, by contrast, the words ‘Mede’, ‘Persian’, and ‘Barbarian’ are used in a non-specific sense to refer to all peoples of the Persian Empire who campaign against Greece. This is not only the case in the direct speeches of Herodotean characters,² but also in the narrator’s own descriptions, particularly of battles.³ The term ‘Phoenician’ seems to take on the same significance for Xerxes’ fleet, though this is unsurprising given their dominant position as the main component of the Persian navy.⁴ The same use of Persian, Mede, and Barbarian in free variation with one another can be observed in the commemorative poetry of the Persian Wars attributed to Simonides.⁵ It is clear that Herodotus adopts the conventionalized appellations for the Persian forces that invaded Greece (vague and ethnographically imprecise as they were) for his

¹ De Quincey (1854), 158-9 (generalizing from Herodotus’ comments on the names for the continents at 4.45-2.5).
² E.g. the defiant Spartans who address Xerxes as ‘King of the Medes’ (Ὁ βασιλεύ Μήδων, 7.136.2).
³ Witness the description of Marathon, in the narrator’s voice—6.109.1: στρατηγὸς τῆς Μήδους συμβαλέιν; 6.112.1: δρόμων έντο ἐς τοὺς βαρβάρους; 6.112.2: Οἱ ὁ δὲ Πέρσαι ὅρδες δρόμων ἐπιόντας. Contrast, e.g., 1.129.4: εἰ γὰρ δὴ δὲν πάντοτε περιθεναι ἄλοχο τέα τὴν βασιληίην καὶ μὴ αὐτὸν ἔχειν, δικαίωτερον εἶναι Μήδους τέα περιβαλεῖν τοῦτο το ἀγαθόν ἡ Περσαίων.
⁴ 6.31.1: Ο ὁ δὲ ναυτικὸς στρατός ὁ Περσαίων; 6.33.2: Βυζάντιοι μὲν νῦν καὶ οἱ πέρηκε Καλχηδόνου φιλέστρατον ὁ Ἀσίας ἀπὸ χώρας καὶ στρατὸς Μήδουν combined. 11 FGE, as quoted by Plutarch, uses Persai (v. 4) alongside Mêdoi (v.1) seemingly as a variant. The predominance of the word ‘Mede’ in contemporary discussion is preserved in the word médizein which became the primary verb used to describe capitulation with the Persians, and is found ubiquitously in our contemporary and later sources (though ‘medizing’ is not mentioned in the poems attributed to Simonides, for obvious reasons). Hellas also emerges as the collective term for the Greeks (8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19a, 22a, 21, 23 FGE).
narrative of events customarily described in that register. It is as if the subject matter calls for a different, more nationalistic way of looking at the Persians, just as the ethnic terms which Persian speakers use of the Greeks are also, on occasion, carefully adjusted for the focalization through foreign eyes. Yet even in the course of the latter books, when Herodotus changes his subject matter and narrative concerns, he reverts to the precise meanings of these names—catalogues or ethnography throughout the work and the seventh book use Persian, Mede, and Phoenician with their proper individualizing force; naturally, the same can be said of the many different Greek ethnicities.

The question, then, whether ‘Mede' means ‘barbarian in Xerxes' army' or ‘ethnic Mede' (as opposed to Persians or Assyrians, for example) is one that must be handled with care, for Herodotus uses the term in a context sensitive way, indicating his ability to talk from different perspectives. Contrasts between the 'customs' of foreign peoples (as related in ethnographic inquiry) and the conceptual framework that they exhibit in dramatic speeches reveals much the same mutability.

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6 E.g. Mardonius, who calls the Greeks the ‘Ionians in Europe' at 7.9.1 (but compare Artabanus’ more accurate use of ‘Ionians’ at 7.51.1), apparently reflecting both a genuine Persian appellation and a common Greek way of representing foreign speech: A. Pers. 178, 950; Ar. Ach. 104. Cf. Stein (1883/94), ad loc.
7 De Quincey (1854), 158-9, claims to notice a similar distinction between the proper and the popular uses of terms in the meaning of the word Libya (prompting the starting quotation).
8 See §3.5.4, n.125.
Appendix Six

Herodotus: Between ‘Elite’ and ‘Popular’ Religion?

Abundant evidence has been presented in chapter two which suggests that the \textit{Histories} contain many radically ‘non-traditional’ theological views (taking ‘traditional’ Greek theology, as Herodotus does, to be that found in the works attributed to Hesiod and Homer, 2.53). This appendix asks a tangential but important question: what were the social implications of holding such views? Scholars who acknowledge Herodotus' anti- or un-traditional stance have tended to see him as an ‘elite’, ‘enlightened’ author whose views are self-consciously opposed to the ‘popular’ views of the ‘masses’.\footnote{Further §2.2, §2.11.} The assumptions underlying this view are presumably that most people entertained a fairly literal interpretation of the presentation of the gods in early hexameter: that they took human form, felt recognizably human emotions, interacted with humans in various (humanly intelligible) ways, and gave birth to certain demi-gods (whose descendants still survived) within the last few dozen generations. These are, of course, ideas about gods found in epic hexameter which Herodotus rejects in the course of his work (cf. §2.2, 2.11).

The notion of a dichotomy between the abstract semi-monotheism of the ‘elite’ and the anthropomorphic polytheism of the 'masses' continues, it seems, to be a common assumption rarely explicitly defended or attacked. It thus seems worth looking closely at those groups to whom Herodotus attributes literal or uncritical acceptance of ‘Greek’ views about the gods. Does Herodotus present the literal interpretation of Hesiodic and Homeric theology as typical of the credulous, the uneducated, the ultra-conservative, the nouveau-riche, previous generations, or rather of other religious, social, or geographical groups?

