NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

DARIUS AND THE TOMB OF NITOCRIS (HDT. 1.187)

At 1.187 of the *Histories,* following his description of the defensive measures
of the Babylonian queen Nitocris, Herodotus details the story of her deception
(ἀπάτη) of Darius. Nitocris built her tomb above a gate of Babylon and wrote on
the outside of it:

> If one of the rulers of Babylon after me is in need of money, let him open my tomb and
> take however much he likes. But if he is not in need, may he under no circumstances
> open it; otherwise it will not be well for him [οὐ γὰρ ἄμεινον 1.187.2, my translation].

Herodotus tells us that Darius was troubled by Nitocris' tomb for two reasons:
(1) the epitaph actually encouraged a future, needy monarch of Babylon to plun-
der the tomb, and (2) Darius could not make use of the gate because he could not
walk under a corpse (1.187.3–4). Upon opening the tomb he found no treasure,
only the body of Nitocris and an inscription reading: "if you had not been greedy
[εἰ μὴ ἄπληστος] for money and shamelessly interested in gain, you would not
have opened the graves of the dead" (1.187.5, my translation). Even a brief exam-
ination of the passage reveals an inconsistency: Darius feels he cannot draw near
the remains of the dead queen but nonetheless orders that her burial chamber be
opened. This paper will explain how this discrepancy was introduced into Herod-
otus' narrative, and in so doing will suggest how the historian went about handling
information that was fundamentally alien to his way of thinking. It will be argued
that Herodotus recorded a detail provided to him by his source (Darius could not
walk through a gate at Babylon), and then tried to account for this detail by em-
bellishing it with familiar story patterns (greed revealed, punishment for tomb vi-
olation, and vengeance exacted by a woman over a long period of time), story
patterns which actually contradict the detail which motivated the elaboration. But
before turning to this discussion, it is important first to review the difficulties this
passage has raised for others.

The story of Nitocris' tomb is often understood as designed to illustrate the
greed of Darius,[1] and on the whole this evaluation is fair. But while the interpre-
tation of this passage is relatively straightforward, its historicity has been doubted.
In the first place Nitocris of Babylon shares her name in Herodotus with another
queen, a female monarch from Egypt who is similarly noteworthy for deception
and vengeance (2.100.2); secondly, her activities (especially her temporary rerout-

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1. So, e.g., J. Hart, *Herodotus and Greek History* (London and Canberra, 1982), p. 115; J. M. Cook,
The Persian Empire (London, 1983), p. 76; J. G. Gammie, "Herodotus on Kings and Tyrants: Objective
Historiography or Conventional Portraiture?" *JNES* 45 (1986): 182.

ing of the Euphrates River) seem a suspicious duplication of the other Babylonian queen we hear about, Semiramis (1.184); and finally we know next to nothing about Herodotus' sources for the excursus on the queens of Babylon.[2] Furthermore, as Aly and Baumgartner have noted,[3] the scene has strong folktale resonances which suggest that the logic and even some of the details of the account may lie well outside historical reality.[4] It has also been observed that the substance of Nitocris' epitaph is wholly Greek and therefore a likely fabrication.[5] In spite of these objections to the accuracy of Herodotus' story of Nitocris and her tomb, efforts have been made to identify her as a historical person, a neo-Babylonian woman named Adad-guppi, the mother of Nabonidus.[6] Additionally, it has been argued that, with the exception of the phrase οὐ γὰρ ἄμεινον, the first inscription in Herodotus' account has parallels with Babylonian-Assyrian curse formulae.[7] But all this aside, certain knowledge about the identity of Nitocris, if in fact that name really corresponds to a historical personage, seems impossible.[8]

To add to this confusion, the story of Darius' violation of Nitocris' tomb bears a striking resemblance to a version of Xerxes' entry into the tomb of "Belus" at Babylon. Aelian *Varia Historia* 13.3 records that Xerxes opened the tomb of Belus (Bel) and found inside a body in a crystalline bathtub immersed in oil. Beside the tub a stele read: τῷ ἀνοίξαντι τὸ μνῆμα καὶ μὴ ἀναπληρώσαντι τὴν πύελον οὐκ ἔστιν ἄμεινον ("It does not bode well for him who opens my tomb and does not fill up the tub."). Xerxes attempted to fill the tub but failed; the level of oil in the tub remained the same despite his efforts to fulfill the command of the inscription. The

2. For a concise discussion of these problems, see A. Kuhrt, "Assyrian and Babylonian Traditions in Classical Authors: A Critical Synthesis," in *Mesopotamien und seinen Nachbarn,* vol. 1.2, ed. H. Kühne, H. J. Nissen, and J. Renger (Berlin, 1982), p. 543; see also below, n. 12.

