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Proverbial Wisdom in Herodotus

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I. Introduction

Herodotus' frequent use of proverbs and other wisdom expressions helps to make his *Histories* more colorful and gives us insight into the folk wisdom of the past. But do the proverbs in the *Histories* simply provide enjoyment and exemplify traditional modes of thought, or do they serve a more serious function as well? In this paper I will argue that Herodotus uses proverbial expressions, particularly contradictory gnomai, as part of the presentation of his historical analysis, to help explain the reasons why events turned out the way they did.

Greek writers of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E. used a variety of terms for wisdom expressions. Some, such as λόγος or ἔπος,[1] have such a wide semantic range that it is clear they were not used as technical terms. Of those terms referring specifically to wisdom expressions (such as παροιμία, ὑποθήκη, ἀπόφθεγμα, and γνώμη), γνώμη seems to have been the most inclusive.[2] Although the Greek gnome is not exactly the same as the modern proverb, the two genres share key characteristics in form, content and usage. According to Aristotle, a gnome is a general statement concerning the objects of practical wisdom (i.e., what should be chosen and what should be avoided with regard to human action).[3] The form of a gnome is relatively stable, but not rigidly fixed.[4] Like the modern proverb, the gnome was based on traditional

[1]E.g., Hdt. 7.51.3: ἐς θυμὸν ὧν βαλεῦ καὶ τὸ παλαιὸν ἔπος….

[2]Lardinois 214.

[3]See Aristotle's definition of the γνώμη at *Rh.* 1394a21–25, and compare his definition of practical wisdom at *EN* 1140b20–21. For detailed discussions of Aristotle's definition of the γνώμη, see Horna and von Fritz 74–75, Kindstrand 74, and Lardinois 214–15.

[4]For example, the Aeschylean gnomic phrase πάθει μάθος (*A.* 177) appears in Herodotus as τὰ δέ μοι παθήματα ἐόντα ἀχάριτα μαθήματα γέγονε (1.207.1). For further discussion of this issue see Lardinois 215–17.

wisdom.[5] Also like the proverb, the gnome was frequently used to influence behavior or to argue for a particular point of view.[6] Thus, while we tend to categorize most wisdom expressions as proverbs, it seems correct to conclude that "Herodotus' audience would have recognized his generalizations as gnomai."[7]

The most comprehensive discussions of wisdom expressions in Herodotus are those of Lang and Gould.[8] Lang identifies seventy-four gnomai in the *Histories* and discusses about fifty of these in some detail.[9] Concentrating mainly on the wisdom expressions in the speeches, she groups them according to subject matter and compares them to similar expressions in Homer and the tragedians. Lang's conclusion that "whether the maxim is used to support a warning, to explain a point being made, or to urge a course of action, it applies a generally accepted truth to the particular situation and so puts it in a context that lends conviction," is an important contribution to understanding Herodotus' use of wisdom expressions.[10] Lang's treatment is weakened, however, by the assumption that Herodotus' use of these wisdom expressions simply reflects "the continued operation and influence of traditional folk wisdom."[11] Lang does note that the maxim "look to the end" is "basic to Herodotus'…historical interpretation," but the possibility that Herodotus may be systematically manipulating his speakers' use of such expressions is not fully explored.

Gould seems to share Lang's view that, in his use of gnomai, Herodotus naively reflects contemporary folk traditions. Gould argues that Herodotus is

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[5]Horna and von Fritz 74–75, Spoerri 823, cf. Silk. Some of the gnomai cited by Aristotle include: οὐκ ἔστιν ὅστις πάντ᾽ ἀνὴρ εὐδαιμονεῖ (1394b2) and ἀθάνατον ὀργὴν μὴ φύλασσε θνητὸς ὤν (1394b23).

[6]Horna and von Fritz 75. On the modern proverb see below.

[7]Gould 1989: 81. The Greek term παροιμία seems to have referred to a wisdom expression that was particularly distinguished by antiquity, brevity and wit, but was otherwise very close to the γνώμη, cf. Russo 122 and Edwards *et al*. 1115. For the lack of a clear distinction between γνώμη and παροιμία, see Kindstrand 74–75 and Huxley 332. Although παροιμία is frequently translated as "proverb," while γνώμη is often translated as "maxim," the γνώμη does seem to be the closest parallel to the modern proverb. See, however, Hölscher 238.