Herodotus, in fact, attributes risibly ‘traditional’ beliefs to fairly diverse groups. In Pisistratus’ staging of Athena’s epiphany (which consists largely of dressing a tall
girl in armour and standing her on a chariot) it is ‘the Athenians’ as a group who are said to fall for this ‘most simplistic’ trick (εὐθέστατον, 1.60.3), and the rumour is said to spread quickly to the demes. There is, in fact, little sense in the Histories that ‘ordinary people’ are more prone to accepting traditional ideas about the gods than the ‘elite’, in as much as the former come into the story at all. The prime difficulty in extracting the social significance of these theological ideas is Herodotus’ tendency to ascribe views to ethnic rather than social groups: ‘the Greeks’, ‘the Athenians’, ‘the Persians’, and so on, which is clearly the result of the perspective of the (geographical) outsider which Herodotus, like all early ethnographers and historiographers, adopts in his discussion of the peculiarities and practices of any group. One set of exceptions to this tendency to avoid specific individuals or social groups are Herodotus’ references to earlier authors whose views he challenges, particularly Hecataeus. Herodotus takes relish in the folly of his predecessor’s typically ‘Greek’ genealogizing before the Egyptian priests (2.143). Is the joke, perhaps, that Hecataeus, in attempting to show himself to be a member of the elite, should reveal his community with the ill-educated masses of Hellas? I think this unlikely—as Herodotus represents it, Hecataeus would not consider descent from a divinity in the relatively recent past to be foolish. This type of illustrious genealogizing may, in Herodotus’ eyes, have been typically aristocratic—the only other people to make such a claim in the Histories are Thracian kings, who reserve particular worship for Hermes in the belief that he is their ancestor (5.7).

Are we, then, to imagine Herodotus as a peripatetic wise figure, who adopts the posture of an outsider to ‘Greek religion’, and groups conservative elites and the ordinary people as sharing the same core ‘traditional’ beliefs? This may not be far wrong. In describing Persian beliefs about the gods, Herodotus indicates that

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2 On the ‘outsider’s’ perspective in early historiography see Tober (2013), who cites numerous throughout Greek local historiography examples in which historians writing local histories of their own area, apparently for local audiences, consistently focalize from an outsider's perspective (extending both to the avoidance of local dialect and first personal plurals). This idiom seems to have been early established.

3 In Pl. Tim. (22a-b, 23b) Critias’ story of the myth of Atlantis describes Solon engaging in a similar ‘genealogizing’ (not his own ancestry, but the descendants of Deucalion and Pyrrha) in front of the Egyptian priests, and again being confronted with the superior age and written-records of the Egyptian people (23b-25d). Solon, of course, unlike the unwitting Hecataeus, does this intentionally to draw the priests into a discussion about the past (προαγαγεῖν βουλήθητις αὐτοῖς περὶ τῶν ἄρχειν εἰς λόγους).
anthropomorphism is the ‘Greek’ conception of divinity (1.131.1), just as Homer and Hesiod are said to have created many ideas about the gods ‘for the Greeks’ (2.53). It is tempting to conclude that this is evidence for widespread literal attachment to traditional notions of divinity. The best evidence for Herodotus’ opinion of traditional Greek theology seems to be the claim of originality that accompanies his theory of the origins of Greek religion in early hexameter (τὰ Ἕ νόιοδόν τε καὶ Ὄμηρον ἔχοντα ἐγὼ λέγω, 2.53.3). Yet it also presumably the case that Herodotus considered what he had to say about the Greek gods to be, broadly speaking, persuasive and acceptable: not the sort of statement that would alienate him from his audience, but rather one that would augment his reputation as a cosmopolitan intellectual. Any successful intellectual posturing must, to some degree, move beyond the ‘common knowledge’ of the platitude, yet it cannot move too far beyond the bounds of what the target audience find plausible. Herodotus’ careful framing of some religious theories (for example, the origin of the ‘Greek’ gods) implies a degree of novelty and creativity (irrespective of his true originality), while his straightforward and undefended dismissal of other ideas (e.g. gods sleeping with mortals) suggests appeal to commonly shared notions of plausibility or piety. But the precise social connotations of Herodotus’ radical theology remain elusive. They will depend largely on whether we conceive of his audience as one of intellectuals and sophists (which would place him at the ‘cutting-edge’, as it were), or as unsophisticated folk who could be wowed by the scraps salvaged from the tables of the real thinkers of Herodotus’ day. The doubt is not whether Herodotus presented himself as an innovator, but rather whether he was really at the vanguard of the Periclean enlightenment, or a second-hand merchant. This is, unfortunately, the kind of question that we are in no position to answer. Factors that have little to do with true intellectual creativity (i.e. posturing, self-presentation, timing, and luck) are likely to have had as great an impact in fifth-century Greece as today.

But it is worth looking critically at the tendency, strong in all periods of scholarship (particularly before the late twentieth century), to associate a conception of the gods as unified, abstract, and moral with elite reflectiveness (for whom the ‘philosophers’

4 For a convincing defence of this idea see Fowler (1996), 86-7.
are traditionally seen as the spokespersons), and the immoral, anthropomorphic, plural gods with the popular thoughtlessness (often represented by ‘the poets’). This dichotomy, whereby a world that lacks divine justice is implicitly popular and a relic of an older and cruder thought world,\(^5\) cannot be sustained in the light of the evidence that emerges from Herodotus and his contemporaries. Subtlety of theological thought and a belief that god is uniformly just and moral are not inevitable bedfellows, contrary to the consensus of most scholars between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries, who invariably describe ‘moral’ conceptions of divinity using the teleological metaphors of ‘refinement’, ‘elevation’, and ‘development’.\(^6\) Likewise, an analysis of Herodotus’ own work reveals that ‘traditional’ myth was an important and to some degree unavoidable part of Greek life: there is little reason to think that only some groups interacted with such ideas, or that they were the only ones capable of employing it ‘at will’.