3. W. Aly, *Volksmärchen, Sage und Novelle bei Herodot und seine Zeitgenossen* (Göttingen, 1921), pp. 56–57; followed by W. Baumgartner, "Herodots babylonische und assyrische Nachrichten," *ArchOrient* 18.1 (1950): 96. See also S. Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (Bloomington, Ind., 1957), Q552.3.5, for punishment meted out from the tomb for greed, and E235.6 and E236.3 for examples of the dead returning to punish those who disturb graves and rob them.

4. See J. Gould, *Herodotus* (New York, 1989), pp. 32–37, for a discussion of Herodotus' "lack of sensitivity to stereotypes and motifs."

5. See A. H. Sayce, *The Ancient Empires of the East: Herodotus I–III* (London, 1883), p. 108 n. 2; W. W. How and J. Wells, *A Commentary on Herodotus,* vol. 1 (Oxford, 1928; reprinted 1989), ad 1.187.2; S. West, "Herodotus' Epigraphical Interests," *CQ* 35 (1985): 296; D. Fehling, *Herodotus and His "Sources,"* Arca 21, trans. J. G. Howie (Leeds, 1989; from German edition, 1971), p. 134.

6. See esp. W. Röllig, "Nitokris von Babylon," *Beiträge zur alten Geschichte und deren Nachleben,* vol. 2: Festschrift F. Altheim, ed. R. Stiehl and H. E. Stier (Berlin, 1969), pp. 127–35. H. Lewy, "Nitocris-Naqî'a," *JNES* 11 (1952): 264–86; followed by G. Pettinato, *Semiramide* (Milan, 1985), p. 31, argues that the woman in question is Naqia. C. F. Lehmann-Haupt, "Die historische Semiramis und Herodot," *Klio* 1 (1902): 269; E. Meyer, *Forschungen zur alten Geschichte,* vol. 2 (Halle, 1899), pp. 478–79 n. 1; and "Untersuchungen über die älteste Geschichte Babyloniens und über Nebukadnezars Befestigungsanlagen," *Sitzungsberichte der königlichen preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 1912 (pt. 2): 1106–7; J. Melkman, "Labynetos," *Mnemosyne* (ser. 3) 9 (1940): 109; O. E. Ravn, *Herodotus' Description of Babylon* (København, 1942), pp. 39–42; and Baumgartner, "Nachrichten," p. 96, have argued that Nitocris' name and her reign have been confused with king Nebuchadnezzar and his achievements.

7. Lehmann-Haupt, "Βηλιτανᾶς, und Βελητάρας," *Orientalische Studien,* vol. 2: Festschrift T. Nöldeke, ed. C. Bezold (Giezen, 1906), cf. his earlier work, "Die neugefundene Steleninschrift Rusas' II von Chaldia," *Zeitschrift der deutsche morgenlandische Gesellschaft* 56 [1902]: 109–11; and "Babylonische-assyrische Fluchformel in griechischen Gewande," *Klio* 3 [1903]: 325), followed by Baumgartner, "Nachrichten," p. 97.

8. See the judgment of P.-A. Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus King of Babylon 556–539 BC* (New Haven and London, 1989), p. 80; cf. R. Drews, *The Greek Accounts of Eastern History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973), p. 79: "Nitocris, unfortunately, remains a mystery."

story ends with the notice that Xerxes did in fact meet the very worst end (αἴσ-
χιστα ἀνθρώπων ἀπέθανεν) as the inscription had warned—he is murdered in his
bed by his own son. The resemblance between this passage and the scene in He-
rodotus rests not only on the similar circumstances, but also on the presence of the
warning οὐ . . . ἄμεινον and the importance of the image of filling (note that Nitoc-
ris describes Darius as ἄπληστος; Bel warns the one who fails to fill his tub, ἀνα-
πληρώσαντι).[9] The reason for the correspondence of the two passages has been
variously explained: one suggestion is that the two passages are traceable to Xer-
xes' supposed sack of the temple of Bel-Marduk;[10] another that they both are dim
reminiscences of the performance of the ritual death of Bel at Babylon.[11] Whatever
the correct explanation may be (it seems neither of the above is now to be be-
lieved), it is likely that, regarding Darius' entry into Nitocris' tomb, Herodotus was
told a story by the Chaldeans[12] which, although it may have contained an element
of factual reporting, was thoroughly reworked in Greek terms and subordinated to
favorite Herodotean story lines—tomb violation and vengeance secured over a
great length of time. My reasons for thinking so are as follows.

