Introduction

The Hebrew Bible assigns to Cyrus of Persia titles usually reserved only for Yahweh's chosen Davidic dynasty. According to Isaiah, Yahweh himself calls Cyrus by the titles, "my Shepherd" (44:28) and "Messiah" (45:1). This exalted portrait of Cyrus is truly exceptional in the Hebrew Bible, which often exhibits strong ethnocentric tendencies and rarely gives high praise, let alone the exalted Davidic titles of Shepherd and Messiah, to the kings of foreign countries. While perhaps the most exalted ancient Near Eastern portrait of Cyrus, other than those provided by Persia herself, this Great King nevertheless also favors well in the Babylonian Chronicle and Dream Text of Nabonidus. But what of Herodotus's opinion?

As a part of their studies into Herodotus's form and thought, Immerwahr and Wood have both examined Herodotus's portrait of Cyrus against the backdrop of larger patterns of the rise and fall of individuals and nations found throughout *The Histories*.[1] More intimate studies by Avery and Evans, on the other hand, have focused more exclusively on the Cyrus *logos* and sought to interpret the portrait of Cyrus on that level.[2] Generally all these scholars, alongside others, have argued for a predominantly sympathetic portrait, complicated only by Cyrus's tragic campaign against the Massagetan. The evidence, however, seems at least marginally at odds with this interpretation. In the stories and books that follow the Cyrus *logos*, there emerges a portrait of Cyrus as a legendary hero. Avery claims that "the foundations for this reverent attitude towards Cyrus are laid in book one" and center on the three things that Cyrus accomplished for the Persians: "freedom, prosperity, and rule."[3] Throughout the rest of *The Histories*, Herodotus includes a variety of short statements that reveal the high esteem in which subsequent eras held this Great King. Yet, Herodotus's own portrait in the Cyrus *logos*, from the fall of Croesus to the

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[1] Henry R. Immerwahr, *Form and Thought in Herodotus* (ed. Walton Morris; Cleveland: Press of Western Reserve University, 1966); Henry Wood, *The Histories of Herodotus: An Analysis of the Formal Structure* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972).

[2] H. C. Avery, "Herodotus' Picture of Cyrus," *AJP* 93 (1972): 529-546; J. A. S. Evans, "Individuals in Herodotus," in *Herodotus, Explorer of the Past: Three Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 41-88.

[3] Avery, "Cyrus," 531, 533.

Massagetan campaign and the death of Cyrus (46-216), reveals a much more ambivalent, occasionally polemical, assessment of Cyrus, which subverts this later portrait.[4]

The Fall of Croesus

The story of the fall of Croesus is a discrete literary unit that starts at 46 and ends at 94.[5] References to the Persians form an inclusio around this literary section. In 46, news of the victories of Cyrus and the Persians arouse Croesus from his grief over the loss of his son, Atys. In 94, the literary unit ends with a decisive declaration that the Lydians became slaves to the Persians. Within this literary unit, there are a series of shorter units: 46-74 (56-68), 75-86, 86-92, and 93-94.[6] The section from 46-74 provides the background to Croesus's campaign against the Persians and includes a subsection from 56-68 on Athenian and Spartan history. The section from 75-86 consists of the account of Croesus's campaign against the Persians while the section of 86-92 is an account of the aftermath of the campaign, specifically the scenes of Croesus facing his death on the pyre and his subsequent inquiries at the oracle of Delphi. The literary unit concludes with a short Lydian ethnography in 93-94.

The story of the fall of Croesus is the first narrative to mention Cyrus and plays an important role in the development of the character of Cyrus in *The Histories*. The story provides an initial rather ambivalent portrait of the Persian king but more significantly initiates a series of story paradigms and motifs that resonate in the central Cyrus narratives in 95-214.

While Cyrus is an important trigger in the fall of Croesus, the Herodotean story is primarily about Croesus's own inexorable march towards defeat rather than a narrative about the

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[4] All references to book one of *The Histories* omit the book number; any references to books two through nine include the book number. Unless otherwise noted, quotes of *The Histories* are taken from Herodotus, *Herodotus: The Histories* (trans. Robin Waterfield; OWC; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). In my study, I have frequently compared this translation with Herodotus, *Herodotus: The Histories* (ed. Betty Radice; trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt; Rev ed.; PC; London: Penguin Books, 1972) and, when necessary, I have used the Greek text of Herodotus, *Herodotus* (ed. G. P. Goold; trans. A. D. Godley; 4 vols.; Rev and Repr ed.; LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University, 1990).