\(^5\) See, e.g., Winnington-Ingram (1983), 7-8, and §3.4.1.
\(^6\) Further §1.9 & n.210.
Appendix Seven

Two types of Oracular Narrative in the Histories

Οὐχ ὤρῳ, ἐφι, ἔφ' ὅτε τὸν μισθὸν ἀπαιτεῖς· εἰ μὲν γὰρ ὡς ἀλλὰζαι τι δυνάμενος τὸν ἐπικεκλομένον, ὅλγον αἰτεῖς ὁπόσον ἄν αἰτής, εἰ δὲ ὡς δέδοκται τῷ θεῷ πάντα ἔσται, τί σου δύναται ἢ μαντική;

Demonax addressing a mantis, in Lucian Dem. 37

Herodotus’ Histories includes over seventy oracular pronouncements and eighteen divinely inspired dreams. These are embedded in some of the most poignant and climatic moments of the Histories. It is frequently claimed, and invariably assumed, that the defining characteristics of oracles in the Histories are ambiguity and incomprehensibility,\(^1\) coupled with a tendency to pronounce on matters other than those which the consultant raised in their question.\(^2\) But this describes only some Herodotean oracles. A directly opposing view, now largely abandoned, was made by Joseph Fontenrose in the case of the Delphic oracle: that the reputation of the oracle for obscurity is ‘wholly modern’. This, however, neglects the many oracles in Herodotus and other ancient sources which links oracles with ambiguity, including

\(^{1}\) The word ambiguous requires a note. All language has some degree of ambiguity; however, here I use the word ambiguity to refer not to the potential which all oracles (as utterances) have for multiple readings, but to oracles whose potential for multiple readings forms part of the story. Thus, for example, I would consider the prediction 'you shall catch a fish tomorrow' unambiguous if it is fulfilled by a successful fishing trip, but ambiguous if the consultant is shot with an arrow with the word 'fish' carved upon it, in spite of the fact that the prediction is the same in both cases: it is the relationship between the statement and reality that is at issue. It will be clear when I use ambiguity to refer to particularly vague or allegorical language (which is not always accompanied by difficulties in interpretation in Herodotus, e.g. 1.62.4).

\(^{2}\) Many scholars, do not deny the existence of straight-forward oracles, but focus exclusively on the infamously complex and difficult ones, e.g. Griffin (2006), 51-2. There is also a tendency to make general statements about ‘oracles’, which describe only one oracular pattern (the ambiguous one): Maurizio, e.g., emphasizes the ambiguous and flawed communication of Delphic oracles to the total exclusion of other types (1997), 319-20, 331-2; cf. Darbo-Peschanski (1987), 80 (‘il est indéniable que les réponses oraculaires des Histoires, du moins celles qu’Hérodote cite au style direct, multiplient les métaphores et les symboles. Elles en sont toutes partiellement obscures et leur déchiffrement demande des efforts et une attention tout particuliers’), 75 (‘Le texte de l’oracle est toujours l’objet d’un contresens ou de la négligence des consultants’); Harrison (2000), 125, 150, 156 (‘mistakes in interpretation…are so common as to constitute the rule rather than the exception’), 230-1; Mikalson (2003) 140 (‘oracles might be vague, misleading, misinterpreted, or corrupted by human agents…’); Kindt (2006), 37 (‘divine speech…is different from human language insofar as it is frequently not directly intelligible to mortals’), 38 (‘obscurity’ is ‘the hallmark of the language in which Apollo frequently addresses the consultant’), 41.
the oracles of Apollo at Delphi.\textsuperscript{3} As will be argued in this appendix, Herodotean oracles, as a group, conform exclusively to neither the 'obscure' nor the 'clear' type.

A great many oracles give simple instructions about the future. This is frequently the case in oracles that offer a straightforward \textit{lusis kakôn} in response to a plea for help with a specific problem. In such situations consultants frequently approach the oracle with their problem (often deriving from some unrecognized impiety on their part) and in response a propitiation to a particular god or purification ritual is proscribed.\textsuperscript{4} Such oracles are typically paraphrases in unambiguous language, interpreted correctly, and give the expected result.\textsuperscript{5} List A (below) gives a number of such oracles.

Moreover, Herodotus cites oracles which are entirely unambiguous in more complex situations. List B (below) lists passages from the \textit{Histories} in which the gods, through oracles, give explanations of their own actions, or complex pieces of advice to characters to guide their future actions, in both cases using language devoid of vagueness, metaphor, or disregard for the question. In those oracles which give advice about the future this advice is understood correctly and brings success to those who obey and misfortune to those who disregard it (aside from those few cases