The use of ἄμεινον in the Herodotus passage not only suggests a parallel with
the Aelian story, it also sets the scene firmly in the world of the Greek oracle: the
word is common in oracular language where real alternatives are considered (e.g.,
should the building of a temple be moved or not), so that a comparative is appro-
priate.[13] Much as an inquirer at an oracular shrine in Herodotus, Darius is given a

9. The verbal similarities were noted by J. Marquart, "Die Assyriaka des Ktesias," *Philologus* suppl. 6
(1891–93): 574–75.

10. Note that Herodotus encourages the view that the two Persian kings could be confused: at 1.183.3
he mentions Xerxes' theft of the statue of Bel, an act which Darius also contemplated. But Herodotus also
speaks of Darius' destruction of the fortifications of Babylon, including the city gates, 3.159.1, a notice
which perhaps could be associated with Darius' violation of Nitocris' tomb. For the argument that Xerxes'
sack of the temple of Bel lies behind both Herodotus 1.187 and Aelian 13.3, see Meyer, *Forschungen,* pp.
478–79 n. 1. Cf. Ctesias, *FGrH* 688 F 13.26; Arr. *Anab.* 3.16.3, 7.17.2; Diod. Sic. 17.112.3; Strab. 16.1.5.
The traditional arguments for Xerxes' destruction of the temple, and the associated problem of when the
term "king of Babylon" ceased to be a part of Achaemenid titulature, have been seriously challenged by
A. Kuhrt and S. Sherwin-White, "Xerxes' Destruction of Babylonian Temples," in *Achaemenid History II:
The Greek Sources,* ed. H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and A. Kuhrt (Leiden, 1987), pp. 69–78; cf. M. W. Stolper,
"The Governor of Babylon and Across-the-River in 486 BC," *JNES* 48 (1989): 283–305, esp. 292–96.

11. Lehmann-Haupt, *Philologische Wochenschrift* 18 (1898): 486; and "Βηλιτανᾶς," pp. 997–1014.
This argument has also been challenged by Kuhrt and Sherwin-White, "Xerxes' Destruction," p. 75, with
bibliography.

12. Note that Herodotus, in telling the story of Xerxes' theft of the statue of Bel (which comes imme-
diately before his treatment of queen Nitocris), states that the information was reported to him by the
Chaldeans (ἐγὼ μέν μιν [the statue of Bel] οὐκ εἶδον, τὰ δὲ λέγεται ὑπὸ Χαλδαίων, ταῦτα λέγω 1.183.3).
On Herodotus' sources for these stories, see Kuhrt, "Traditions," pp. 542–46; and Kuhrt and Sherwin-
White, "Xerxes' Destruction," p. 72. Although it may be impossible to know for certain what Herodotus'
source was here, it seems reasonable to conclude that it is not the same as that which lies behind the
stories associated with Darius' capture of Babylon; for a discussion of the possible sources for the "Zopy-
rus Novelle," see J. M. Balcer, *Herodotus and Bisitun,* Historia Einzelschriften 49 (Wiesbaden, 1987),
p. 128.

13. H. W. Parke, *The Oracles of Zeus: Dodona, Olympia, Ammon* (Oxford, 1967), app. 1, "A Selec-
tion of Enquiries at Dodona," where ἄμεινον is typically paired with λώιον, p. 261, no. 5; for other ex-
amples see p. 263, no. 1; p. 267, no. 12; p. 268, nos. 15 and 16; p. 269, nos. 18 and 21; p. 270, no. 22;
p. 271, nos. 24 and 25. See also Parke and D. E. W. Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle,* vol. 2 (Oxford, 1956),
no. 122 (= Thuc. 2.17.1), and compare Pl. *Leg.* 838a; Xen. *An.* 6.2.15, 7.6.44; *Lac. Pol.* 8.5; *Vect.* 6.2–3;
and Arr. *Anab.* 7.26.2–3. Note, however, that the collocation οὐ γὰρ ἄμεινον occurs in two other places
in Herodotus, both from the mouth of Darius: at 3.71.2, where he warns the conspirators to hurry their
plans against the Pseudo-Smerdis, and at 3.82.5, where in his closing remarks during the constitutional
debate he urges that monarchy be adopted as Persia's form of government.

