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## GODS IN EARLY GREEK HISTORIOGRAPHY

*Robert L. Fowler*

This chapter seeks to understand something of Herodotus' attitude towards the gods, both by examining his text for internal indications and by comparing the practice of other early writers. There have been, to be sure, many excellent studies of Herodotus' gods, and his religion.<sup>1</sup> In general one may study Herodotus' text either to discover evidence of religious practice and belief, or to assess the role of the gods in the *Histories* themselves. The second of these is the primary focus here, but more than the usual point that the gods are deeply implicated in the course of history, in various interesting ways, I wish to stress that they are also deeply implicated in the historiography, and linked to Herodotus' most basic conception of his task.

Herodotus, after all, did not have to work the gods into his

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- 1 Most recently S. Scullion, 'Herodotus and Greek religion', in C. Dewald and J. Marincola (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Herodotus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 192–208. See also G. Lachenaud, *Mythologies, religion et philosophie de l'histoire dans Hérodote* (Lille: Université de Lille III, 1978); H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (London and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983<sup>2</sup>), pp. 58–70; J. Gould, *Herodotus* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989); W. Burkert, 'Herodot als Historiker fremder Religionen', in G. Nenci and O. Reverdin (eds), *Hérodote et les peuples non grecs: entretiens sur l'antiquité classique 35* (Vandoeuvres and Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1990), pp. 1–39; J. Gould, 'Herodotus and religion', in S. Hornblower (ed.), *Greek Historiography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 91–106 = *Myth, Ritual, Memory, and Exchange: Essays in Greek Literature and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 359–77; T. Harrison, *Divinity and History: The Religion of Herodotus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); N. Fisher, 'Popular morality in Herodotus', in E. Bakker et al. (eds), *Brill's Companion to Herodotus* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 199–224; J. Mikalson, 'Religion in Herodotus', in Bakker et al., *Brill's Companion to Herodotus*, pp. 187–98; T. Harrison, "'Prophecy in reverse'?" Herodotus and the origins of history', in P. Derow and R. Parker (eds), *Herodotus and his World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 237–55; J. Mikalson, *Herodotus and Religion in the Persian Wars* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

explanation of historical events. Living not much later, Thucydides excluded them; in the next generation the pious Xenophon put them back in.<sup>2</sup> Ctesias cheerfully gives Semiramis the divine mother and fabulous biography Herodotus had passed over in silence.<sup>3</sup> These differences show that we are dealing with individual preference, not (as it was once popular to suppose) evolution from superstition to reason, from *mythos* to *logos*.<sup>4</sup> In Herodotus' own day Sophists were busy finding anthropocentric ways of explaining the world. Herodotus could have told a secular story, but he did not. Religion is everywhere in his book; no one would write such a thing were they not, at the least, profoundly interested in the gods and their role in human history. In this light the idea that he is a religious sceptic of some kind seems very hard to sustain. Though he expresses many reservations concerning various human beliefs about the gods, this is quite different from scepticism about their basic existence. Any number of passages demonstrate his belief in divinity; none suggests disbelief.<sup>5</sup>

- 2 Thucydides: S. Hornblower, 'The religious dimension of the Peloponnesian War, or, what Thucydides does not tell us', *HSCPh* 94 (1992), pp. 169–97; W. Furlley, 'Thucydides and religion', in A. Rengakos and A. Tsakmakis (eds), *Brill's Companion to Thucydides* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 415–38. Xenophon: H. Bowden, 'Xenophon and the scientific study of religion', in C. Tuplin (ed.), *Xenophon and his World* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2004), pp. 229–46; R. Parker, 'One man's piety: the religious dimension of the *Anabasis*', in R. Lane Fox (ed.), *The Long March: Xenophon and the Ten Thousand* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 131–53. See also Hornblower's brief remarks in *Greek Historiography*, p. 30.
- 3 F 1b–c Lenfant; cf. F 1m. On Herodotus' scepticism about divine parentage see below, p. 000.
- 4 An example among many: H. Strasburger, 'Herodot als Geschichtsforscher', in *Studien zur alten Geschichte* 2 (Hildesheim and New York: Olms, [1980] 1982), pp. 835–919 at 887: 'So nahe er Thukydidēs zeitlich und in vielen wesentlichen Zügen der Äußerungstechnik steht – in gedanklicher Hinsicht geht die Trennungslinie zwischen archaisch und klassisch, der von uns abgewendeten und der uns zugekehrten Denkwelt, gerade zwischen ihnen Beiden durch. Für Herodot sind die meisten geschichtlichen Erscheinungen Kundgebungen eines göttlichen Willens, Äußerungen, die ihm geheimnisvoll und unheilsschwanger erscheinen, mindestens, solange noch nicht das Ende einer bestimmten Schicksalskette sichtbar scheint.'
- 5 Gould, 'Herodotus and religion'; Harrison, *Divinity and History*, pp. 13–14; Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus*, p. 64; contrast D. Lateiner, *The Historical Method of Herodotus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), pp. 196–205. Scullion, 'Herodotus and Greek religion', and Burkert, 'Herodot als Historiker fremder Religionen', oddly mistake Herodotus' reluctance to speak of theology for scepticism about the existence of gods; though he was influenced by the tradition of Xenophanes and Protagoras (below, p. 000), when the latter says 'Concerning the gods I am unable to know that they exist, or that they do not exist, or what they are like in appearance' (tr. Scullion, p. 201), Herodotus obviously disagrees with the first part of this. Cf. V. Gray, 'Herodotus' literary and historical method: Arion's story (1.23–24)', *AJPh* 122 (2001), pp. 11–28 at p. 21.