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Fontenrose (1978), 236. ‘How did the Delphic Oracle acquire its reputation for ambiguity if no ambiguous responses were ever spoken there? The truth is that this reputation is wholly modern: Delphi had no such reputation in antiquity. Herodotus quotes ambiguous and obscure oracles but never says that ambiguity was a Delphic characteristic’. Fontenrose’s desire for direct narratorial statement is unreasonable, but direct contradiction of Fontenrose’s claim can be found at, e.g., Arist. \textit{Rhet.} 3.5.
\item For a detailed study of the formulae of questions and answers see Fontenrose (1978). Fontenrose finds the proscription of propitiation to be a common amongst his ‘historical’ oracles. The most common ‘historical’ question, introduced by \textit{λῷον καὶ ἀμείνον} (1978), 39, is not found in Herodotean questions, which are commonly paraphrased or omitted, but is found in several oracular responses (two from Delphi one from an unspecified oracle): τὸ δὲ σοι \textit{πολὺ λὼν ἁμφὶς}/ ἄμεινα (1.86.2); ἡ δὲ Πυθίη σφέας ἐκέλευ εἰς τὸ καὶ Αὐξησίης άμητὰ ἀκριβώς καὶ ὑποκρίτου ἄμηνον κοινάται (5.82.1); ἑμνατίθησιν ἑτὶ τὴν ἥν κοραλήν κατελόντας θάγα, Ὀνησίλῳ δὲ θείει ὡς ἣρωι ἀνά τὸν ἐπος, καὶ ζητητό τοῦτα ἄμεινον κοινάται. (5.114.2).
\item Cf. Fontenrose (1978), who claims that most oracular pronouncement from Delphi were of this type, arguing from an evidence pool of 74 oracular responses, and 34 question formulae which are recorded by sources contemporary to the pronouncement (‘historical’ oracles). The evidence pool thus begins c.440-30, stretches down to the Roman period, and is based upon the assumption that an apocryphal oracular story or attribution requires at least a generation to develop. The idea that we should interpret early Delphic prophecies in the light of similarly impressive prophecies which became attributed to Delphi concerning the death of Alexander etc. within a few generations after their occurrence, in itself, a reasonable one. But, needless to say, this is nothing more than a possibility for Herodotean oracles, all of which are at least a generation earlier than Fontenrose's first ‘historical’ oracle.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
in which the oracle is portrayed as actively deceptive). In those oracles in which the gods explain their behaviour the divine response is one side of a coherent dialogue, rather than a vague and unrelated answer (e.g. 1.91, 1.158-9).

Writing about oracles as if they were only ambiguous simulates the impression of the modern reader who, quite naturally, remembers deceitful oracles which act as the foil for an extended dramatic narrative, and passes quickly over the many simple rituals of consultation and propitiation which do not command attention. But there is no doubt that Herodotus assumes that oracles can be straightforward, clear guides to the future and to human action as often as he shows them to be enigmatic or self-fulfilling harbingers of doom.

In contrast to the straightforward lusis kakón, there is another tradition of prophecy attested in the Histories, and throughout Greek literature, in which the information communicated to the recipient is expressly stated to be unavoidable, using a formula like dei or khrê ginesthai: it is a fixed fate which the recipient of the prophecy attempts to avoid (to no avail). One might legitimately wonder, like Lucian's Demonax, at the futility of such prophecy, and ask what its purpose could be, from a theological point of view. The idea that oracles were dispensed in order to allow the consultant to steel himself for the coming disaster is common in later writers making sense of the vast and varied oracle and dream narratives passed down by literature and tradition. Achilles Tatius gives the following:6

φιλεῖ δὲ τὸ δαιμόνιον πολλάκις ἀνθρώπως τὸ μέλλον νόκτωρ λαλεῖν, οἷς ἴνα φυλάξονται μὴ παθεῖν (οὐ γὰρ εἰμαρμένης δύνανται κρατεῖν), ἀλλ' ἴνα κοσμότερον πάσαντες φέρωσι, τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἐξαιρον ἀθρόν καὶ ἀπροσδόκητον ἔκπλήσσει τὴν ψυχήν ἄφνω προσπεσὸν καὶ κατεβάπτισε, τὸ δὲ πρὸ τοῦ παθεῖν προσδοκώμενον προκατηνάλωσε κατὰ μικρὸν μελετώμενον τοῦ πάθους τὴν ἀκμὴν.

This idea is also used, in various forms, by scholars attempting to present the gods as benevolent, oracular communications as true, and misunderstandings the result of blindness, irrationality, and slavery to immoral desires, all central concerns of many

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6 Leucippe and Clitophron,1.3; Cf. Ptolemy, Tetrabiblos, 1.3.11.
scholars continuing the moralizing project of early humanist scholarship. In order to avoid the obvious conclusion that prophecies of inevitable doom must be either false, or pointless, Kirchberg, for example, suggests that oracles do grant man a certain freedom—knowledge.\(^7\)

Seine Freiheit bestand darin, sich mit wachem Bewußtsein unter sein Schicksal zu Stellen. Nur wenn der Mensch als wissender handelt, steht er seinem Schicksal gegenüber als einer, der nicht blind, d.h. für Herodot: nicht schuldig ist. Frei sein—so könnte man Herodots Anschauung kurz formulieren—heißt wissen.

However, these novel conception of 'freedom' and 'guilt' are found nowhere in the *Histories* or at all in the fifth century, and are the ingenious products of a foreign theological tradition attempting to bring Herodotus into its fold. Herodotus, like most tragedians, has the opposite opinion of such oracles: to know one’s own or a loved one's doom and to be powerless to prevent it—the curse of Cassandra—is the cause for dejected lament. The story of Atys and Croesus, for example, would suggest that strengthening the resolve of the consultant does not figure amongst the purpose of divine prediction of disasters within the *Histories*.\(^8\) Herodotus, in fact, like the tragedians provide no hint of the purpose of such divine communications.

We can, however, observe that misleading, distressing, futile, and self-fulfilling oracles and dreams are an important part of the Greek literary tradition, from the destructive and deceptive dream of *Iliad* 2 onwards. If the 'theological' purpose of such prophecy is obscure (and would seem to suggest a degree of malevolence on the part of the powers that reveal the future to the doomed), their purpose in narratological terms is clear: they make excellent stories, especially with 'tragic' plot lines, in which we can feel sympathy for a character who not only suffers, but experiences fear, confusion, dread, and a sense of betrayal and entrapment as the events themselves unfold.