tacit choice by the inscription at 1.187: to determine whether he is truly a king in need of funds. And while the first inscription offers Darius a choice, the second within the tomb functions as a response to his action. It is important to note regarding the first inscription that ἄμεινον, in addition to being used in oracles, is also found in Greek literature in connection with maledictions and tombs. At *Works and Days* 750 Hesiod warns, μηδ' ἐπ' ἀκινήτοισι καθίζειν, οὐ γὰρ ἄμεινον.[14] As West observes, this passage, like the one in Herodotus, is oracular;[15] but the passage clearly also refers to graves insofar as it is widely believed that ἀκινήτοισι must apply specifically to tombs.[16] Additionally, the use of ἀκίνητος provides another parallel between the Hesiod passage and the Nitocris episode in Herodotus. After recording the words of the first inscription (indicating the presence of money in the queen's tomb), Herodotus notes, in order to underscore the uniqueness of Darius' outrage, οὗτος ὁ τάφος ἦν ἀκίνητος μέχρι οὗ ἐς Δαρεῖον περιῆλθε ἡ βασιληίη (1.187.3).[17] While it has to be admitted that the use of ἀκίνητος is not identical in these two passages, it is clear that a sepulchral context is found in both. It seems that Herodotus may be drawing on language associated with the treatment of tombs in the Greek world in order to tell his story of a Persian king's encounter with a Babylonian tomb.

The language of the episode is not the only feature of the story to have strong Greek resonances. The motif of the desecration of a tomb followed by a change in the fortune of the violator is employed elsewhere by Herodotus. At the close of his *Histories* (9.116–120), we are told the story of Artauctes' violation of the τάφος and τέμενος of the hero Protesilaus. This episode too involves deception (ἐξηπάτησε, 9.116.1), albeit by the plunderer and not the plundered; furthermore if the first notice of Artauctes' outrage (7.33) is attached to the fuller version told in book 9, a (more explicit) forecasting of what was to befall the criminal is also an element of the tale (compare 7.33 with 9.120.4), just as we find in Nitocris' second inscription containing the warning for the future king. The threat of retribution is certainly also implied in the warning of the Scythian king Idanthyrsus that the Persians should not attempt to destroy the Scythians' ancestral graves (4.127.2). This last example is most instructive. Just as with the Babylonian Nitocris, Herodotus conceives of foreign burial practices in Greek terms. F. Hartog has shown convincingly that, although there is much in Herodotus' description of the burial of Scythian kings that would sound strange to the Greek ear, it is actually a mirror opposite of Greek burial customs; in other words, Greek funerary ritual informs Herodotus' understanding of Scythian practice.[18] This same process may be at

14. Cf. also *Il.* 24.52, where Apollo comments to the other gods on Achilles' mutilation of Hector's corpse: οὐ μήν οἱ τό γε κάλλιον οὐδέ τ' ἄμεινον. The only tomb involved in this passage is Patroclus' (σῆμ' ἑτάροιο φίλοιο 51), and it may be argued that Apollo's words apply specifically to the mutilation of the corpse, not to where the mutilation is taking place. Nonetheless, the phrase is still connected to the treatment of the dead.

15. M. L. West, ed., *Hesiod Works and Days* (Oxford, 1978), ad 750; cf. Hdt. 1.31.3.

16. E. E. Sikes, "Folk-lore in the *Works and Days* of Hesiod," *CR* 7 (1893): 392–94; H. M. Hays, "Notes on the Works and Days of Hesiod" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1918), p. 189; T. A. Sinclair, ed., *Hesiod Works and Days* (London, 1932), ad 750; West, *Works and Days*, ad 750.

17. West, *Works and Days*, ad 750, in fact adduces Hdt. 1.187.3 as a parallel.

18. F. Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus*, trans. J. Lloyd (Berkeley, 1988; French edition 1980), pp. 133–41. Cf. B. D. Shaw, "'Eaters of Flesh, Drinkers of Milk': The Ancient Mediterranean Ideology of the Pastoral Nomad," *Ancient Society* 13/14 (1982–83): 5–31. See also below, n. 25.

work in Herodotus' discussion of Nitocris' epitaph; although it is a common Greek custom to have a curse on a tomb warning against doing damage to it,[19] it appears that this practice was seldom observed in Babylonia.[20]

At this point it may be well to dismiss the episode of Nitocris' tomb as hopelessly impossible to unravel, and to go no further than to assert that it is likely the result of Herodotus' own reshaping of a local oral tradition; in such a situation it is difficult to separate what is a product of Herodotus' own Greek imagination and what is his source material. But if we return to the logic (or lack thereof) of Darius' action in opening the tomb, a feature of the story can be isolated which must derive from Herodotus' source and which in turn helps to illustrate a Herodotean practice found elsewhere in the *Histories*.