[5] The Croesus *logos* itself seems to start in 6 and end in 92, with parallel summaries of Croesus and his conquest of Ionia framing the narrative. The Lydian ethnography (92-94) is not a part of the Croesus *logos* proper but it is included in the story of the fall of Croesus.

[6] Carolyn Dewald, "Explanatory Notes," in *Herodotus: The Histories* (OWC; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 594-735, 595; cf. Immerwahr, *Form and Thought*, 330-332, who offers a more elaborate breakdown of these sections.

military acumen of the Persian king in conquering him.[7] Certainly, it is acknowledged right at the outset that Cyrus defeated Astyages and that his power continues to increase (46). Cyrus also demonstrates some military acumen to take advantage of Croesus's retreat into Sardis (79). He takes the advice of Harpagus at Sardis to rout Croesus's cavalry (80) and, by offering a reward to his soldiers, he secures the capture of Sardis before Croesus's allies can arrive to lift the siege (84). But, these modest statements of Cyrus's skill as a military leader are offset by persistent references to the superior numbers of Cyrus's forces (77, 80); the overwhelming role of fate throughout the narrative; and, Croesus's own errors in judgment.

Cyrus does not defeat Croesus so much as Croesus defeats himself. In 86, Croesus recognizes that his defeat plays out the wisdom of Solon concerning the mutability of happiness. In 91, the Pythia of Delphi points out that Croesus's defeat is a matter of fate, a divine judgment for the crime of his ancestor, Gyges.[8] Croesus also makes several errors in judgment, which are contributing causes in his ultimate defeat. He misunderstands the oracles of Delphi and Amphiaraus (71, 91). He disregards the warning of Sandanis (71). He transgresses natural boundaries, symbolized in his crossing of the river Halys (72, 75). He disbands the foreign element of his army under the mistaken assumption that Cyrus would not march against Sardis (77). All these elements of the story diminish Cyrus's role in bringing about the fall of Croesus.

They are, however, also important paradigms or motifs that echo in the central Cyrus narratives—as I will point out in this paper—and indeed permeate the rest of *The Histories*. The stories of Cyrus, Cambyses, Darius, and Xerxes all share at least one or more of these motifs as well as other motifs found in rest of the Croesus *logos*: divine *ψθόνος*, human *εὐδαιμονίη*, *μοῖρα*, *τίσις*, *κύκλος*, *νόμος*, *ὕβρις*, as well as rivers, advisors, oracles, gods, and dreams.[9]

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[7] cf. Avery, "Cyrus," who compares this campaign to the Massagetan campaign and concludes, "The Cyrus who campaigned against Croesus did everything right … The Cyrus who campaigned against Tomyris did everything wrong" (536-537). There is some validity to this position but I think Avery over-emphasizes the rather meager descriptions of Cyrus's successes and also ignores the degree to which Croesus is responsible for his own defeat.

[8] cf. 13. For the complete story of Gyges in *The Histories*, see 7-14.

[9] See Donald Lateiner, *The Historical Method of Herodotus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 189-210, who demonstrates how some of these motifs surface in Herodotus's explanations for the important events of his narrative.

Along with the ambivalent portrait of Cyrus's role in the fall of Croesus, it is perhaps possible to detect an anti-Persian polemic in Herodotus's sources (or his own views). In an oracle from Delphi in 55, which the Pythia clarifies in 91, Cyrus is the mule who ascends to the Persian throne. While a mule often has royal associations in ancient Near Eastern literature, the point of comparison in this instance strongly suggests a derogatory connotation.[10] A mule is the offspring of a (noble) horse and a (base) donkey just as Cyrus, according to the Pythia, is the child of a noble Median mother and an inferior Persian father (91). Given the importance of boundaries in Herodotean thought, this transgression of class and ethnic boundaries probably represents a not-so-subtle polemic against Cyrus.[11] Similarly, in the Telmessian interpretation of the ill-omen in 78, the horses, which in the logic of the interpretation represent Cyrus and the Persians, are described as "hostile intruders." This description seems to recast the Persians, in place of the Lydians, as the belligerents in this conflict.

The tone of this portrait of Cyrus does not change in the post-conflict part of the story. Herodotus reports that Cyrus places Croesus and fourteen Lydian boys on a funeral pyre and orders the pyre set alight. Herodotus is unsure of Cyrus's motives, listing three possibilities: "a victory-offering for some god," "he wanted to fulfil a vow he had made," or "he had heard that Croesus was a god-fearing man and … he wanted to see if any immortal being would rescue him from being burnt alive" (86). Whatever the motive, the fact that Herodotus even attempts to find a motive illustrates that Cyrus's actions are barbaric and so it is difficult to know what to make of Cyrus's change of heart in response to the story of Solon's visit to Croesus—is it merciful when a barbarian refrains from committing the barbaric act he has ordered?[12] Irregardless, Herodotus pre-empts any prestige that could accrue to Cyrus as a result of this decision just as Herodotus diminishes Cyrus's role in the fall of Croesus. While Cyrus orders his men to put out the fire and

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[10] "Donkey, Ass," n.p., *DBI*. Logos Library System 2.1g 1998. It is also interesting to point out that a mule, in contrast to a horse, often symbolizes peace.