\(^8\) Contrast with Achilles, Ptolemy, and Kirchberg the views found in Hdt. 9.16.4, Solon 13 W 54-6, Tyresias in S. *OT*, 316-18, A. Ag. 1211-13 (illustrated by the exchanges between Cassandra and the chorus, e.g. 1107-1113), generalized at earlier points by the lament of the chorus at 250-3. Already in the *Iliad* the futility of the gift of prophecy is highlighted (further §3.7, n.179).
Herodotus is representative of most contemporary Greek authors in making no theoretical distinction between oracles which announce *what will happen* (which I shall term 'predictive oracles', examples in List C1, below) and oracles which advise consultants on *what to do* ('empowering oracles', examples in List C2, below) but analysis along these lines reveals an important difference in the assumptions about the fixed nature of a human's future well-being. Both empowering and predictive dreams and oracles are common within the *Histories* and in roughly contemporary authors, attributed to the same oracular shrines. Many of the oracles of, for example, list A (below) are predicated on the assumption that the future can be altered by actions taken by the consultant, and this is vindicated by the course of the narrative. Underlying much of Xenophon’s religiosity is a similar assumption that appeasing the gods will bring about a change in one’s circumstances. The purpose of such oracles is fundamentally different from the 'predictive' oracles discussed immediately above—it is to bring about a *future* change which the consultant desires. Such attempts by mortals to influence their future are implicitly permitted by the instructions which the god gives to consultants, and by the many episodes within the *Histories* in which an illness or physical condition is cured (1.19-22, 4.179), or an instruction given through an oracle proves to be good advice that leads to successful outcomes (7.189, 8.20, 8.36).

One way to reconcile the differences between these oracles would be to understand 'empowering' oracles as also being self-fulfilling and thus, in a sense, predictive. Alyattes, the Agyllans and the Aigeidai, we might argue, were *fated* to recover from their illness, curses, and infant mortality, and the oracles given to them merely instruct them how to do so, making fate come to pass. But there is simply no indication that the authors or any Greeks would have replied with such an explanation if confronted with this inconsistency. Applying a neat theoretical argument to link these two ideas into a coherent system merely satisfies the modern

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critic's desire to make Herodotus consistent. The fact that stories of empowering oracles are sometimes heeded, sometimes ignored, and sometimes discussed by Herodotus as if it both courses of action were possible suggests that there is a real instability in the Histories about whether particular future events are fixed or mutable. The rationalisation thus seems not only absent, but positively denied by Herodotus' treatment of the oracular stories we are trying to understand. We are left, then, with a division between two conceptions of fate surrounding oracle stories—either that the future can be altered for the better by consulting and heeding oracles, or that the future is fixed, that oracles and dreams sometimes act to bring about this future against the consultant’s desire, and that the knowledge they impart empowers them only to grieve before they suffer.

In some cases, these different types of prophecy are used in relatively quick succession, in such a way that seems to indicate differing traditions or treatments of the subject. Xerxes' dream at 7.19, for example, acts as a proleptic device, a flash-forward to disaster, but it also characterizes Xerxes’ court as short-sighted or servile, Xerxes himself as lacking judgement, and implies the involvement of the gods in the Persian defeat. However, given that it delivers a clear prediction of the failure of the expedition which (without the willing suspension of disbelief) Xerxes should have been able to understand, it is hard to reconcile with the earlier dreams which bullied Xerxes into the campaign on the basis that it would prevent him becoming ‘small’ again, and relied on the threat of disaster to persuade him. These dreams are treated by Xerxes and Artabanus with extreme care and are the object of anxious debate and testing (7.12-18), an anxiety which recurs later on at Abydos (7.47.1) The intervening dream thus seems to be theologically inconsistent with the deceptive dreams that earlier visited Xerxes and Artabanus. It would seem to suggest that dreams are not coherent windows into the world of divine motivation and truth, but

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10 See Harrison (2000), 226, who considers the idea that the future might be fixed in certain broad respects, but undetermined in others.
11 The Euboeans disregard the oracle of Bacis, to their own misfortune, which Herodotus seems to consider carelessness rather than fate (8.20.1-2). In a rather different example Arcesilaus, son of Battus, is given clear, if metaphorical, instructions by the Pythia about what to do on his return to resume the rule of Cyrene—he disregards it, and dies εἰτε ἐκὼν εἰτε άέκων ἀμαρτόν τοῦ χρησμοῦ ἐξέπλησε μοῖραν τὴν ἑυτοῦ. (4.164.4). Here it is clear that the oracle was not acting to bring human actions in line with ‘fate’ but, if anything, the opposite.
often serve largely narrative goals and aims (ones that are, in fact, shifting from place to place).

A final observation is that many repeating patterns suggest empowering and predictive prophecy are associated with two very different story-patterns. Taking those in List A first, most successful and straightforward alterations of the future on the basis of empowering oracular advice tend to come as a response to a present or obviously directly impending suffering (often with a human origin) and the action taken tends to be the propitiation of certain gods (e.g. 1.19-22; 1.167.2; 1.174.4; 4.149.2; 5.82.1; 6.139.2; 7.178.1). The failed attempts of individuals to alter their fixed fate as revealed in predictive dreams and oracles tend to take a very different form: their problems are not immediate but are first made explicit by the prophecy in the form of a prediction that prosperity will not last (e.g. 1.34; 1.55; 1.107-8; 3.30.2; 6.77.1-2; 7.17.2), and the consultation is, on several occasions, an enquiry about future prosperity rather than present afflictions (1.55; 3.57-8). The predictive oracle or dream does not instruct the consultant on which god must be propitiated, but reveals a doom-laden fate, either enigmatically (e.g. Tegea, 1.67.2), or clearly (e.g. Atys' death, 1.34.1). When the victim of fate apprehends his doom clearly he does not attempt to avoid this by the propitiation of specific deities (as the fortunate receivers of 'empowering' oracles are directed to) for in 'predictive' oracles/dreams a specific divine agent is never identified as angry or requiring propitiation. Instead the doomed individual tries to moderate his actions or the world around him to avoid the specifics of the dreaded event and fails.\textsuperscript{12} A ‘predictive’ communication often falls to those of great good fortune (not, as is argued in chapters three and four, only to the arrogant, impious, cruel, and unlikeable), fitting with the motif of the instability of good fortune. The present ills addressed by empowering oracles, by contrast, are mostly the obvious work of a particular deity, angered by a specific action, who needs to be propitiated or otherwise appeased.\textsuperscript{13} One narrative comes from the world of predestined fate and seems particular literary, the other seems to