There are, however, many ways of including gods in a story. The point is perhaps most easily demonstrated by quoting two passages, not from Greek writers, but from the Bible.<sup>6</sup> The first passage is chosen more or less at random from the Old Testament (1 Samuel 16.1–4, King James Version):

And the Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons.

And Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me. And the Lord said, Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord.

And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will shew thee what thou shalt do: and thou shalt anoint unto me him whom I name unto thee.

And Samuel did that which the Lord spake, and came to Bethlehem.

The second is from Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, ch. 15:

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;

By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, and how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures;

And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:

After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.

After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.

6 The contrast is merely meant to focus attention on Greek characteristics; for orientation on Biblical historiography (and what that term might mean in context), see A. Momigliano, 'Persian historiography, Greek historiography, and Jewish historiography', in *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 5–28; T. Bolin, 'History, historiography, and the use of the past in the Hebrew Bible', in C. Kraus (ed.), *The Limits of Historiography: Genre and Narrative in Ancient Historical Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 133–40. For Persian historiography see H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 'The Persian kings and history', in Kraus, *The Limits of Historiography*, pp. 91–112.

And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

But by the grace of God I am what I am.

The first passage has many parallels in the historical books of the Old Testament. God appears on almost every page; either he speaks directly with the principal characters and directs their actions, or they speak confidently on his behalf. The entire history is the enactment of his plan for the Israelites to reach the Promised Land; he has made a covenant with them, which he cannot break, though they do so repeatedly.

The second passage also provides a narrative, the last days and resurrection of Christ, as the foundation of history, the end of which is, as in the first passage, the establishment of a Kingdom. The divine plan underpinning this is guaranteed by scriptures. It is further guaranteed by the repeated epiphany of the risen Christ, attested by many living witnesses. The implication for the individual in both passages is the same: keep the faith; follow the Lord.

Much of what we find in these passages is alien to mainstream Greek religion as conducted in the city-states or represented in the great works of literature. There is no master plan, no call to 'follow me' as one does Moses or Jesus. There is a sense of a contractual relationship with the gods, but nothing like the Old Testament covenant. There are no scriptures, no Word of God. There is no end of history. The gods do not make the fate of humanity, collectively or individually, their central concern.

These differences are clear. There is, however, a point of contact in one respect: in some genres of Greek literature, the gods do converse directly with humans: epic and tragedy come immediately to mind, but lyric too affords examples, whether in Sappho's intimate songs (fr. 1), or Pindar's more public ones (*Pyth.* 8.59). In mythography too the gods are omnipresent in this direct manner.<sup>7</sup> But not in historiography – at least, not once Herodotus had set the pattern. Recall that the mythographers were historians; the distinction of myth and history lay in the future, even if it was starting to take shape in Herodotus' day, owing not least to his efforts but also to those of the Sophists. His prose forebears therefore gave no lead in this respect.<sup>8</sup> Herodotus

7 For the gods in mythography, see below.

8 For orientation on Herodotus and his relation with the mythographers, see R. Fowler, 'Herodotus and his contemporaries', *JHS* 116 (1996), pp. 62–87, and 'Herodotus' prose predecessors', in Dewald and Marincola, *The Cambridge Companion to Herodotus*, pp. 29–45.

was clearly predisposed to think that gods are part of the story, as we shall see at a quite basic level – in one sense, he was not so far from the Bible after all; but something prevented him from telling his story as Homer, Aeschylus, Pherecydes, Pindar or the authors of the Bible told theirs, with gods on stage. Here again, personal predilections will have played a role; but given that Herodotus was, it seems, the first to make this choice, and given its profound consequences, we need to ask about the context in which he made it.

A general point about the nature of Greek gods is highly pertinent. The basic difficulty is that a Greek god cannot be the ultimate subject of the story. As denizens and not creators of the world, they must be part of some other, more basic story. Wilamowitz famously observed that in Greek religion ‘god’ is a predicate, not a subject.<sup>9</sup> In more modern Christian traditions, one learns as a child appropriate adjectives with which to describe the deity: God is love, God is merciful, God is just, God is all-knowing, God is all-powerful, and so on. In Greek religion, by contrast, when something notable happens – lightning strikes, significant words are spoken, your interlocutor changes into a bird and vanishes through the ceiling – one draws an inference: *that* (subject) was a god (predicate). The gods are in the world, and projections of it; they are not outside it, or authors of its being. Something more fundamental than they must provide the outlines of the story.

Greek religion therefore was inherently resistant to the kind of role the Bible gives God. But even as an ordinary pious Greek Herodotus need have done no more than note religious matters when pertinent to his tale, and perhaps draw inferences about divine punishment of sacrilege (a firm article of belief for all pious Greeks at all times). Herodotus wanted to do more than this. His whole enterprise, I suggest, was one of finding a way to turn Greek gods from predicates into subjects. I mean at the fundamental level of what makes history happen. In historiographical terms, this level must appear as what moderns would call the master narrative, the pattern or framework governing the particular story.<sup>10</sup> Herodotus’ master narrative is easily identified; it is the cycle of human fortune:

I will proceed with my history, telling the story as I go along of small cities of men no less than of great. For most of those which

9 U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Der Glaube der Hellenen*, 2 vols (Berlin: Weidmann, 1931), I, pp. 18–21; earlier at *Isyllos von Epidaurus* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1886), p. 97 n. 0 and his note on Eur. *HF* 557.