[11] See Lateiner, *Historical Method*, 126-144 for a discussion of the importance of boundaries in *The Histories*.

[12] It is interesting to note that Cyrus laughs after he hears this story. According to S. Flory, "Laughter, Tears, and Wisdom in Herodotus," *AJP* 99 (1978):145-153, laughter in *The Histories* is often a sign of contempt for wisdom or the gods.

rescue Croesus and the others from the pyre, his men are "too late … to control the fire" (87). It is Apollo (cf. Loxias in 91) who delivers Croesus from imminent death.

Cyrus takes Croesus into his service, accepts his advice to stop the looting of Sardis, and promises to cooperate with any requests that Croesus might make (88-91). This last episode in the story of the fall of Croesus, even as it recounts the victory of Cyrus over Croesus, almost seems to reinstate Croesus. In 88, Herodotus reports that Cyrus "was very impressed with him, and he and his whole entourage admired the man's demeanour." Again, in 90, "Cyrus was delighted with what Croesus was saying; he thought the suggestion was excellent … He was full of praise for Croesus." Further to this, Cyrus extends to Croesus carte blanche: "Yes, of course you have my permission, Croesus," Cyrus says, "and the same goes for future requests of yours too" (90). However one reads Cyrus's magnanimity, it is significant to the ensuing narratives that Cyrus takes Croesus into his service as Croesus plays an important foil to the character of Cyrus (and also Cambyses). It also symbolically unites the empires of Lydia and Persia and therefore implies continuity between Croesus's first "criminal acts of aggression against the Greeks" (5) and the later acts of aggression perpetrated by Cyrus, Cambyses, Darius, and Xerxes.

According to Wood, "Herodotean history does not proceed in a straight line: the essence of history is the cycle of human affairs (1.207), specifically the instability of human fortune, in which reversal is inherent (1.5.3-4)."[13] The entire Croesus *logos* (6-92) serves a critical function in this cycle. The *logos* recounts the rise of Croesus to prosperity as well as his eventual fall. Wood argues that this pattern of rise and fall depicted in the Croesus *logos* recurs throughout *The Histories* on the level of the individual and on the level of nation.[14] On the level of the individual, the pattern repeats in the stories of Cyrus, Cambyses, Darius, and Xerxes, where each king

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[13] Wood, *Histories*, 30; cf. Immerwahr, *Form and Thought*, 154, who denies that Herodotus employs a circular or even cyclical patterning of history: "The patterns of rise and fall, or of cooperation and war, are thus irregular patterns, when seen as historical time sequences, rather than as moral or religious patterns of crime and punishment or the like … Herodotus does not work with large cycles in universal history; he is not a cyclical historian." This claim, however, seems inconsistent with Immerwahr's repeated references to cycles in *The Histories*.

[14] Wood, *Histories*, 30-31. See also Immerwahr, *Form and Thought*, 76. Of course, the theme of the reversal of fortune is a pattern Herodotus identifies in his own voice in the proem of 1.5. James Romm, *Herodotus* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 59-62, points out that the proem resurfaces in the voice of Solon (1.32), the Pharoah Amasis (3.40), and Xerxes's uncle, Artabanus (7.10). Romm goes to argue "that Herodotus provided these three prominent commentaries on the downfall of greatness as a way of building an ethical framework" (63).

experiences the height of prosperity only to experience a significant defeat. On the level of nation, Wood identifies a pattern to the history of Lydia that includes three elements: "initial obscurity: rise and growth: reversal."[15] This pattern repeats in Herodotus's account of the history of Persia: from the rise of Persia in Cyrus's era to the reversal in Xerxes's era. In this way, Croesus and Lydia serve a critical function as paradigms for the individual and national accounts of Persia and its kings and especially the central Cyrus narratives.