Herodotus provides two reasons why Darius was bothered by Nitocris' tomb. One was that the inscription on the tomb not only did not forbid its violation, it actually invited a future king to enjoy its treasures. This invitation can only be understood as troubling insofar as it ran counter to what Darius expected; Herodotus seems to be implying that normally Darius would have at least hesitated before plundering a tomb. Consequently when the epitaph encouraged that the tomb be opened, Darius found it intolerable not to do so. The other reason Herodotus gives for Darius' distress is that he could not make use of the gate into which the tomb was built because he could not walk under a corpse. Hence it comes as something of a surprise when we learn that Darius opened the tomb.

The inconsistency here in Herodotus' account may betray the presence of his original source material. Although it is far from certain, it is widely believed that the religion of Darius and Xerxes was a form of Zoroastrianism.[21] If in fact Dar-

19. It should be noted that the veiled curse in Herodotus, οὐκ . . . ἄμεινον, is very vague; epitaphs tend to provide explicit details as to what will happen to the tomb violator. See R. Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs*, Illinois Studies in Language and Literature 28 (Urbana, 1942), pp. 108–18 for examples; and for a general statement, L. Robert, *BCH* 101 (1977): 49 = Bibliotèque des Écoles français d'Athènes et de Rome 239 (1987): 7.

20. A. Parrot, *Maledictions et violations de tombes* (Paris, 1939), p. 17; and A. D. Nock, "Tomb Violations and Pontifical Law" (= review of Parrot) *JBL* 60 (1941): 95 = *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, vol. 2, ed. Z. Stewart (Oxford, 1972), p. 532, both asserted that inscribed funerary maledictions are not known among the Babylonians. However, there is at least one: *Yale Oriental Studies* 1 (1915) = Miscellaneous Inscriptions in the Yale Babylonian Collection, ed. A. T. Clay: no. 43, pp. 60–62, esp. lines 11–20; see also D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylon II: Historical Records of Assyria from Sargon to the End* (Chicago, 1927), pp. 408–9. Note that in the collection of texts by E. Ebeling, *Tod und Leben nach den Vorstelungen der Babylonier*, vol. 1 (Berlin and Leipzig, 1931), no. 12, p. 57, line 10, an oath was evidently sworn over the tomb of a dead king, most likely a curse against future grave robbers; see R. Labat, *Le caractère religieux de la royauté assyro-babylonienne* (Paris, 1939), p. 119. It should be noted also that the tomb of Adad-guppi had an inscription which contained a general command for the reader to worship the gods of Babylon (*Ancient Near Eastern Texts*[3], ed. J. B. Pritchard [Princeton, 1969], pp. 561–62). This inscription also happens to challenge the identification of Adad-guppi with Nitocris; it makes plain that this royal woman was buried in a "secret place," scarcely a description appropriate for a city gate! The assertion that the Babylonians had burials in city gates is in fact problematic; R. Koldewey, *Das Ischtar-Tor in Babylon*, Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichung der deutschen Orientgesellschaft 32 (Leipzig, 1918), p. 53, identified the Ishtar gate with the grave of Nitocris, arguing that the words ὑπὲρ τῶν μάλιστα λεωφόρων πυλέων τοῦ ἄστεος could refer to nothing else; cf. Baumgartner, "Nachrichten," p. 96; and G. Goosens, "L'histoire d'Assyrie de Ctésias," *AC* 9 (1940): 28 n. 3 (note that Röllig, "Nitokris," p. 132 n. 17, cautions that the expression λεωφόρων means "especially used by people," not lion-bearing—indeed how would one construe μάλιστα otherwise?). Koldewey dismisses the story in Herodotus as fabulous, but notes that a grave had been located in the north wall of the "Südburg." Röllig however, "Nitokris," p. 132, notes that a Babylonian grave in a tower structure has yet to be found.