[8]Lang 58–67 and Gould 1989: 63–85; see also Russo's treatment of the gnomai in the Candaules/Gyges story, 126–29. For the history of scholarship on wisdom expressions in Greek and Roman authors in general, see Horna and von Fritz, Spoerri, Taylor 1931: 42–62 and Strömberg; more recently, Kindstrand, Tzifopoulos, and Lardinois, all with extensive bibliography. On modern paroemiography, see below.

[9]Lang 58–67. For more on Lang's survey of Herodotean gnomai, see below.

[10]Lang 65.

[11]Lang 52.

essentially "a storyteller whose view of the world and whose modes of explanation are rooted…in the tradition of his craft."[12] Accordingly, he takes issue with those scholars who see a "theory of history" expressed in the Herodotean maxim that "human happiness never abides in the same place" (1.5.4).[13] Gould contends that a proverb or maxim cannot provide an explanation of historical events because it "does not claim to put forward the sort of general truth that…[can] be verified or falsified" by future events. In other words, a proverb or gnome "is not an assertion that any counter-example will render void." A counter-example will simply elicit a contradictory proverb, without challenging the validity of the first one: " 'Look after the pennies; the pounds will look after themselves'…exists happily side by side with 'Penny wise, pound foolish,' just as 'Too many cooks spoil the broth,' does not exclude 'Many hands make light work.' " Since proverbs and gnomai are "generalizations which permit contradiction and conflicting interpretations," Gould concludes, they have no explanatory power. Consequently, Herodotus' use of such generalizations should not be confused with "an explanatory hypothesis of why things happen in human experience."[14]

Gould's claim that a proverb or gnome cannot function on its own as an explanation of historical causes is certainly valid. To reiterate his point, a proverb such as "It is necessary to look to the end" (1.32.9) can always be countered with "Let nothing go untried" (7.9γ); and the gnome "Man is completely subject to chance" (1.32.4) can be answered by "I find that planning well is the greatest gain" (7.10δ2). Taken by itself, a proverb can never provide a satisfactory historical analysis because, as Gould points out, it is so easily contradicted. But Gould's argument suffers, I believe, from his assumption that a coherent historical explanation must take the form of an abstract, theoretical statement.[15] As recent scholarship has shown, Herodotus frequently uses a more subtle type of historical explanation, that of repeating patterns of action and result. Literary in form but historical in content, these narrative patterns gain authority with each repetition. Cumulatively, they demonstrate to the reader or

[12]Gould 1989: 63.

[13]Gould 1989: 78–82.

[14]Gould 1989: 81–82. Gould suggests that the theme of "reciprocal action," while not rising to the level of an explanatory principle, is the "most pervasive strand of explanation in Herodotus' narrative" (82–85). Gould's point is well taken, although he is not the first scholar to note that Herodotus frequently uses the motif of reciprocal action (or revenge) as an explanation for historical events (see n. 55 below). I hope to discuss the topic of reciprocal action in Herodotus elsewhere.

[15]Gould 1989: 80; cf. Gould 1996: 698.

listener that specific types of actions generally lead to specific results.[16] Herodotus' historical explanations are thus frequently embedded in his narrative and are not always expressed as abstract statements. There is no reason why proverbs should not play an important role in this type of historical explanation. Furthermore, Gould seems not to have made use of the wide range of secondary literature on proverbs and their usage. Scholars in the field of paroemiology (the study of proverbs and other wisdom expressions) have produced a substantial body of research dealing with the kinds of questions Gould raises, including that of contradictory proverbs.

The studies of Lang and Gould not only indicate the importance of wisdom expressions in the *Histories* but also raise crucial questions concerning Herodotus' use of them. In order to discover whether the wisdom expressions in the *Histories* do, in fact, serve a purpose beyond the colorful presentation of traditional beliefs, I propose to begin with a review of recent scholarship on proverbs in general and on contradictory proverbs in particular. This survey will then provide the analytical background necessary for a thorough examination of the contradictory gnomai in the *Histories*. This analysis will show that contradictory gnomai do play an important role in Herodotus' method of historical explanation. While Herodotus' modes of expression may be those of a storyteller, his aims and goals are those of a historian: the preservation of the past and an explanation of historical causes, as outlined in the proem. Herodotus uses traditional storytelling methods (such as contradictory gnomai, narrative patterns, and paradigmatic tales) as part of a complex presentation in which the analysis of events is embedded in the narrative. By using the tools of modern paroemiology to understand Herodotus' use of contradictory gnomai, we can begin to separate Herodotus' explanations of events from the narrative in which they occur.