The Birth and the Rise of Cyrus

With the fall of Croesus, Herodotus transitions into the story of Cyrus proper and the origins of Persian power in Asia. Rather than starting with the rise of the Achaemenid dynasty of Persia, Herodotus begins this story with a discussion of the Median revolt against the Assyrian Empire and the subsequent reign of the Median kings up to the time of Astyages. This story of the early Median Empire (95-106), the birth and early childhood of Cyrus (107-123), and the rise of Cyrus (123-130) constitutes a discrete literary unit from 95-130, set apart by an inclusio of parallel references to Cyrus and the defeat of Croesus. It is followed by a Persian ethnography from 131-140.

According to Herodotus, this part of *The Histories* consists of one of four stories of the birth and childhood of Cyrus that he has chosen from among those he has heard (95). "My version," Herodotus declares, "will be based on what certain Persians say, those who seek to tell the truth rather than exalt Cyrus' achievements" (95). Herodotus's protestations to the truth aside, this story of the birth and rise of Cyrus shares many similarities with common founder legends and exhibits elements of Greek drama. Understanding the character of Cyrus in this section, therefore, requires sensitivity towards these popular elements and how such elements might contribute to characterization.

According to Pearson, many (if not all) of Herodotus's historical characters are influenced by popular memory and the characters and characterizations of earlier Greek literature.[16] These

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[15] Wood, *Histories*, 31.
[16] Lionel Pearson, "Real and Conventional Personalities in Greek History," *JHI* 15, no. 1 (1954): 136-145.

conventionalized characters arise from the limited evidence to which Herodotus had access and the expectations of a Greek audience, both of which made it necessary for Herodotus to extrapolate historical personalities according to popular and literary conventions. Historical events and persons are a starting point for Herodotus but they come to him as stories infused with established patterns, motifs, prejudices, biases, and hatreds.

In the story of the fall of Croesus, this type of popular memory is reflected in the oracle of Delphi and the Telmessian interpretation of the snake-eating horses, which, as I have already discussed, seem to exhibit an anti-Persian, anti-Cyrus polemic. In the story of the birth and rise of Cyrus, there are several more instances of popular memory. The story of his birth belongs to a popular genre of founder legends, widespread in the ancient Mediterranean and Near East. These founder legends share many common story elements: dreams or omens that presage the birth of a child who will threaten a ruling despot; the despot's attempts to thwart that future by attempting to kill the child; the escape of the child; surrogate parents who conceal and raise the child; a subtle shepherd motif, which prefigures the child's destiny; the motif of hidden and revealed identities; and, the motif of divine providence. The stories of King Sargon of Akkad, Moses, David, and even Jesus are among the potentially hundreds of ancient Near Eastern stories that share affinities with elements, motifs, and imagery of the Cyrus story.[17] This genre also surfaces often in Greek and Roman story-telling, most notably in the stories of Oedipus and Romulus. Herodotus even tells another story in *The Histories* that could be counted among this genre, namely the story of Cypselus in 5.92. The particulars of each story can vary but the basic outlines and the central message remain the same. These stories anticipate the rise of a hero.

The story of the birth and rise of Cyrus is also infused with many typical story elements, motifs, and imagery of Greek drama. From Astyages's fated fulfillment of the very ends he wants to avoid to Harpagus's Thyestean-style banquet, Greek drama undeniably flows through this

[17] See Robert Drews, "Sargon, Cyrus and Mesopotamian Folk History," *JNES* 33, no. 4 (1974): 387-393; Donald B. Redford, "The Literary Motif of the Exposed Child," 14, no. 1 (1967): 209-228. The legend of Romulus bears striking resemblances to the story of Cyrus, particularly to a version of the story that Herodotus polemicizes in 110, 122-123, namely that a wild dog suckled and cared for the baby Cyrus (cf. Justin 1.4.10).

story.[18] There is certainly no doubt that Herodotus bears the influence of his literary predecessors and contemporaries who were writing drama, epic, fable, and poetry. Herodotus's indebtedness to Homer, Aeschylus, and Sophocles is widely acknowledged and these are certainly not the limit of Herodotus's real or potential influences. Other suggestions include writers representing a variety of subject areas: Anaximander, Anaximenes, Aesop, Dionysus, Hecataeus, Xanthus, and others.[19] Mandell and Freedman even argue that the Hebrew Bible, specifically the so-called Primary History of Genesis through Kings, influenced Herodotus.[20] It is no surprise then, that Herodotus, an obviously cultured man, should reflect the worldview of these sources and his age.