10 On this common term (also ‘metanarrative’, ‘grand narrative’) see for instance M. Fulbrook, *Historical Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 58–62.

were great once are small today; and those which used to be small were great in my own time. Knowing, therefore, that human prosperity never abides long in the same place, I shall pay attention to both alike. (1.5.3–4, tr. de Selincourt)

Though a cyclical view of history at the agency of the gods was traditional since Hesiod, it is of the greatest significance that Herodotus is not prepared simply to assume, in the manner of a Muse-inspired poet, that the gods play this role. Nothing would have been easier, but this was not doing history. In spite of his convictions about the role of gods in history, he has thought it necessary first to place them to one side. He is explicit about this, in fact: when at 2.3.2 (cf. 2.65.2) he declares his reluctance to speak about τὰ θεῖα τῶν ἀπηγημάτων on the grounds that everyone has equal knowledge about the gods (equally much, and equally little), he means, as Burkert convincingly argued, what we would call myths;<sup>11</sup> among other things, the statement can be read as a repudiation of (what we call) mythography. Ultimately, however, he wants the gods in; but his strictures mean that he must first write them out, and present his views as a *conclusion*, the results of his *historiē*. In the Bible, the story can be inferred from God; in Herodotus, god must be inferred from the story.

It is the function of the Solon and Croesus episode to furnish this proof programmatically for the entire *Histories*, whose other great example of the pattern will be Xerxes. Croesus is mentioned immediately after the above passage, so is clearly uppermost in Herodotus' mind, though before he gets to Croesus he must first explain his antecedents.<sup>12</sup> The Croesus and Solon episode adds the divine dimension to the statement in the proem, which lacks it. That Herodotus is not passively reporting received material, but is shaping it with powerful intent, is clear from the location and extent of the tale. That he endorses the theological opinion placed in the mouth of Solon (1.32.1, 9) can hardly be doubted.<sup>13</sup>

On the *superficial* level, gods are of course everywhere in Herodotus. Their presence makes itself known through oracles, omens, miracles, dreams and so on. The two levels ultimately join up, and it will be

11 Burkert, 'Herodot als Historiker fremder Religionen', p. 26.

12 On the sequence of the narrative here see M. Lloyd, 'Croesus' priority: Herodotus 1.5.3', *Liverpool Classical Monthly* 9.1 (January 1984), p. 11.

13 Similar sentiments are expressed by other characters at 3.40.2, 3.40.4, 7.10ε, 7.18.3, 7.46.4 (book 3 about Polycrates, book 7 about Persians vs. Greeks, not without irony). Croesus repeats the point at 1.207.1: ἐπεὶ με Ζεὺς ἔδωκε τοῖ . . . ἀνθρώπος καὶ σὺ εἶς . . . μάθε, ὡς κύκλος τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐστὶ περιγημάτων. Cf. Mikalson, *Herodotus and Religion in the Persian Wars*, pp. 50–1; S. Shapiro, 'Herodotus and Solon', *ClAnt* 15 (1996), pp. 348–64.

profitable to consider Herodotus' procedures. About oracles and such things, Herodotus like other Greeks can dispute the meaning; as Harrison and others have well argued, scepticism regarding this or that sign should not be generalized; in fact, such scepticism is a proof of belief in this kind of system.<sup>14</sup> Where Herodotus does become profoundly sceptical is when the gods are supposed to have walked on to the stage of history, and spoken directly to humans or directly determined the course of events in the Biblical manner. This is a straightforward way in which he has written the gods out of his history, and the move is significant.

Sometimes the expression of doubt is explicit. For instance, the ruse of the Peisistratids in dressing up a woman as Athena is ridiculed (1.60.3): gods do not work like that. Herodotus doubts that Bel enters his temple and takes his rest there (1.182). He reserves judgement on the story of Boreas and Orithyia (7.189.3). In connection with various improbable tales about Rhampsinitus, for instance that he played dice with Demeter, Herodotus passes his famous remark, believe it if you will: here as elsewhere he is merely reporting what he has heard (3.123.1). He prefers a rationalized story of the origin of the Scythians to the tale of Herakles and the supernatural snake-woman (4.11.1).

Mostly, however, the scepticism is implicit. Here the distinction between reported and direct speech is pertinent. It is, to be sure, a treacherous distinction.<sup>15</sup> It cannot be taken as read that a reported view (marked by 'it is said that' or 'the Corinthians say' and the like) implies that Herodotus does not believe the report. His famous remark in connection with the Argives' neutrality in the war that he merely reports what he has heard and is not obliged to believe it, and that this applies to his whole work (7.152.3), does not prevent him from expressing firm opinions on many occasions on the reliability of reports. It is also true that the distinction itself is not always easy to draw. A long episode might be introduced by 'it is said that', but thereafter have no further reminder of its being a report; the longer it is, the more one hears Herodotus' own voice. Conversely an episode might be technically reported directly, but be so vividly focalized through the principal actors that it becomes their story as much as Herodotus'. But for all the difficulty attendant on this distinction we cannot simply ignore his striking programmatic statements at 3.123.1 and 7.152.3, and treat reported and direct speech as equivalent without further thought. His deployment of phrases such as 'the Corinthians say' – hundreds of times – is the most distinctive element of his voiceprint. It

14 Harrison, *Divinity and History*, pp. 156–7.

15 Mikalson, *Herodotus and Religion in the Persian Wars*, p. 145.



is his fundamental stance as an historian and his great contribution to historical methodology.<sup>16</sup> Nothing in Herodotus is straightforward or without exception, but this should not prevent us from trying to assess the phenomena.