II. Modern Paroemiology

Although the proverb is primarily an oral genre,[17] and new proverbs are continually being developed while others fall into obscurity,[18] there is a consensus among scholars concerning the proverb's nature and function. Scholars agree that a proverb is a short and witty general statement, cast in

[16]Pioneering work on narrative patterns in the *Histories* was done by Bischoff, Lattimore, Immerwahr 1966, and Wood. More recently see Lateiner 1977 and 1989: 111–44, Flory 1978a and 1987: 13–16, Boedeker 1987 and 1993, Gray, Shapiro 1996 and Dillery.

[17]Jason 619, Abrahams and Babcock 415, and Norrick 12.

[18]See Barrick for a case study of this phenomenon.

poetic (or heightened) speech, whose form is more or less fixed.[19] A proverb expresses practical wisdom (often a comment on the human condition or moral or practical advice) that is based on experience and is widely accepted by the society in which the proverb circulates.[20]

The proverb's essential function is to explain a particular situation in light of a generally accepted truth.[21] Thus, proverbs are used to "sum up a situation, pass judgment, recommend a course of action, or serve as…precedents for present action…."[22] Proverbs are frequently used to resolve a conflict[23] or to encourage the listener to modify his behavior in accordance with a generally accepted norm.[24] Because a proverb admonishes indirectly, it can be used in situations where direct criticism would be inappropriate.[25] In all of its uses, the proverb has an explanatory function: the proverb user attempts to clarify a situation through the use of traditional wisdom.[26]

Because a proverb's meaning is so closely associated with the context in which it is used, paroemiologists have increasingly emphasized the study of

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[19]A proverb is a general statement: Jason 617, Norrick 13, Simpson ix. Cf. Aristotle's definition of the gnome: ἔστι δὴ γνώμη ἀπόφανσις, οὐ μέντοι οὔτε περὶ τῶν καθ' ἕκαστον…ἀλλὰ καθόλου…., *Rh.* 1394a21–23. A proverb is a short and witty statement: Taylor 1931: 3–4, Seitel 124, Finnegan 14, Silverman-Weinrich 71, Norrick 31. A proverb is cast in poetic or heightened speech: Finnegan 23, Dundes 53, Silverman–Weinrich 70, Yankeh 10, Norrick 31. Some scholars (e.g., Russo 121 and Norrick 31), argue that the proverb has a fixed form; others argue that its form can evolve, e.g., Taylor 1931: 22–27, Wilson 176–77, Sherzer, Barrick, and Mieder 112.

[20]A proverb expresses wisdom: Taylor 1962: 3–4, Goodwin and Wenzel 142–43, Norrick 28, Robinson 64. "A proverb is a traditional saying which offers advice or presents a moral in a short and pithy manner," Simpson ix; cf. Russo 121. A proverb's wisdom is widely accepted by society: Taylor 1962: 8, Finnegan 14–15, Jason 617, Abrahams and Babcock 425, Silverman-Weinreich 71, Goodwin and Wenzel 142–43, Yankeh 7. Cf. Aristotle's comment on gnomai: διὰ γὰρ τὸ εἶναι κοιναί, ὡς ὁμολογούντων πάντων, ὀρθῶς ἔχειν δοκοῦσιν, *Rh.* 1395a11–12.

[21]Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 118, Abrahams and Babcock 415–18.

[22]Dundes and Arewa 71; cf. Taylor 1965: 7, Yankeh 8, and Norrick 18.

[23]Taylor 1931: 87, Messenger, Finnegan 30–31, Norrick 27.

[24]Silverman-Weinreich 71: "a proverb points out that a given specific occurrence illustrates an accepted general rule. The hearer supposedly already knows the rule, and the intention of the user of the proverb is to link situation and rule." Cf. Jason 619, Goodwin and Wenzel 142.