\textsuperscript{12} For example, Croesus attempts to alter the palace and restrict Atys' movements (1.34), Astyages tries to marry of Mandane, then to kill Cyrus (1.107-8), Cambyses tries to kill his brother (3.30.2), and the Argives contrive a bizarre stratagem to avoid being defeated by deceit (6.77.1-2).

\textsuperscript{13} See the above examples. For an unexplained fate, cf. Candaules (1.8.2), Mycerinus (2.139.3), Scyles (4.79.1), Corinth (5.92.δ.1), Demaratus (6.64), Miltiades (6.135.3).
hail from the world of cult and ritual purification. Herodotus, like the tragedian, moves from one to the other effortlessly, in a manner familiar to his audience.

Similar movements can be found in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Oedipus’ first instinct is to consult the Delphic oracle for guidance (68-77). The response is a classic *lusis kakôn*, ordering the expulsion of the *miasma* (96-9), namely the murderer of Laius (100-107), whom Oedipus then curses (216-75). At this point there is no doubt that the affliction of Thebes must be ended by Theban action in accordance with oracular guidance. But as the play progresses and it becomes clear that man is the hapless plaything of a cruel fate, and that the Delphic oracles given to Jocasta and Laius (711-14) and Oedipus as a young man (787-93) had functioned in a very different way from the response reported at the start of the play. In a society where oracles often provided helpful day-to-day guidance on ritual that was supposed to positively influence the future, it is to be expected that there exists a contradiction with stories handed down from earlier periods in which oracles predict immutable destiny. In fact, part of the dramatic horror that such stories could engender was perhaps derived from the idea that the tools that were relied on as divine aids could also act as the tools for dreadful divine destruction: the reversal and perversion of the familiar and reassuring perhaps adds another level of dread to the self-fulfilling and predictive oracle.

It is unsurprising that those oracles and dreams of a straightforward nature are passed over by both Herodotus and his reader with much less emphasis than those which act as the subject for extended narrative and, effectively, as an example of the impossibility of avoiding fate. The potential for dramatic storytelling is obviously greater in the case of oracles which are ambiguous, build up tension by prolepsis, or provide particular emotional poignancy than it is in very simple oracles which proscribe a ritual action to remedy a high rate of infant mortality (4.149.2).

To end, it is worth remarking that the two ideas of fate are perhaps not quite as superficially incompatible as they might seem on a dispassionate conceptual analysis.

14 For purification in the *Histories* see Herodotus on Croesus and Adrastus at 1.35.1-2: Κροῖσος δὲ μὴν ἐκάθηρε. Ἐστὶ δὲ παραπλησία ἢ κάθαρσις τοῖσι Λυδοῖσι καὶ τοῖσι Ἑλλησί. Cf. Dodds (1951: ch.2).
of their underlying metaphysical assumptions. In one, man can propitiate the gods to 

improve his life (Agyllans, Aigeidai), or take care not to offend them by acting against their will (Cnidians). In the other, man cannot escape the destiny that the higher powers have chosen for him. Whilst those oracles which ‘empower’ man imply a degree of control, there are only a very few pieces of oracular advice which do not involve some kind of propitiation of the divine as the indirect means of bringing this about, and the fact that their actions are divinely ordained clearly gives them a certain divine significance (2.152.3; 5.1; 5.79-80; 5.89.2; 8.20).
Lists

Abbreviations (for oracles):

**Format of Oracle:**
- Indir. = indirect speech
- Prose = prose oracle (in direct speech)
- 6er = hexameter oracle (in direct speech)
- 3er = trimeter oracle (in direct speech)

**Source of Oracle:**
- Αµµ. = Ammon
- Αµφ. = Oracle of Amphiareus
- Βα. = Bacis
- Βτ. = Buto
- Δδ. = Dodona
- Δφ. = Delphi
- θαυροπ/. = ἕκ θαυροπίου (a common vague designation for action done on oracular instruction)
- λογ. = λόγιον (i.e. no specific oracular institution implied)
- Unattrib. = no reference to the oracle making the pronouncement at all

**Question Put to Oracle:**
- VQ. = Question given verbatim
- PQ. = Question paraphrased
- NQ. = No details at all about question

**Lists follow, where appropriate, the following format:**
Reference: Subject of consultation or oracle (format/source/question/other relevant details).

*example:*
List A: Simple and straightforward oracular communication.