In the present case, instances of direct vs. indirect intervention of divinity in history, there is a clear tendency. Omens, miracles, dreams and oracles are the main indirect forms. Although in all of these cases there is little or no doubt that a divinity is involved (*ex hypothesi* with oracles and miracles), they all involve the gods working through some other medium, and giving messages that require interpretation. If one compiles a list of all of these phenomena and notes whether they are reported in Herodotus' own voice or that of others, one finds numerous examples of both.<sup>17</sup> We conclude, partly aided by some explicit

16 Fowler, 'Herodotos and his contemporaries', pp. 80–6; N. Luraghi, 'Local knowledge in Herodotus' *Histories*', in N. Luraghi (ed.), *The Historian's Craft in the Age of Herodotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), ch. 7.

17 I forebear here to list all the dreams and oracles; for general discussion see Harrison, *Divinity and History*, ch. 5, and index s.v. 'dreams'; Mikalson, *Herodotus and Religion in the Persian Wars*, index s.vv. In what follows bold type indicates that Herodotus speaks in his own voice; it can be seen at a glance that the two types of enunciation are well represented, and inferences cannot be drawn as to the reporter's view of the matter unless he tells us. First, matters identified as portents by the word τέρατα: **1.59.1 cauldron spontaneously boils**; **1.78.1 snakes eating horses** (H. confirms Croesus' inference that it was a *teras*); **2.46.4 woman has intercourse with goat**; 2.82.2 Egyptians keep records of *terata* and are careful interpreters; **3.153.1 mule foals** (Zopyrus infers that god is behind this – Babylon will fall; the incident is focalized through Z., but there is no λέγεται or the like); 4.28.3 Scythians regard a winter thunderstorm or an earthquake at any time as a *teras*; **6.98.1 the Delian earthquake**; **7.57.2 mare gives birth to hare** (Xerxes disregards though its meaning was plain, εὐσύμβλητον; H. also uses σημαίνειν of portents, for example 1.78.2: like dreams, they need interpretation) **and a mule gives birth to a hermaphrodite foal**; 8.27.4 Thessalians take the Phokeis (of the chalked faces) to be *teras*; **8.37.2 sacred weapons found outside the temple of Delphi**; **8.37.2 even greater wonder, boulders falling, battle-cry from the temple of Athena Pronaia**; **8.137.3 loaf baked for Perdikkas always twice as big**; **wife infers it's a *teras*** (focalized through woman; whole story reported straight; note also the river swelling to prevent pursuit); 9.120.1 the portent of the dried fish on the fire. Secondly, other types of divine-human interaction (including portents or marvels not designated as τέρατα), excluding epiphanies: 1.31 Cleobis and Biton die in response to mother's prayer; 1.87.2 god puts out Croesus' pyre; **1.175 priestess growing beard warns of impending disaster**; 2.63.4 aetiological tale about Ares told by Egyptians; **2.111.2 Pheros impiously flings spear into Nile and goes blind; cured by advice of oracle**; 2.141 Sethos assisted by army of mice (told in dream that gods would come to his aid); 2.144.2 gods once ruled Egypt; Horus last to sit upon the throne; 2.156 Egyptian legend to account for the floating island; **2.181.4 Ladice prays to Aphrodite to cure her husband's impotence**; 3.86.2 lightning and thunder in clear sky confirm Darius as king (but 3.87, a different account); 4.15 Aristeeas vanishes; 4.85.1 the Symplegades; 4.191–5 various natural oddities in Libya; 6.82.2 flame shoots from breast of statue of Hera; 6.86δ gods punish Glaucus by wiping out his family; 7.10ε Artabanus on the envy of the god who destroys the mighty; **7.37 eclipse of**

statements, that Herodotus accepts the divine origin and validity of these forms of communication. Perhaps we may assume that he reserves judgement on the veracity of some of the reported examples.

With respect to direct intervention, the pattern changes. One may distinguish two types of such intervention, one on a micro-level and one on a macro-level. The micro-level, the level of everyday visible life, offers two forms of divine interaction. The first is that of corporeal epiphany.<sup>18</sup> These are without exception reported indirectly: 2.91.3, the frequent appearance of Perseus in Chemmis; 2.153 and 3.27, of Apis;<sup>19</sup> 4.179.2, of Triton to the Argonauts; 6.61.4, of Helen (or one we presume to be Helen) to Demaratus' mother; 6.69.1, of Astrabacus to Demaratus' mother as a double of Ariston; 6.105.1, of Pan to Pheidippides; 6.117, of the phantom to Epizelus at Marathon; 6.127.3, of the Dioscouri to Euphorion; 8.38, of Phylacus and Autonous to the Persians at Delphi; and 8.84.2, of the phantom woman at Salamis. This does not seem accidental.

The second type of intervention at micro-level is even more direct: when gods mate with humans. For this we do not need to rely on the distinction of reported and direct speech. Herodotus has serious reservations about these stories. His scorn of Hecataeus, who thought

(footnote 17 *continued*)

**the sun** (focalized through Xerxes); 7.129.4 the Peneus gorge made by Poseidon (H. endorses the Thessalian claim, on grounds that Poseidon causes earthquakes); 7.191.2 sceptical that Magi could quell the winds with sacrifice to Thetis and the nymphs; **8.13 'the god' was doing everything possible to equal the odds by sinking the Persian fleet at the Hollows**; 8.41.3 Athenians believe the goddess has abandoned the acropolis; **8.55 olive tree on the acropolis**; **9.61.3 Pausanias prays to Hera and sacrificial omens are instantly favourable**; 9.78.2 god gave Pausanias victory (part of a speech); **9.94 Euenius receives power of prophecy from god**.

18 These are discussed also by F. Graf, 'Trick or treat? On collective epiphanies in antiquity', in N. Marinatos (ed.), *Divine Epiphanies in the Ancient World* = *JCS* 29 (2004), pp. 111–30 at 115–18, who concludes that Herodotus suspends judgement rather than evinces general scepticism; see also Henrichs, this volume, Chapter 1.