[25]Finnegan 28–29.

[26]Norrick 28. Cf. Lang 65 on Herodotean maxims, quoted above, p. 90.

proverbs in context.[27] For example, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has shown that the Anglo-American proverb "A rolling stone gathers no moss" can be used with opposite meanings, depending on whether the moss on the stone is viewed positively or negatively.[28] Seitel discusses four different meanings for a single African proverb, depending on whether an older man addresses it to a younger, a guest to his host, a host to his guest, or one man to another regarding a third.[29] Because of the growing awareness of the importance of context, modern paroemiologists generally include both the text and the context of the proverbs that they discuss.[30]

The existence of contradictory proverbs has frequently been noted. Contradictory proverbs often occur in what anthropologists call "verbal duels." Verbal dueling includes any form of verbal conflict ranging from the disagreements that occur in ordinary conversation to the exchange of opposing arguments at a trial.[31] Contradictory proverbs naturally occur in verbal duels as each speaker searches for a proverb that will best support his argument. Dundes and Arewa describe an argument between a husband and wife in Nigeria that was composed almost entirely of contradictory proverbs.[32] Toward the end of their argument, the husband used the proverb "Untrained and intractable children would be corrected by outsiders" to make the point that if they did not punish their disobedient child, the community at large would take action. His wife replied, "If a man beats his child with his right hand, he should draw him to himself with his left," thus agreeing to the punishment, but urging that her husband also demonstrate his love. As this exchange illustrates, proverbs cited in verbal duels are not self-contradictory; the opposition between the proverbs serves to clarify the difference between opposing points of view. Proverbs are useful in verbal duels precisely because they have explanatory power: each person believes his argument will be made stronger and more persuasive by the citation of an appropriate proverb.[33]

Contradictory proverbs are also found outside of verbal duels, but these, too, are consistent with the proverb's explanatory function. According to

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[27]E.g., Messenger, Dundes and Arewa, Finnegan, and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett.

[28]Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 112–13.

[29]Seitel 128–32.

[30]See Lardinois and Russo on the importance of context in the study of ancient Greek wisdom expressions.

[31]Farb.

[32]Dundes and Arewa 74–75.

[33]See Messenger for the importance of contradictory proverbs in the traditional Nigerian judicial system.

Yankeh, many so-called "contradictory proverbs" actually refer to different contexts. He points out that the proverbs "Out of sight, out of mind" and "Absence makes the heart grow fonder" would each be appropriately used in different situations.[34] Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes that supposedly contradictory proverbs such as "Haste makes waste" and "Strike while the iron is hot" simply demonstrate that "a proverb's meaning and 'truth' are conditioned by the context."[35] Goodwin and Wenzel argue further that, even when used within a single context, contradictory proverbs can support the process of practical reasoning, because "on reflection they may be found to achieve consistency at a higher level." For example: "…knowing both 'Look before you leap,' and 'He who hesitates is lost,' one is inclined to hesitate just long enough to look!" Thus Goodwin and Wenzel conclude that contradictory proverbs can improve deliberation when "the contemplation of contrary proverbs leads to a moderation of impulses," and hence to the selection of "a sensible middle course."[36]

Thus, when considered in context, proverbs do have an explanatory function. By applying a widely accepted truth to a particular situation, a proverb user attempts to explain that situation and, in most cases, to recommend a course of action as well. Contradictory proverbs are no exception. In verbal duels they are used to support opposing points of view; outside of verbal duels, they may apply to different contexts or encourage deliberation about a particular situation.

III. Herodotean Gnomai

Any consideration of the gnomai in Herodotus must begin with the survey made by Mabel Lang as part of her investigation into Herodotus' narrative techniques.[37] Although Lang has identified seventy-four gnomai in the *Histories*,[38] four of these are not true gnomai. One is really a fable (7.152.5); one is not a complete statement (6.37.2); and two seem so closely tied to their respective contexts that they cannot be considered general statements (6.86δ and 8.102.1). To the seventy gnomai that remain, I have added sixteen more, making a total of eighty-six gnomai in the *Histories*.[39] Of these eighty-six, I have

[34]Yankeh 10–11; cf. Mieder 239–40.

[35]Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 114–15.