By the fusion of popular notions and literary conventions, however, Herodotus undermines the hero typology and conveys an ambivalent, at times polemical, account of the birth and rise of Cyrus. Herodotus downplays any sense that the gods were with Cyrus—normally an integral part of a founder legend. While modern historians are inclined to see this as evidence of Herodotus's objectivity, it is more likely an example of Herodotean biases.[21] It is anachronistic to suggest that Herodotus would conceive of an objective history as a secular story; to many of the ancients and classicists, the existence of the divine was self-evident. Indeed, the accepted

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[18] Alexandru Cizek, "From the Historical Truth to the Literary Convention: The Life of Cyrus the Great Viewed by Herodotus, Ctesias and Xenophon," *AntCl* 44 (1975): 531-552, claims that "in the Cyrus drama, the immanence of the motifs of Dionysian passion is fully revealed" (539). J. A. S. Evans, "The Imperialist Impulse," in *Herodotus, Explorer of the Past: Three Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 9-40, comments on *The Histories* in general, "It needs little imagination to discover tragic patterns in the *Histories* that compare with those we find in *Oedipus Tyrannus* or the *Antigone*, and cross-fertilization is more than possible: the friendship of the two men is documented well enough" (33). On Astyages's dreams, see Christopher Pelling, "The Urine and the Vine: Astyages' Dreams at Herodotus 1.107-8," *CQ* 46 (1996): 68-77. On Thyestes, see Aesch. *Ag*. 1590ff. In addition, Sophocles wrote a lost tragedy about Thyestes.

[19] See e.g. W. W. How and J. Wells, *A Commentary on Herodotus: With Introduction and Appendixes* (2vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912, repr. 1975), 1:20-27; Lateiner, *Historical Method*, 91-108; Romm, *Herodotus*, 12-31.

[20] Sara Mandell and David Noel Freedman, *The Relationship Between Herodotus' History and Primary History* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993); see also John Van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), who argues for a more indirect influence. On the flipside, Flemming A. J. Nielsen, *The Tragedy in History: Herodotus and the Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSup 251; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); Jan-Wim Wesselius, "Discontinuity, Congruence and the Making of the Hebrew Bible," *SJOT* 13 (1999): 24-77; *The Origin of the History of Israel: Heredotus' Histories as Blueprint for the First Books of the Bible* (JSOTSup 345; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), argue that Herodotus, whether directly or indirectly, influenced the author of the Primary History. Personally, I think it is unlikely that there is any relationship between the HB and *The Histories*. The similarities of form and thought are not sufficiently compelling; in fact, a close analysis of the suspected similarities reveals the existence of sharp incongruities under the surface, reflecting a significant gap between the respective thought worlds of the HB and *The Histories*.

[21] In my opinion, it is specious to argue that Herodotus would not have believed the story that Cyrus was suckled by a dog because it was too incredible, especially when Herodotus does include in *The Histories* stories that are just as fantastic as this one. Throughout *The Histories*, there is well-known evidence of incredible and fantastic stories that Herodotus apparently accepted at face value. In this case, however, I believe that a bias against the Persians, and specifically the Persian kings, led Herodotus to select a less fantastic story. In the end, he may have been correct in doing so but we should not necessarily congratulate Herodotus, especially if prejudice rather than the pursuit of truth was the real motive behind his selection of the more realistic story.

assumption of *The Histories* is that the divine operates in human history; it is simply a matter of Herodotus's inquiries to set out where, when, and in what form that divine activity occurred in past events. In this story, Herodotus repeatedly points out that human actions saved the life of Cyrus (95, 110, 122-123). Only Median characters in the story suggest that divine providence played a role (118, 121, 124); Herodotus, as the story-teller, never supports such a claim, though he does so in other instances, such as his much more sympathetic and supportive account of the role of Apollo/Loxias in saving Croesus in 87 and 91. In fact, it appears that Herodotus thought the belief in the role of divine providence, communicated to Cyrus, was the root of hubris in Cyrus and a cause of his insatiable conquests and eventual downfall (204, cf. 122). Also as in the story of the fall of Croesus, an omen once again disguises a not-so-subtle polemic against the Persian king. In this case, the first dream of Astyages equates the coming rule of Cyrus with urine, which in this context is a negative image.[22] The gods, if they are involved in the birth and rise of Cyrus at all, do not speak very highly of him!

More significantly though, Cyrus is a minor character in his own birth and rise. His story serves as a backdrop to the drama of Astyages and Harpagus. As in the story of the fall of Croesus, Cyrus's rise is not the result of any great strategy or skill on his part. Instead, it is the almost inevitable consequence of the actions of others, in this case the mistakes and folly of Astyages and the plans of Harpagus. Cyrus's only contribution to his own rise is to convince the Persians to revolt against their masters, the Medes.