19 In his own voice at 2.153, but put together with 3.27ff it is a reported Egyptian belief, which H. of course respects. On the difference between epic and Herodotus on this point, see S. Hornblower, 'Epic and epiphanies: Herodotus and the "New Simonides"', in D. Boedeker and D. Sider (eds), *The New Simonides: Contexts of Praise and Desire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 135–47. To his point that the Pan epiphany is different because the Athenians established his cult (implying widespread belief in the event), the incident of Apis is one rejoinder; another is Griffiths' (*apud* Hornblower), that 'the word *πιστεύσαντες* implies that other views were possible' (p. 144); another is that the Athenians in Herodotus are capable of mass folly. For orientation on ancient epiphanies, see most recently J. N. Bremmer, 'Close encounters of the third kind: Heliodoros in the temple and Paul on the road to Damascus', in his *Greek Religion and Culture, the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 215–33, with bibliography at p. 217 n. 12; Henrichs, this volume, Chapter 1.

his sixteenth ancestor was a god, is notorious (2.143). He is doubtful about Perseus' divine father (6.53.2), as he is about Targiteus' (4.5.1); he is consistent in naming only the human parents of Greek heroes in nine out of ten instances in the *Histories* (once he slips and refers to 'Perseus son of Zeus and Danae', 7.61.3).<sup>20</sup>

The tale of Hecataeus is told in the context of a conversation with Egyptian priests, for whom the time of the gods was very much older than sixteen generations ago. Herodotus accepts this chronology and concludes that the Greek dating of their gods is false. The implication is that the age of gods must be the same everywhere, and that when they left there was a qualitative change in human history; so while there may be no *spatium mythicum* there is clearly a *spatium divinum*, and it is well behind us. Moreover, Herodotus draws the conclusion that the gods did not walk with the heroes either. The reason must be that he regards them as much like us, if superior in attainments. Scholars who wish to deny the sense of a *spatium mythicum* to Herodotus make the point that, whatever one makes of Herodotus' strictures in his proem about what we can or cannot know about tales of Troy, they cannot belong to the *spatium mythicum* since he elsewhere treats the war as historical.<sup>21</sup> But if we draw the line between the two qualitatively different *spatia* not between us and the heroes, but between heroes and gods, the result is tolerably consistent. The gods did not intervene in the lives of heroes any more than they do in ours. We need to understand just how astonishing this conclusion is. It is completely at odds with every known predecessor, and requires a complete revision of traditional 'mythology'. One gains some sense of what Herodotus' mythography might have looked like from his treatment of Helen's story in book 2: not only rationalizing but also *historicizing*. One gains an idea too from the proem. The gods have been written out of the traditional story; the judgement of Paris is nowhere to seek. The move is revolutionary, and programmatic.<sup>22</sup> It marks the beginning of history, and therefore of historiography.

20 Harrison, *Divinity and History*, p. 89.

21 References in D. Boedeker, 'Epic heritage and mythical patterns in Herodotus', in Bakker et al., *Brill's Companion to Herodotus*, pp. 97–116 at 110.

22 Thus I would go well beyond Harrison's somewhat neutral statement, *Divinity and History*, p. 33, that 'Quite simply, he felt no need in the Proem to mention the presence of gods.' Their omission is a deliberate and amazing step. See further below, n. 34. Herodotus' view on gods and heroes must be relevant to the 'so-called human generation' (3.122.2); but at the same time that passage throws up another difficulty, in that Minos, apparently on the other side of the line, elsewhere is treated as historical (1.171.2–3, 7.169–70, though in the first passage Herodotus stresses the events are at the remotest edge of historical reach, and in the second passage there is a λέγεται). Perhaps Herodotus is being mildly inconsistent; Minos is close to the

The meagre remains of earlier writing, whether about ‘mythical’ or more recent periods, do nothing to contradict this statement; on the contrary, such indications as there are tend to offer support.<sup>23</sup> No writer evinces embarrassment about interracial sex. τῆι Δανᾷ μίσγεται Ζεὺς, ‘Zeus had intercourse with Danae’, says Hecataeus bluntly (fr. 21). There are of course scores of other examples of genealogies sprung from a god. There are endless examples of gods involved directly in the lives of heroes. Boreas rapes Orithyia in Acusilaus, to take an example that intersects with Herodotus (fr. 31). Apollo’s servitude to Admetus figures in several mythographers,<sup>24</sup> as does his and Poseidon’s to Laomedon – though it is interesting that in the two post-Herodotean authors in question, Hellanicus (fr. 26) and Metrodorus (fr. 2), the story is introduced by λέγεται and λέγουσι respectively. The Erinyes pursue Orestes as vigorously as they do in Aeschylus (Hell. fr. 169, Pher. fr. 135), Herakles draws his bow at Helios (Pher. fr. 18a), Athena blinds Tiresias (fr. 142), and so on. In one of the verbatim quotations of Pherecydes (105), in response to Pelias’ question to Jason, what would you do if an oracle said you would be killed by one of your citizens, Jason responds that he would send him to Aia to fetch the golden fleece; Pherecydes comments, ‘Hera put this notion in Jason’s mind so that destruction would befall Pelias in the person of Medea.’<sup>25</sup> Hera plants the idea directly into Jason’s mind; there is no dream, no oracle, no sign to be read. There is no parallel for this in Herodotus.<sup>26</sup>

It will not do to say that the mythographers know they were treating of myth, as that prompts the question, when did someone first perceive the difference; we would be looking for a Herodotus before Herodotus. There is no warrant for thinking that the mythographers thought they were doing anything but writing history. The observa-

(footnote 22 *continued*)

beginning, after all, and he and his brothers did end up as gods of the Underworld. Space precludes closer engagement with E. Vandiver, *Heroes in Herodotus: The Interaction of Myth and History* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2004), especially ch. 3 ‘The heroic age and chronology’; her diagnosis of heroes as midway between men and gods, so that the line is blurred, has its attractions but ultimately I think fails, even if heroes are treated as gods after death (not impossible even for men of Herodotus’ time). Her view that we are meant to think that the normal myth of the rape of Helen is operating in the background of the proem and represents Herodotus’ own view is a perverse critical result in so potent and significant a passage.