[36]Goodwin and Wenzel 142–43; cf. Robinson 64–65.

[37]Lang 58–67.

[38]She does not list them all, however, and her citations are sometimes difficult to find, since they are scattered over several pages and often buried in end notes: Lang 58–67 and 161–62 nn. 10–24.

[39]These are listed in the Appendix. Following Lang, I have excluded oracular gnomai except for the gnome at 1.91.1, which echoes a frequently repeated sentiment in the

identified only six groups or pairs that can in any way be seen as contradicting one another: (1) Gyges and Candaules (1.8–13); (2) The Constitutional Debate (3.80–83); (3) Xerxes, Mardonius, and Artabanus (7.8–10); (4) The Conversation at Abydos (7.47–51); (5) Themistocles and Adeimantus at Salamis (8.59); and (6) Candaules and Xerxes (1.8.2 and 7.39.1).[40] In the first five of these citations, the contradictory gnomai occur in verbal duels, in which two (or three) individuals are debating about a particular issue; only the last pair is not part of a verbal duel. I will consider all of the contradictory gnomai in context, to better elucidate the way that Herodotus uses them.[41]

1. Gyges and Candaules (1.8–13)

The first three contradictory gnomai occur in the Gyges-Candaules story,[42] in which Herodotus explains how Gyges, Croesus' ancestor and a member of the Mermnad clan, took the Lydian monarchy away from Candaules and the Heraclid dynasty, to whom it had traditionally belonged. Herodotus tells us that Candaules thought his wife was "by far the most beautiful of all women," and that he praised his wife's beauty excessively (ὑπεραινέων, 1.8.1). As Russo notes, Candaules' excessive devotion to his wife is already a violation of custom, since royal marriages are traditionally based on dynastic, rather than emotional, considerations.[43] Since Candaules shared all his important affairs with Gyges, his bodyguard, he wanted to share with him the object of his obsession as well. One day Candaules said to Gyges, "since people trust their eyes more than their ears (ὦτα γὰρ τυγχάνει ἀνθρώποισι ἐόντα ἀπιστότερα ὀφθαλμῶν, 1.8.2), I want you to see my wife without her clothes on." The request strikes Gyges as perverse: "Master, what kind of a sick suggestion is that (λόγον οὐκ ὑγιέα), your ordering me to see my mistress naked?" (1.8.3). Gyges here identifies the king and queen as his master and

narrative (cf. Lang 64). Aside from oracular gnomai, I have attempted to make this list as complete as possible, although some gnomai may have been inadvertently omitted.

[40]I have been as inclusive as possible in compiling this list.

[41]It should be clear that in all of these examples I am not concerned with the question of factual accuracy, i.e., whether these gnomai were actually cited, but with the coherence of Herodotus' presentation.

[42]See Russo for an insightful discussion of the wisdom expressions in this passage; see Cairns for a thorough treatment of the gnome ἅμα δὲ κιθῶνι ἐκδυομένῳ συνεκδύεται καὶ τὴν αἰδῶ γυνή (1.8.3). For discussions of the passage as a whole, see Aly 34–35, Hellmann 30–33, Benardete 11–15, Evans 1985, Flory 1978b and 1987: 29–38, Konstan 1983: 11–13, Long 9–38, and Arieti 16–23.

[43]Russo 127. On Candaules' obsessive passion, see Flory 1987: 32 and Konstan 1983: 11–13.

mistress, thus stressing the impropriety of the king's command. As he argues against Candaules' plan, Gyges cites two gnomai of his own: "A woman removes her modesty along with her clothes" (ἅμα δὲ κιθῶνι ἐκδυομένῳ συνεκδύεται καὶ τὴν αἰδῶ γυνή, 1.8.3) and "Fine things were discovered by men long ago from which it is necessary to learn; among them is this: Let each one look to his own" (πάλαι δὲ τὰ καλὰ ἀνθρώποισι ἐξεύρηται, ἐκ τῶν μανθάνειν δεῖ· ἐν τοῖσι ἓν τόδε ἐστί, σκοπέειν τινὰ τὰ ἑωυτοῦ, 1.8.4).[44] Gyges concludes: "I believe that she is the most beautiful of all women, and I beg you not to require me to do unlawful things (ἄνομα, 1.8.4)."