In these ways, Herodotus subverts the founder legend and employs conventions of Greek drama as a critique against Persian claims of the miraculous and great events that surrounded the birth and rise of Cyrus. In Herodotus's version of the story to this point, Cyrus has very human and even shameful origins: according to the oracle of Delphi, he is a mule, a half-breed, and according to the dream of Astyages, he will pollute all of Asia. Herodotus presents Cyrus's rise to power in Asia as the result of the vain folly of two kings, Astyages and Croesus, and the vengeful plans of one Median general, Harpagus. Cyrus is virtually a passive instrument in the

[22] This is not as obvious as it might seem to contemporary readers; see Pelling, "Astyages' Dreams."

machinations and mistakes of those around him. Up to this point then, Herodotus has minimized the historical accomplishments of Cyrus, polemicized Persian myths, and also laid the groundwork to explain the eventual downfall of the Persian king.[23]

The Battle Campaigns

In the next section of the story of Cyrus, Herodotus explores the battle campaigns of the early Persian Empire under Cyrus. Herodotus briefly makes reference to the downfall of Croesus and Lydia again as the starting point for his chronicle of the subjugation of Ionia, Aeolia, and all of "coastal Asia" (140[1]-177). There is no inclusio for this section as it is a continuation of the story of the fall of Croesus and the rise of Cyrus, which he interrupted with a Persian ethnography in 131-140. Instead, Herodotus writes, "I now resume my earlier narrative" (140). The common *μέν-δέ* construction ends this narrative section of the battle campaigns (the *μέν*-clause) and starts a new section (the *δέ*-clause), which chronicles Cyrus's conquest of "inland Asia" (177[8]-201).[24] The greater part of the new narrative section concerns Cyrus's conquest of Babylon and digressions relating to that topic.

The portrait of Cyrus that emerges in this section brings into view the imperialist impulse to expand—only hinted in the character of Croesus—that Herodotus portrays as the *aitie* of the wars between Greeks and non-Greeks (cf. proem). Evans calls this expansionist drive the *nomos* of imperialism and points to Xerxes's speech in 7.8 where it is articulated as a *nomos* that for the Persian people has its origins in the wars of Cyrus:[25]

> "Men of Persia," Xerxes said to the assembled Persian notables, "I am not myself setting up this *nomos* among you to follow, but it is one I have inherited, and I shall use it. I learn from our elders that we have never remained inactive since we took over this sovereign power from the Medes, when Cyrus dethroned Astyages." (7.8)[26]

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[23] It is worth noting, as another example, that if Herodotus had knowledge of it, he completely ignores the fact that Cambyses I was king of Persia and so also that Cyrus was king of Persia at the time of the Medo-Persian hostilities.

[24] On this function of the *μέν-δέ* construction, see Immerwahr, *Form and Thought*, 58.

[25] Evans, "Individuals," 26.

[26] This is Evans's own translation from Evans, "Individuals," 26.

As Evans observes, Herodotus tells two stories that explain "how the Persians acquired and maintained their *nomos* of imperialism."[27] Cyrus is at the centre of both stories. In 126, Cyrus inspires the Persians to revolt against the Medes by offering them a choice to live as slaves or masters. In 9.122, in the aftermath of the successful revolt against the Medes, Cyrus inspires the Persians to remain in their own "small and rugged country" rather than emigrate to a better country by presenting it as a choice to live as slaves or masters.[28] These stories not only show "how the Persians acquired and maintained their *nomos* of imperialism" but also show Cyrus's key role in inspiring his people to make that choice. The battle campaigns of Cyrus epitomize the application of that *nomos*.[29]

Throughout the battle campaigns section, Herodotus presents Cyrus as a king with a constant, nearly unalterable desire for conquest and subjugation. In 141, Cyrus rejects overtures of peace and subservience from the Asiatic Greeks and appoints military commanders to subjugate them purely out of vengeance for their unwillingness to support him against Croesus and the Lydians. In 153, he expresses contempt for the Spartiates and the entire Greek world. He even vows their destruction if he remains healthy. Also in 153, Herodotus mentions Cyrus's aspirations against "Babylon, the Bactrians, the Sacae, and the Egyptians." In 155, Cyrus, motivated by a revolt in Lydia, expresses to Croesus a desire to reduce the Lydians to slavery; only Croesus's petition on behalf of the Lydians prevents this action (155-157). Even so, Cyrus does order the enslavement of all of those directly involved in the Lydian revolt (156). In 178-200, interspersed with some short anecdotes and a Babylonian ethnography, Herodotus recounts Cyrus's conquest of Babylon. In 189-190, Herodotus tells an anecdote about Cyrus's anger towards the river Gyndes after a horse drowns in its waters—an image of irrational anger that prefigures the later actions of Xerxes, who flogs and brands the Hellespont in 7.35. In 190,

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[27] Evans, "Individuals," 26.