23 For Herodotus’ precursors see Fowler, ‘Herodotus’ prose predecessors’, p. 34. Mythographical fragments are quoted from R. Fowler, *Early Greek Mythography* 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

24 Andron fr. 3, Acusilaus fr. 19, Pherecydes frr. 35, 131.

25 ταῦτα δὲ τῶι Ἰήσονι Ἦρη ἐξ νόον βάλλει, ὡς ἔλθοι ἢ Μήδεα τῶι Περίηι κακόν.

26 The closest thing to it is the dream of Xerxes; see below.

tion that they were merely imitating the ways of epic, whose works they transposed to prose, strengthens the point: such criticism as they directed towards the inherited stories did not run along Herodotean lines, and remained within the same general thought-world as that of their exemplars.<sup>27</sup> There is a qualitative difference in what he was doing, a new kind of history, that within a hundred years was finally and explicitly differentiated from myth.<sup>28</sup>

The point is reinforced when we turn again to the macro-level of the *Histories*, the remote level at which gods directly determine the course of human events. The significant point is that it is closely related to the master narrative – the cycle of human events – indeed so closely related that it may be considered part of it. Seven times Herodotus comments emphatically in his own voice that god punishes crime and sacrilege.<sup>29</sup>

- 27 Hecataeus' rationalism, which in any case does not come close to the Herodotean revolution, is evidenced by three fragments (19, the number of Aegyptus' sons; 26, Geryon a human king in Ambracia; 27, the hound of Hades); but he accepts without demur the miracle of a bitch giving birth to a stake (fr. 15) and reports Phrixos' talking ram, 'at the wish of Zeus' (though these words could in theory be the scholiast's).
- 28 It would take too much space to list every actual or implied instance of divine intervention in the mythographers; nearly every genealogy implies one, for a start. I give a brief, representative list to supplement the text above. Oracles figure in Aristoph. fr. 9B, Creoph. fr. 1, Hell. fr. 51, 125, 142, 163, Herodor. fr. 9, Pher. fr. 10, 64, 105. Gods appear to characters in dreams in Pher. fr. 148 (Athena to Theseus) and Xenom. fr. 1.21 (Phoebus to Ceyx). Gods effect metamorphoses in Aristoph. fr. 8, Hell. fr. 140, Menecr. fr. 2, Pher. fr. 38, 77 (agent not expressed), 124. Epiphanies are implied whenever a god has an active role in a story, for instance in the servitude of Apollo mentioned above, but waking visions employing the language of epiphany figure in Pher. fr. 10 (Zeus to Danae), Pher. fr. 11 (Hermes to Perseus), Pher. fr. 148 (Aphrodite to Ariadne, Dionysos to Ariadne). In addition to participating in many stories (and thus influencing events), gods plant ideas in human minds or otherwise direct events in Acus. fr. 22.78, Hec. fr. 17, Hell. fr. 1, 51, 160B, Pher. fr. 16, 17, 22, 41, 105, 133, 140 (to which add the epiphanies). The fragments of the mythographers dealing with historical periods are few. Oracles figure in Charon *FGrHist* 262 F 1, Antiochus 555 FF 10, 13. Charon 262 F 2 claims to have seen the cup Zeus gave to Alcmena; F 3 reports a prodigy attendant upon Xerxes' invasion; F 12 is the folktale of Rhoecus and the hamadryad. Xanthus of Lydia *FGrHist* 765 F 20 has a novel version of Niobe's petrification; gods figure in FF 13 and 29. We know next to nothing of Dionysius of Miletus, so cannot assess his attitude to the gods in history.
- 29 2.120.5, Greeks refused to believe Trojans about Helen τοῦ δαμονίου παρασκευάζοντος so that it would be clear that great offences bring great punishments from the gods; 4.205, verdict on Pheretime: excessive revenge is punished by the gods; 6.84.3, Cleomenes punished for what he did to Demaratus; 6.91, Aeginetans punished for sacrilege; 6.139.1, crime of Lemnian women punished by crop failure etc.; 7.134–7, anger of Talthybius falls upon the Spartans; 8.129.3, disaster befalls Persians at Pallene because of their sacrilege (so say the Potidaeans and H. agrees). In most of these cases Herodotus is drawing an inference about a longish sequence of events (a 'Schicksalskette' in Strasburger's term, above n. 4). Note also 9.65.2, where Herodotus infers that no Persian dead were found in the shrine of Demeter because of their earlier sacrilege at Eleusis. On the topic generally cf. Harrison, *Divinity and History*, ch. 4.