21. See, e.g., T. C. Young, "The Consolidation of Empire and Its Limits of Growth under Darius and Xerxes," *CAH*[2], vol. 4 (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 99–103. For a cautious review of the question of the religion

ius was a Zoroastrian, then his reluctance to pass through the gate holding the re-
mains of Nitocris makes perfect sense, for he would have felt restricted by
Zoroastrian purity laws regarding proximity with the dead; indeed M. Boyce has
argued that the episode described at Herodotus 1.187 demonstrates that Darius
was motivated by Zoroastrian regulations forbidding contact of any kind with a
corpse.[22] Although the scene at 1.187 suggests that Darius was an observant
Zoroastrian, it ought not to be regarded as proof of Herodotus' knowledge of
Zoroastrian burial practice. Indeed Herodotus' account of Iranian burial customs
at 1.140 demonstrates the need for caution in this matter; while he reports accu-
rate information—from the Zoroastrian point of view—in connection with the
Magi who expose their corpses to the mutilation of birds and dogs, he believes
that the "Persians" bury their dead, something which is strictly contrary to Zoro-
astrian beliefs. Some have argued that Herodotus' entire account of Iranian reli-
gion at 1.131–132 reflects a period in which different religious beliefs were
tolerated by the Achaemenid rulers of Persia, insofar as it is in places at odds with
what is known from primary documents (especially regarding burial practice), and
that consequently uniform and dogmatically correct Zoroastrianism ought not to
be expected from Herodotus' account.[23] The implication of this view is very im-
portant for the present discussion: while Herodotus may not have been able to
identify a practice as Zoroastrian, he was able to note and record practices he con-
sidered Persian, and these practices can in fact be recognized as Zoroastrian. Re-
garding 1.187 in particular, whether Herodotus could recognize Darius' reluctance
to walk under a corpse as motivated by Zoroastrian belief must admittedly remain
uncertain, but that is not really the point at issue. What is important to establish is
that it was possible or even likely that the information given to Herodotus de-
pended on Darius being a Zoroastrian and consequently reluctant to approach the
corpse of Nitocris. Another incident in Herodotus involving a Persian king and the
corpse of a monarch helps to illustrate what may account for the details of the Ni-
tocris episode. At 3.16.2 Herodotus reports that Cambyses ordered the burning of
the pharaoh Amasis' mummified corpse. He notes also that the order was viewed
as sacrilegious by both Egyptians and Persians. Regarding the "Persians" Herodo-
tus explains: Πέρσαι γὰρ θεὸν νομίζουσι εἶναι τὸ πῦρ; in fact the burning of
corpses was viewed as the defilement of fire by Zoroastrians. Many have argued
that this story derives from a source hostile to Cambyses, very likely Egyptian in
origin.[24] While this explanation seems on the whole accurate, the detail that Cam-
byses' order was sacrilegious in Persian eyes would have been an unlikely charge

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of the Achaemenids, see C. Herrenschmidt, "La religion des Achéménides: État de la question," *Studia
Iranica* 9 (1980): 325–39.

22. *A History of Zoroastrianism*, vol. 2: *Handbuch der Orientalistik* 1.viii.i.2.2a (Leiden and Köln,
1982), p. 112.

23. See Boyce, *Zoroastrianism*, p. 182; and Young, "Consolidation," p. 100. Others have argued that
on the basis of Herodotus' description of the religious practices of the Achaemenids their religion cannot
be identified as Zoroastrianism: see, e.g., E. Benveniste, *The Persian Religion According to the Chief
Greek Texts*, Ratanbai Katrak Lectures 1 (Paris, 1929), pp. 22–49; for burial, see esp. pp. 32–33.

24. See Boyce, *Zoroastrianism*, p. 72. See also E. Bresciani, "Egypt and the Persian Empire," in *The
Greeks and the Persians*, ed. H. Bengtson, trans. from Italian by P. Johnson (New York, 1968), pp. 333–
37; and A. B. Lloyd, "Herodotus on Cambyses: Some Thoughts on Recent Work," in *Achaemenid His-
tory III: Method and History*, ed. A. Kuhrt and H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg (Leiden, 1988), p. 62.

for Egyptians to make; on the other hand it makes perfect sense for Herodotus to include such a detail on his own authority from what he knew of Persian religion. Accordingly, while establishing that Herodotus knew that the sanctity of fire was a central belief of Zoroastrianism is not important, showing that he recognized that this custom was an important element in "Persian" religion is. It seems far-fetched that Herodotus invented the Persians' adherence to the custom of viewing fire as sacred, a custom which happened to conform to contemporary Zoroastrian practice. It seems more likely that either he had first-hand knowledge of the ritual purity of fire for the Zoroastrians, or he learned of it from investigation or inter-view. Likewise, since Herodotus' reason for Darius' not wishing to walk through the gate where Nitocris was entombed accords with the religious beliefs of the Achaemenids, it is reasonable to conclude that Herodotus was told a story by a source familiar with Persian customs.