1.19-22: Alyattes' Illness and the Temple. (Indir. Δφ. NQ. heard from the Delphians.)
1.167.1-2: Agyllans and the cursed ground. (Indir. Δφ. PQ: want to cure a hamartas.)
1.174.4-5: Cnidans trench-building project. (3er. Δφ. PQ: want to know about the cause of mysterious eye wounds.)
2.52.2-3: Names of the gods (Indir. Δδ. PQ: should Pelasgians use Egyptian names?)
2.133: Mycerinus will die in 7 years. (Indir. Br. Seemingly unsolicited.)
4.15.3: Aristeas' apparition and statue. (Indir. Δφ. PQ: Asked what the phasma meant.)
4.149.2: Aigeidai to set up temple to the Furies of Oedipus and Laius to avoid infant mortality. (Indir. Unattrib. NQ.)
4.178: Spartans told to colonise Phla. (Indir. λογ. Explicitly second hand information.)
5.82.1: Barren land in Epidaurus: told to build statues of Damia and Auxesia. (Indir. Δφ. PQ: Consult about the sumphorê.)
6.118.3: Delians to return statue of Apollo given them by Datis. (ἐκ θεοπροπ. NQ.)
6.139.1-2: Lemnos sterile, and women barren. Oracles commands them to give to the Athenians whatever dikê the Athenians think just. (Indir. Δφ. PQ: they sent seeking a λώσιν τινά...τῶν παρεόντων κακῶν.)
7.117.2: Acanthians told to worship Artachaies as a Hero. (ἐκ θεοπροπ. NQ.)
7.178.1: Delphians instructed to pray to the winds. (Indir. Δφ. PQ: Delphians consult on behalf of themselves and Greece in terror at impending invasion.)
9.93.1: Apollonians take special care of their holy sheep in line with a prophecy. (ἐκ θεοπροπ.}
List B. Clear but complex/unusual oracles.

1.91: Delphic explanation of Croesus’ downfall despite generous dedication. (Prose—focalizing through Pythia—Δφ. PQ: is it a custom for Greek gods to be akharistos?)

2.18: Boarders of Egypt defined by the Nile. (Indir. Δμμ. PQ: Are those living on the boarder of Egypt and Libya part of Egypt and bound by the same customs?)

2.139.3: Length of Sabacus’ rule of Egypt. (Indir. ῥα μαντήμα which the Ethiopians use’.)

3.124.1: ‘many oracles’ (τῶν μαντίων) forbid Polycrates’ expedition. (Indir. Unattrib.)

5.1.2: Paeonians told to attack if Perinthians call them by their name. (Indir. source vague: χρῆσαντος τοῦ θεοῦ.)

5.43: Oracle confirms Dorieus would conquer the land for colonizing Heracleia. (Indir. Δφ. PQ: will he take the land to which he was sent?)

5.89.2: Complex conditional oracle about Athenian revenge on Aeginetans. (Indir. Δφ. apparently unsolicited.)

6.34.1-2: Dolonkians told to get help from whomever first calls them hospitably. (Indir. Δφ. PQ: consult about a war going badly.)

6.35.3: Miltiades told to aid the Dolonkians. (Indir. Δφ. PQ: asks if he should comply with their request.)

6.86.γ2: Glaucus told that consultation of a deed is equal to commission. (Indir. Δφ. PQ: Glaucus prays for pardon.)

7.220.4: Spartans told a king will die or Lacedaemon will be sacked. (6er. Δφ. PQ: They consulted about the war that was beginning.)

8.20.1-2: Euboeans told to remove their goats from Euboea when a barbarophonos yokes the sea with papyrus. (6er. Βα. Ignored, as Hdt. notes, to their disadvantage. NQ.)

8.36.1-2: Delphians ask about moving holy things in Delphi, told Apollo will look after his own things. (Indir. Δφ. PQ.)

8.114.1: Spartans told to ask requital from Xerxes for Leonidas. (Indir. Δφ. NQ.)

8.141.1: Dorians to be driven out by Athenians and Persians. (Indir. λογ. NQ.)

9.43: Medians to be destroyed by the Thermedon and Asopus rivers. (6er. Βα. NQ.)

9.93.3-4: Apollonians consult about infertile flock and land. Told that the gods sent the wolves to destroy the flock, that they were wrong to blind Euenius, and they have to give him what he wants. (Indir. Δφ. and Δδ. PQ.)
List C.1: 'Predictive' Prophecy
(often—but not always—metaphorical, ambiguous, or misleading)

Oracles
1.13: Oracle confirms Gyges as king, predicts eventual τίσις. (Indir. Δφ. PQ.)
1.53.3: Croesus will destroy a great empire. (Indir. Δφ. & Αμφ. VQ.)
1.55: Croesus need not fear until a mule sits on the Median throne. (6er. Δφ. PQ.)
1.66.2: Apollo gives the Spartans Tegea to measure with chains. (6er. Δφ. PQ.)
3.64.3: Cambyses told he would die in Ecbatana. (Indir. Br. NQ. Homonymous mistake.)
5.92β.2: Oracle interpreted as predicting Cypselus' tyranny (6er. Δφ. PQ: Eetion consults about childlessness).
5.92β.2: An older oracle in possession of Bacchiadai interpreted as predicting Cypselus' tyranny (6er. unattrib. NQ.)
5.92ε.2: A 'two-sided' oracle given to Kypselos, which leads him to capture Corinth. (6er. Δφ. NQ.)
6.77.2: Argives told to fear defeat by 'the female'—interpreted as 'deception', cf. 77.1, 78.2. (6er. Δφ. NQ. Given to both Argives and Milesians.)
7.220.4: Spartans told a king will die or Lacedaemon will be sacked. (6er. Δφ. PQ: They consulted about the war that was beginning.)
7.6.3-5: The Hellespont had to be yoked by a Persian. (Indir. Musaeus via Onomacritus.)
9.42.1-43.1: It is necessary for a Persian to attack Delphi and be destroyed. (Indir. λογ. NQ. Narrator observes that it was composed about the Illyrians and Enchelians.)
9.43: Persians shall be destroyed by the Thermadon and Aesopus. (6er. Bu.)

Dreams
1.34: Oneiros shows Croesus Atys' death.
1.107: In Astyages' sleep Mandane's urine seems to fill the city and Asia. Interpreted by oneiropoloi and afraid at their response. Mandane thus married to a Persian.
1.108.1: Astyages sees an opsis in which a vine from Mandane's womb covers Asia. Interpreted by oneiropoloi. Orders Cyrus killed (cf. Soph. El. 421-3 for imagery.)
1.209.1: Cyrus 'seemed to see in his sleep' that Hystaspes' eldest son has wings shadowing Asia.
3.30.2-3: Cambyses sees a vision of 'Smerdis' sitting on his throne and touching the sky with his head—orders his brother Smerdis killed.
5.56: Hipparchus visited by a big and good-looking man, who speaks riddling hexameters to
him. Entrusted to oneiropoloi, but Hipparchus is killed that day.