[28] On 9.122 and its possible interpretations, see Carolyn Dewald, "Wanton Kings, Pickled Heroes, and Gnomic Founding Fathers: Strategies of Meaning at the End of Herodotus' Histories," in *Classical Closure: Reading the End in Greek and Latin Literature* (ed. D. H. Roberts et al.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 62-82.

[29] cf. Charles W. Fornara, *Herodotus: An Interpretive Essay* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 24-36.

Herodotus writes that the Babylonians had observed "Cyrus' expansionist ambitions … how he attacked every race indiscriminately."

There is little room in Herodotus's account for the benevolent Cyrus of the Hebrew Bible or other ancient Mediterranean and near Eastern sources.[30] Instead, this characterization of Cyrus prepares for Tomyris's accusations of Cyrus at the start, middle, and end of the Massagetan campaign: "Peace is the last thing you desire" (206), "You bloodthirsty man, Cyrus … for all your insatiability I will quench your thirst for blood" (212), and "I warned you that I would quench your thirst for blood" (214).

The Massagetan Campaign and the Death of Cyrus

In the account of the Massagetan campaign, Herodotus brings together several themes and motifs from the earlier sections. There are no inclusios to mark off this section; it is only the shift from the narrative on Babylonian campaign (177[8]-201) to this section about the Massagetan campaign (201-216) that sets it apart. The actual battle account (204-214) is sandwiched between two ethnographies concerning Massagetae (201-204, 215-216).

In the course of the campaign, Cyrus commits similar mistakes to those of his imperial predecessors, Astyages and Croesus. Like both predecessors, Cyrus receives a providential omen, in this case a dream, and in a similar vein he misunderstands the omen (209). Cyrus interprets the dream like Croesus as a sign of divine favor (209) and he reacts to the dream like Astyages with threats against his would-be usurper (209-210). Like Croesus rejected the wise advice of Sandanis, Cyrus rejects the wise advice of Tomyris (206, 212). Like Croesus, and actually on the advice of Croesus too, Cyrus transgresses the natural boundary of the river Araxes, which separates the Persian Empire from the Massagetan Kingdom (207-208).[31]

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[30] Herodotus's ambivalent and often polemical assessment of Cyrus stands in remarkable contrast to the unequivocally positive tone of some ancient Near Eastern texts (which I mentioned in my Introduction), most notably some records of the reign of the neo-Babylonian king, Nabonidus, and the post-exilic texts of the Hebrew Bible, such as Isa 40-48, 2 Chr 36, and Ezra 1. These texts, along with the Cyrus Cylinder, tend to portray Cyrus as the great liberator of Asia, ordained by the gods of Babylon and Israel respectively. See Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (trans. Peter T. Daniels; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 31-33.

[31] Croesus's advice is deeply ironic in that it so closely mirrors the mistake he made in crossing the river Halys to attack Cyrus. Though Croesus claims to offer this advice as someone whose "own experiences have taught [him] an unwelcome lesson" (207), he clearly has not learned this lesson.

In particular, the mistake to cross the river Araxes and invade the Massagetan Kingdom is a critical one. As Herodotus reveals through the voices of Cambyses in 3.36 and Artabanus in 7.18, this was the decisive mistake in Cyrus's Massagetan campaign. It is implicit in these narratives that by transgressing the natural boundary dividing the Persian and Massagetan Kingdoms, Cyrus made himself liable to divine wrath. The same mistake brings disaster to Darius, who crosses the river Ister, in his Scythian expedition and Xerxes, who bridges the Hellespont, in his campaign against the Greeks.

It is startling that it is Croesus who advocates this course of action. Contrary to Croesus's reasoning, his own experiences should have taught him that the act of aggression symbolized in crossing a natural boundary invites disaster. His experiences also should have taught him, as it did Artabanus, that happiness lays in remaining at peace (7.18). But instead, Croesus draws on his experiences to devise a trick that he evidently hopes will result in a Persian victory.[32] He suggests that Cyrus offer the Massagetan army a taste of the soft life and so turn them into soft men. His strategy works insofar as a third of the Massagetan army falls prey to the trick. But, in the end, the strategy must backfire—at least in keeping with Herodotean thought—because in carrying it out, Cyrus contravenes the highest *nomos* of his own people as well as his own standards of honorable conduct, which is that deceit is forbidden (138, cf. 153).[33] This theme prefigures the similar actions of subsequent Persian kings, and the disasters that befall them, especially the actions of Cambyses, who flaunts Persian customs repeatedly. It is also a characteristic of the bad monarch in the speech of Otanes in 3.80[34] and highlights one of patterns

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[32] Or does he? Perhaps, it is a mistake to accept Croesus's protestations of goodwill towards Cyrus at face value. In the two other occasions that Croesus offers advice to Cyrus, it is not Cyrus's goodwill that he has at heart but rather he offers advice in the best interests of his people, the Lydians. In 88-90, he proposes a solution to stop the looting of Sardis and in 155, he proposes another solution to avoid the subjugation and enslavement of the Lydians.