On the other hand if we try to account for Darius' behavior in terms that Herod-otus as a Greek would have understood we run into difficulties. Whereas Darius' action is perfectly explicable from a Zoroastrian viewpoint, his reluctance to draw near Nitocris' corpse would probably have seemed strange to Herodotus. We know from 4.26.2 that Herodotus believed that the Greeks in general observed the γενέσια, funerary rites which likely brought the participants in close proximity with the dead.[25] But even more to the point, from the earliest periods of Greek settlement patterns, corpses were often buried on the margins of communities along the roads which led into town;[26] Athens and the Kerameikos are an obvious example. Furthermore, although burial within settlements was usually forbidden in the Greek world, those distinguished individuals who were accorded the honor of interment within the city were often buried in the agora, the most frequented area of a Greek city.[27] Both practices must have meant that people living in Greek cities were in frequent nonritual proximity with the dead. In support of this point, it is useful to recall the common *Wanderer* motif found in Greek epigrams which depends upon the idea of there being a passerby who stops to read the inscription, a topos with which Herodotus himself is familiar (Simon. 22B [Page, *Epigram-mata Graeca*] = Hdt. 7.228.2; ὦ ξεῖν'. . .), and which was already well established by his day (see, e.g., Peek, *Griechische Vers-Inschriften: Grab-Epigramme* 1226 = Jeffery, *LSAG* Central Greece no. 19, dated to the middle of the sixth century). Consequently when Herodotus was told the story of Darius' predicament before

25. Describing the cannibalistic funerary practices of the Issedonians, Herodotus observes: παῖς δὲ πατρὶ τοῦτο ποιέει, κατά περ Ἕλληνες τὰ γενέσια (4.26.2). S. C. Humphreys, "Introduction: Compara-tive Perspectives on Death," in *Mortality and Immortality: The Anthropology and Archaeology of Death,* ed. S. C. Humphreys and H. King (London, 1981), p. 5, notes that "ancient Greek ethnographers situate Greek funerary practices in the centre of a spectrum," and cites Herodotus for examples. For a tentative description of the γενέσια, see D. C. Kurtz and J. Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs* (Ithaca, 1971), p. 148; on the festival, see in general F. Jacoby, "ΓΕΝΕΣΙΑ: A Forgotten Festival of the Dead," *CQ* 38 (1944): 65–75; and S. C. Humphreys, "Family Tombs and Tomb Cult in Ancient Athens: Tradition or Traditionalism?" *JHS* 100 (1980): 100–101. On tomb visitation in general, see R. Garland, *The Greek Way of Death* (Ithaca, 1985), pp. 104–20.

26. W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), p. 191.

27. See R. Martin, *Recherches sur l'agora grecque* (Paris, 1951) = Bibliotèque des Écoles français d'Athènes et de Rome 174, pp. 194–201; cf. I. Morris, *Burial and Ancient Society* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 62–69. See also Plut. *Mor.* 238D and *Lyc.* 27.1, where we are told that "Lycurgus did away with all superstitious fear connected with burials, granting the right to bury the dead within the city" (F. C. Bab-bit, Loeb Library translation of *Mor.*).

the tomb of the Babylonian queen (whether or not this scene actually took place), it probably perplexed him.[28]

It should be noted that it was in all likelihood Darius' discomfort at being *near* a corpse which Herodotus found strange. He may have actually shared the king's apparent unease at being *underneath* a corpse. The Greeks evidently thought that the earth was the appropriate place for the disposal of a person's remains because the corpse was in some sense made up of the earth (see, e.g., Soph. *El.* 244 and Eur. fr. 532).[29] Consequently burial meant returning the body to its fundamental element. On the other hand, bodies above the earth constituted a desecration of it. *Iliad* 24.54, where Apollo stresses the injury Achilles does to the earth by allowing Hector's corpse to rot, underscores this point: κωφὴν γὰρ δὴ γαῖαν ἀεικίζει μενεαίνων.[30] Naturally, if the Greeks felt distress at bodies being left on the surface of the earth, the idea of bodies suspended above the earth may well have been an even stronger source of anxiety. However, although Herodotus may be suggesting that the location of Nitocris' grave was unusual, he was not the only writer in antiquity to report the entombment of a monarch above a city gate. Servius (*ad Aen.* 2.13, 241; 3.351) knows of a tradition which places the tomb of Laomedon in the lintel above the Scaean gate at Troy.[31]