6.107-8: Hippias dreams about sleeping with his mother, and thinks he will take Athens. (But dream fulfilled by his tooth.)

7.12-18: Xerxes and Artabanus ordered/threatened to continue with the Persian expedition in the course of three opseis in which they are addressed by a big, good-looking man. Divinity of dreams tested and proved.

7.19.1: Xerxes has an opsis in which he is crowned with an olive wreath which extends over the whole world but then disappears. Interpreted by Magi as indicating his enslavement of all men.
List C.2: Empowering Prophecy

Oracles

1.19-22: Alyattes’ Illness and the Temple. (Indir. Δφ. heard from the Delphians. NQ.)

1.167.1-2: Agyllans and the cursed ground. (Indir. Δφ. PQ: want to cure a hamartas.)

1.174.4-5: Cnidans trench-building project. (3er. Δφ. PQ: want to know about the cause of mysterious eye wounds.)

2.52.2-3: Names of the gods (Indir. Δδ. PQ: should Pelasgians use Egyptian names?)

2.152.3: Brazen men from the sea. (Indir. Oracle of Leto in Buto. PQ: Psammitichus desires vengeance on those who drove him out.)

2.158.1: Necos’ red sea canal stopped by an adverse oracle. (Indir. unattrib. NQ.)

5.1.2: Paeonians told to attack if Perinthians call them by their name. (Indir. source vague: χρήσαντος τοϋ θεου.)

6.139.1-2: Lemnos sterile, and women barren. Oracles commands them to give to the Athenians whatever dikê the Athenians think just. (Indir. Δφ. PQ: they sent seeking a λύσιν τινά...τῶν παρεόντων κακῶν.)

8.20.1-2: Euboeans told to remove their goats from Euboea when a barbarophonos yokes the sea. (6er. Ba. Ignored, as Herodotus notes, to their disadvantage.)

Dreams

3.149: Otanes repopulates Samos after a dream (ὁψιος ὄνειρου) and a genital disease.

6.118.1: Datis sees an opsis in sleep. The opsis is not known, but it seems to prompt him to return a statue.
Appendix Eight
Fragmenta Herodoti Halicarnassei (fl. c.415?)

Testimonia

T.1. [= Arist. De gen. an. 756b1-10]
...οὗτος καὶ Ἡρόδωτος ὁ μυθολόγος, ὡς κυκλοφοροῦντος τῶν ἱθῶν ἐκ τοῦ ἀνακάπτειν τὸν θόρόν, οὐ συνορέουσίς ὃτι τοὺς ἐστίν αὐτοὶ.

...Erodotus fabularum scriptor.

T.2 [= Cicero, de leg. 1.5]
quamquam et apud Herodotum patrem historiae et apud Theopompum sunt innumerabiles fabulae.

Fragmenta

Fr. 1.
προβήσομαι ὡς τὸ πρόσω τοῦ λόγου, ὡς ὡς μικρὰ καὶ μεγάλα ἄστεα ἀνθρώπων ἐπεξείμων. Τὰ γὰρ τὸ πάλαι μεγάλα ἦν, τὰ πολλὰ αὐτῶν σεμικρά γέγονε: τὰ δὲ ἐπὶ ἐμέ ἦν μεγάλα, πρότερον ἦν σεμικρά. Τὴν ἀνθρωπηνὴν ὅπως ἔπιστάμενος εὐδαιμονίην ὑδάμα ἐν τούτῳ μένουσαν,

Fr. 2 [= Plut. Mor. 857f-858a]
ὁ Κροίς, ἐπιστάμενον καὶ τὸ θείον πᾶν ἐὼν φθονερὸν τε καὶ ταραχῶδες ἐπειροτὰς ἀνθρωπηνίων πραγμάτων πέρι

Fr. 3 [= Plut. Mor. 1106e9-a10]
ὁ θέας γλυκῶν γεύσας τὸν αἰῶνα φθονερὸς ἐν αὐτῷ ὅπως φαίνεται

Fr. 4
μάθε ὡς κύκλος τῶν ἀνθρωπηνίων ἐστὶ πραγμάτων, περιφερόμενος δὲ οὐκ ἐξ αἰεί τούς αὐτοὺς εὐτυχέειν.

Fr. 5
Πέρασας δὲ οὐδα νόμοις τοιοσίδε ἐρασμένως, ἀγάλματα μὲν καὶ νησίς καὶ βωμοῦς οὐκ ἐν νόμῳ ποιευμένως ἱδρύεσθαι, ἀλλὰ τοῖς ποιεύσει μορφὴν ἐπιφέρονσι, ὡς μὲν ἐμοὶ δοκεῖν, ὅτι οὐκ ἀνθρωποφυέας ἐνόμισαν τοὺς θεοὺς κατὰ πέρ οἱ Ἑλληνες εἶναι.

Fr. 6 (spurius?)
Καὶ καὶ τοῦ θείου ἡ προνοία, ὡςπερ καὶ οἰκός ἐστι, ἑούσα σοφή, ὡς μὲν [γάρ] ψυχήν τε δειλα καὶ ἐδωδίμα, ταῦτα μὲν πάντα πολύγονα πεποίηκε, ἵνα μὴ ἐπιλίπῃ κατεσθιόμενα, ὡς δὲ σχέτλια καὶ ἀνηρά, ὀλιγόγονα.
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