On two other occasions, this view is uttered by someone else – one is 6.86, the speech of Leotychidas and the parable of Glaucus, and the other is 8.106, the story of Hermotimus, both of which we are obviously meant to take seriously.<sup>30</sup> Herodotus thus leaves us in no doubt about this kind of divine intervention. But, as with the master narrative, soothe gods intervene from a lofty perch, and not by unambiguous visible intervention. Accordingly, inference and interpretation are once again required. There are times when it will not be certain: people had different views about Cleomenes, for instance, and though Herodotus is certain that the Spartans were punished by Talthybius for what they did to the Persian heralds, he thinks that the destruction of Athens might have been due to some other cause (7.133). Nevertheless, his frequent certainty in this kind of inference is notable. Though no Greek would doubt the principle that the gods punish sacrilege, Herodotus is very forceful on the point. Perhaps he is eager to secure agreement about his inferences on the firm ground of this indisputable principle, in order to predispose his audience to accept his inferences about the less firm ground of the master narrative. The two come together most prominently in the person of Xerxes.<sup>31</sup> About him, Herodotus' Greek audience would have had no illusions that he deserved what he got, and was as godless as his troops who burned the temples. Why then is this ground less firm, if the cycle of fortune is traditional wisdom too? I would suggest two reasons: first, because Herodotus conceives it as such; his understanding of the historian's task means that simple assertion, as in Aeschylus' *Persians*, is not open to him. Second, it is a crucial part of his text that the reckoning of sacrilege and injustice amongst Persians and Greeks is by no means one-sided, and that the cycle applies just as surely to Greeks, in particular to the Athenians. The episode with which the *Histories* closes, the treatment of Artayctes, is a sacrilege, and in the view of most critics a

30 The principle is affirmed in the narrative also by the Ethiopian Sabacus (2.139.2) and the oracle of Branchidae (1.159.4).

31 Scullion, 'Herodotus and Greek religion', pp. 194–5, insists on a distinction between technically sacrilegious offences and Xerxes' general arrogance; on p. 195 after discussing general expressions for 'the divine' (on which cf. below) he writes: 'There are thus two basic models: on the one hand sacrilegious behaviour inevitably punished by the relevant god, on the other superiority exposed to the caprice of chance and the counteraction of an abstract divinity. It is the latter model, better suited to uncertainty and complexity, that is relevant to the general significance of the Persian Wars.' Here we are in agreement; but to my mind, Scullion's discussion shows not that we should keep them apart, but that they are joined at the hip. We may be sure that Herodotus' audience regarded the whipping of the Hellespont as sacrilegious (Aesch. *Pers.* 745–51; in Herodotus' own narrative, Themistocles' view is eloquent: 8.109.3, cf. 8.143.2). On Xerxes see also Mikalson, *Herodotus and Religion in the Persian Wars*, pp. 44–7.

clear warning for the Athenians, like much else lying at the heart of the *Histories*.<sup>32</sup> That message will not have been received without demur, and required every persuasive device Herodotus could bring to bear.

In general, then, the gods interact with the events of history indirectly on the micro-level and directly – in the sense that they take charge of the course of events – on the remote macro-level. These two points go very well together; one can even say that they are constitutive of one another in Herodotean history. The macro-level must in general determine the micro-level; the difficulty is in determining the significant points of interaction. At the most crucial juncture of the *Histories*, Xerxes' decision to invade Greece, the gods do intervene to ensure his downfall, by means of a micro-level device: the famous dream. Herodotus turns this story into a set-piece illustrating precisely the difficulties of interpreting such things. He could have done it in the way that Pherecydes' Hera directed Jason (which is probably the form of the story as he received it), but he did not. He arrives at the same conclusion only by means of a complicated sequence of events that leave no doubt of Xerxes' equal responsibility for the decision. Coming the other way, from micro- to macro-level, one may say that the indications of divine activity confronting us in everyday life are presented by Herodotus as a stimulus to inquiry. They plainly point to something, but to what is anything but certain. Without the uncertainty and the remoteness, the answers would be easy. This cannot by definition be *ιστορίη*. There must always be a dialectic between what can be known and what cannot be known for any kind of inquiry into causes to be possible. Some sense of inaccessibility and wonder must be built into the text.<sup>33</sup>

As the first historian's approach to his task, this goes well beyond the 'uncertainty principle' of traditional Greek religion.<sup>34</sup> What led

32 On Artayctes, see for example Harrison, *Divinity and History*, p. 121; on Athens, see for example R. Fowler, 'Herodotus and Athens', in Derow and Parker, *Herodotus and his World*, pp. 305–18; J. Moles, "'Saving" Greece from the "ignominy" of tyranny? The "famous" and "wonderful" speech of Socles (5.92)', in E. Irwin and E. Greenwood (eds), *Reading Herodotus: A Study of the Logoi in Book 5 of Herodotus' Histories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 245–68.

33 R. Munson, *Telling Wonders: Ethnographic and Political Discourse in the Work of Herodotus* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

34 Mikalson, *Herodotus and Religion in the Persian Wars*, p. 146, quoting Gould, *Herodotus*, p. 94, on the uncertainty principle, comments 'it is what we would expect from a historian working carefully and thoughtfully'; in a similar vein Harrison, *Divinity and History*, p. 191, quoting Gould, 'Herodotus and religion', p. 94: 'Herodotus' acknowledgements of the same necessary uncertainty are not based on specific "historiographical principle" but on the nature of Greek religion.' The point is, who first joined these up? For earlier critics, Herodotus' theological orientation seemed less complicated: see the essays by E. Meyer

Herodotus to adopt this stance? If Greek culture precluded a theocentric answer to his questions, why has he in the end written his gods into the macro-level anyway? If it did permit such answers, why did he not give such answers in the manner of an Aeschylus? The difference is the genre. To arrive at Herodotus' position, one must ask 'what is god?' and 'what is history?' at the same time. Those scholars are surely right who point to the influence of Ionic philosophy, particularly Xenophanes, whose inquiries tended precisely to take gods out of the micro-level of human experience; closer to his own day, one may detect a similarity also with the fundamental uncertainty of Protagoras about one's ability to know what god is.<sup>35</sup> But the conjunction of 'what is god?' with 'what is history?' appears to be Herodotus' doing alone.