[33] Cyrus is actually guilty of violating this nomos twice during the campaign. Herodotus describes both Cyrus's pledge of marriage to Tomyris and Croesus's plan to get the Massagetan army inebriated as tricks (*δόλῳ* in 205, *δολώσας* in 210).

[34] See John G. Gammie, "Herodotus on Kings and Tyrants: Objective Historiography or Conventional Portraiture?," *JNES* 45, no. 3 (1986): 171-195, who argues that the speech of Otanes (3.80) is programmatic in *The Histories*. Otanes's speech, he argues, serves as a pool from which Herodotus draws the characteristics of not only the Persian kings but tyrants as well. Gammie argues that kings and tyrants exhibit these characteristics or alternatively a positive inversion of them. Furthermore, Gammie claims that the degree to which a king or tyrant conforms or diverges from Otanes's description reflects Herodotus's opinion of that person; Otanes's catalogue of vices is a conventional norm that exerts control over Herodotean portraiture. cf. Lateiner, *Historical Method*, 163-186, who contends that the entire Constitutional Debate (3.80-82), not just the speech of Otanes, serves as a Herodotean "benchmark." Critical to this point, Lateiner argues that the speeches, particularly those of Otanes and Darius, are complementary rather than

of *The Histories*, which is the failure of the barbarian kings to learn from the mistakes of others or even from their own mistakes. Croesus can not learn from his own mistakes; Cyrus does not learn from Croesus; Cambyses, Darius, and Xerxes do not learn from each other or Cyrus and Croesus. Cyrus, therefore, does not escape Herodotus's conventional and polemical portraiture of kings and tyrants.

Conclusion

As shown, the story of Cyrus in *The Histories* exhibits many typical Herodotean patterns of representation. Throughout the narrative, there is an intersection of themes, motifs, and imagery of popular memory and literary convention, constrained only by occasional historical truth. The portrait of Cyrus that emerges from this intersection is ambivalent at best, negative at its worst. It is made to serve Herodotus's theories about the *aitie* of the wars between Greeks and non-Greeks. And, it undoubtedly polemicizes Persian views of their Great King, while providing only limited insight into the actual, literary or historical, character of Cyrus.

Yet, it is also a portrait that teaches many lessons of nearly universal value. It is a scathing critique of imperialism; a warning against impetuousness and arrogance; and, an object lesson in learning from the past. It is perhaps this last lesson that most sharply confirms Herodotus's place as the father of history. Through his inquiries, however flawed, Herodotus sought to understand the mistakes of the past and offer his audience the opportunity to learn from them. This is, perhaps, the reason that Cyrus makes his appearance at the end of *The Histories*. Displaced from time, Cyrus issues a warning—in the end, he is given the benefit of being able to learn from his mistakes—not to the Persians to whom he directs his answer but to Herodotus's audience: "Wealth and despotism may extend and multiply material goods and

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contradictory. Lateiner astutely observes that Darius's argument is weak. Darius offers no refutation of Otanes's list of tyrannical vices, criticizes only "degenerate forms of other constitutions," and proffers nominal advantages for monarchy. His argument culminates in a venerable appeal to *the way we have always done it*. Thus, the advantages Darius forwards on behalf of monarchy, Herodotus willingly admits into his presentation of history; but these advantages do not offset the damning catalogue of vices that Otanes indexes, which Herodotus reinforces in his record. Second, in Lateiner's view, Herodotus judges that history supports the essential points put forward in the Constitutional Debate and so shows their validity with a systematic and cumulative selection of examples. Thus, the Constitutional Debate is not an ahistorical schema that Herodotus superimposes on historical personages, as Gammie asserts, rather it governs the selection and arrangement of narratives, dialogues, and statistics or put even more generously, it merely espouses the historical patterns of despotic behaviour already identified through enquiry. The Constitutional Debate, and specifically the speech of Otanes, is symptomatic rather than programmatic.

human subjects—in short, power—but they also corrupt and eventually destroy the individuals and communities that enjoy them."[35]

[35] Lateiner, *Historical Method*, 50.

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