In his effort to make sense of Darius' action at the tomb of Nitocris, Herodotus may have embellished his account of it in a way to make it understandable; the scene does follow story patterns found elsewhere in his work. He probably started with the detail which made little sense: Darius could not enter Babylon through the gate over which Nitocris' body lay entombed. Keeping this detail in mind, that the Persian king was in some way troubled by the queen's tomb, Herodotus constructed a scenario which, in his own terms, explained the king's distress: Darius was "tricked" into committing an act which he thought would enrich him, but which in fact revealed him to be a grave-robber. This story line has parallels with other scenes in Herodotus' work. As has already been pointed out, tomb violation and its consequences are explored elsewhere in the *Histories*. Furthermore, as S. Flory has shown, the episode of Nitocris' tomb can be grouped with other stories in Herodotus wherein a cunning woman exacts revenge through artful planning, "often over a period of time": Candaules' wife, queen Tomyris of the Massagetae, and the Egyptian Nitocris are clear examples.[32] In the case of Nitocris of Babylon, Herodotus

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28. It is interesting to note in connection with nonritual proximity with the dead that Theophrastus' *deisidaimon* will not approach tombs or corpses, *Char.* 16.9. While it must be admitted that this portrait is full of exaggerated characteristics, it is at least informed by what the Greeks thought was proper behavior. Consequently excessive anxiety about being near the resting place of the dead was evidently regarded as superstitious behavior.

29. See W. Leaf, *The Iliad,* vol. 2 (London, 1900–1902), ad 24.54.

30. Cf. Heraclitus, *DK* 96, νέκυες κοπρίων ἐκβλητότεροι; and the comments of M. Marcovich, *Heraclitus* (Venezuela, 1967), p. 410; and C. H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 213. The connection between *Il.* 24.54 and the fragment of Heraclitus was first noticed by the T Scholiast.

31. See C. Vellay, "Le règne de Laomédon," *CM* 8 (1946): 84 n. 3; M. Robertson, "Laomedon's Corpse, Laomedon's Tomb," *GRBS* 11 (1970): 24–25; and C. Bérard, "Récupérer la mort du prince: Héroïsation et formation de la cité," in *La mort, les morts dans les sociétés anciennes,* ed. G. Gnoli and J.-P. Vernant (Cambridge, 1982), p. 94. Bérard also notes (pp. 93–94) that the original Erectheum at Athens may have stood on the site of what would be the temple to Athena Nike, thereby also possibly representing another place where a monarch was buried near an entrance, namely next to the gates of the Mycenaean acropolis.

32. S. Flory, *The Archaic Smile of Herodotus* (Detroit, 1987), pp. 42–43.

constructs a familiar story line around the central detail that Darius was vexed by
the queen's tomb. That the elaboration is actually inconsistent with the detail that
generated it (Darius' inability to pass underneath a corpse and his opening of the
tomb) suggests that it was the detail, not the fable, that was supplied to Herodotus.[33]

What Herodotus has done then with the story of Darius' entry into Nitocris'
tomb is really no different from what he did with other strange facts which lay be-
yond his understanding. A case in point is the story of Darius' horse (3.84–87); it
has been shown that it is likely derived from the practice of horse-divination ob-
served in Persia and unknown in Greece.[34] The story as told by Herodotus has
clear folktale components which might have helped mediate its strangeness for a
Greek audience.[35] The disclosure of the Pseudo-Smerdis may also reflect a similar
process (3.68–69); beginning with a story of Persian court intrigue, Herodotus
constructs a story whose central panel (Phaedima's discovery that the usurper had
no ears) makes sense only in Greek iconographic terms.[36] In Herodotus' transfer
of foreign "facts" to Greek stories, the details he gained by inquiry and interroga-
tion remain, but they undergo deformation as they are adapted and explained by
him in his effort to make the unfamiliar understandable.[37]

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CRATERUS AND THE *PROSTASIA*

With Alexander the Great's death in Babylon in 323 B.C., the Macedonian nobles
(the *principes*) meeting in council created a regency for his half brother Arrhidaeus
(Q. Curtius 10.7.3–4; Arr. *Succ.* la.3, 8). Later when Roxane gave birth to Alex-
ander's son and namesake, the infant was also hailed by the troops as king and the
regency was expanded to encompass this dual monarchy (Arr. *Succ.* la.8; cf. Diod.
18.23.3).[1] The exact nature of this regency has been hotly debated over the years.