It is a difficult position to be in, if one cannot readily construct a sentence beginning 'God is' in Greek. As I have attempted to argue, Herodotus' procedure is to construct a master narrative and equate that with the gods. If there is ambiguity in the 'and' of 'gods and history' – is it conjunctive or disjunctive? – Herodotus' instinct, encouraged by epic poetry and other traditions, is to think in conjunctive terms, but honesty compels him to arrive at that conclusion by way of a detour into disjunctive territory. The resulting picture has similarities to epic in respect of the 'double motivation' of action, in which on many occasions both divine and human agency seem to contribute to the course of events, working parallel to each other. But there are important differences from epic too. 'Parallel' is probably the wrong word even for epic, since it is not the case that one could switch from one plane to the other and tell the same story. The two planes have to be kept in play simultaneously to achieve the effect. One should probably think instead of a double helix. But in epic the move to the divine level is much easier, and the poet has direct access to the workings of Zeus' mind. The plan of the gods is every bit as efficacious in Herodotus, but

(footnote 34 *continued*)

('Weltanschauung'), H. Focke, and O. Regenbogen in W. Marg (ed.), *Herodot* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1965), and note the lapidary comment of Wilamowitz, *Aristoteles und Athen* 2 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1893), p. 11: 'der Ionier, der den glauben der väter verloren hatte, hatte einen reineren glauben sich selbst erworben und den gott in der geschichte wiedergefunden'. H. Immerwahr, 'Historical action in Herodotus', *TAPhA* 85 (1954), pp. 16–45, attributes his own confusion to Herodotus.

- 35 A. Momigliano, *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography*, pp. 31–2; 'Historiography on written tradition and historiography on oral tradition', in *Studies in Historiography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), pp. 211–20 at 211; Scullion, 'Herodotus and Greek religion', p. 200, with references (but see above n. 5).



he cannot access it in the same way. As stated several times already, he must infer it. But here is the final way in which the gods and history converge in Herodotus. Whether the object is divine or human agency, the process of assessment is the same. Herodotus is in either case the *histōr*, the investigator and judge.<sup>36</sup> His foregrounding of this process is his great contribution to historical methodology. Herodotus often represents his characters drawing inferences about divine intervention, a mirror of his own activity.<sup>37</sup> For instance, when Polycrates' ring is returned to him, he concludes in astonishment that the matter is divine (3.42.4). When Ariston hears the story of his double, he concludes the matter must be divine (6.69.3). When Herodotus reflects that the anger of Talthybius was vented upon the sons of the same ambassadors who went to Persia, he considers the matter must be divine (7.137.2). When he observes that the rumour of the victory at Plataia reached Mykale on the same day, he declares there are many proofs (τεκμήρια) by which one may conclude the matter is divine (9.100.2). There are several other examples, and interestingly in each case the word for 'divine' is the neuter θεῖον. One should not perhaps press this too hard, as it is a widespread Greek usage.<sup>38</sup> But it is highly marked in two programmatic places in Herodotus – once in the Solon *logos*, where the sage famously remarks that the θεῖον is envious and fond of havoc (1.32.1), and again in the *logos* of Xerxes' dream (7.16), where Artabanus discusses the conditions under which dreams might or might not be divine – and it is perhaps not fanciful to think that he used the abstract word because it better reflected his own thinking in terms of patterns rather than personalities.<sup>39</sup>

If Herodotus' master narrative is equated with the will of the gods, there is another interesting point of contact with, and difference from, epic. Critics have remarked that in the *Iliad* 'the will of Zeus' is identical with 'the plot of this epic'.<sup>40</sup> So far, so similar. But the difference is

36 C. Dewald, 'Narrative surface and authorial voice in Herodotus' *Histories*', *Arethusa* 20 (1987), pp. 147–70.

37 A. Hollmann, 'The manipulation of signs in Herodotus' *Histories*', *TAPhA* 135 (2005), pp. 279–327.

38 Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus*, p. 64; Harrison, *Divinity and History*, pp. 179–80; Mikalson, *Herodotus and Religion in the Persian Wars*, pp. 131–3.

39 Cf. W. Pötscher, 'Götter und Gottheit bei Herodot', *Wiener Studien* 71 (1958), pp. 5–29 = *Hellas und Rom* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1988), pp. 3–27. For examples of anonymous divine intervention, see J. E. Powell, *A Lexicon to Herodotus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938) s. vv. θεῖον, δαίμων, δαιμόνιον, θεός, δέω, θεοβλαβής; note also 6.27, where the subject of φιλέει must be a god. ἀνάγκη has a slightly special use in Herodotus: see R. Munson, 'Ananke in Herodotus', *JHS* 121 (2001), pp. 30–50.

40 Recently for example J. Wilson, 'Homer and the will of Zeus', *College Literature* 34 (2007), pp. 150–73.

that Homer, with the authority of the Muses behind him, can simply state as fact in line 5 that the will of Zeus was fulfilled. Herodotus has to argue his case. He is his own Muse. His aspiration is to see things as they do; to attain the god's-eye view. In the end he achieves an even greater authority. It is after all through his narrative that the master narrative is established. He is author of both. In this construct everything clicks satisfyingly into place, right down to the extra three years allowed Croesus (1.91.3). All oracles and dreams have, in retrospect, proven true. It could not possibly be otherwise. If Herodotus began his investigations with the stance of an uncertain inquirer, for whom the narrative was still in the uncertain future, he finishes in the future perfect, in a position to tell us even the content of Polycrates' daughter's dream (3.124.1). Master narratives, after all, require master narrators.