As noted above, wisdom expressions often articulate shared social values and thus can be used to indirectly request the listener to modify his behavior. Gyges' gnomai are intended to serve this function. Gyges first warns of permanent damage to a woman's sense of propriety if she reveals herself to someone other than her husband. He then articulates a universal paradigm for appropriate social interaction: Let each one look to his own.[45] Gyges' gnome thus directly contradicts Candaules' suggestion that "seeing is believing," and is clearly intended to do so. Gyges uses a contradictory gnome to politely inform the king that his wife should not be revealed to others. Note, too, that Gyges exhorts Candaules to learn from wisdom expressions because of their ancient origin and the traditional values they express (τὰ καλά). Gyges' final plea ("I beg you not to require me to do unlawful things") establishes a further opposition between "the fine things" (τὰ καλά) discovered by men long ago, and the "unlawful things" (ἄνομα) that Candaules now proposes.

The king, however, persists in his demand until his bodyguard finally agrees. That night Gyges hides in the royal bedroom and watches the Queen undress, but the Queen notices him as he tiptoes out of the room. Realizing immediately that her husband is behind the scheme, the Queen says nothing, but she confronts Gyges the next morning, informing him that, because he has "acted contrary to custom" (ποιήσαντα οὐ νομιζόμενα), he must either kill Candaules (who planned the deed) or he himself must die (1.11.2–3). That night, Gyges kills Candaules as he sleeps and takes possession of his wife and kingdom. The Delphic Oracle later confirms his position as king, although

[44]This last quotation includes not only the gnome itself ("let each one look to his own"), but also a brief explanation of the value of a wisdom expression (its basis in traditional wisdom) and its proper social function (influencing behavior).

[45]Plato later gave this sentiment an important role in his ideal republic: *R.* 4.441d12–e2 and 10.620c3–d2. See Lateiner 1989: 141 for the thematic importance of this gnome to the *Histories*.

warning darkly that Candaules and the Heracleidae will take revenge on the Mermnads in the fifth generation (1.13.2).

In this story of how the Heracleidae lost their power, Candaules is presented as a foolish king who does not understand the norms of his own society. Gyges, on the other hand, is presented as knowing the right course of action, although he twice proves unable to take it.[46] The contradictory gnomai in this passage do not contradict themselves; they are used to clarify and support the two opposing positions. Furthermore, both of Gyges' gnomai are validated by subsequent events, though not in the way that Gyges had anticipated. By inciting the bodyguard to kill his king, the Lydian Queen *does* "remove her modesty along with her clothes," although her purpose in doing so is to defend the social norms that have been transgressed.[47] And because Gyges failed to "look to his own," Croesus, his fifth generation descendant, will be punished (1.13.2).

2. The Constitutional Debate (3.80–83)

Herodotus' use of contradictory gnomai to delineate opposing viewpoints in a verbal duel can also be seen in the Constitutional Debate. The seven Persian conspirators, after removing the Magian impostors from the royal throne, meet to decide on what form of government to establish for the Persians. At this meeting, three types of government are proposed: democracy, oligarchy and monarchy. The arguments in this passage have been much discussed,[48] but what has not, I believe, previously been noted is the fact that each of the three arguments ends with a gnome.

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[46]See Long 31–32 and Flory 1987: 37–38 on the problematic aspects of Gyges' choice; cf. Flory 1978b.

[47]As Cairns (82 n. 26) explains, the Queen's message to Gyges is that the right to see her naked "can belong to only one man." In forcing Gyges to make the difficult choice of becoming either a murderer or a dead man, the Queen steps out of her subordinate role.

[48]See Vlastos, Immerwahr 1966: 101, Benardete 84–87, Ostwald 178–79 and 107–8, Lasserre, Evans 1981 and 1991: 57–58, Flory 1987: 130–35, and Lateiner 1989: 167–70. Discussions concerning the sources of Herodotus' debate are perhaps best seen as disagreements about the relative importance of different influences. In view of Herodotus' repeated insistence that the debate actually occurred (3.10.1 and 6.43.3), it is clear that there was some Persian influence, unless one is willing to argue that Herodotus was deliberately lying (cf. Fehling 120–22). Ostwald (178–79) argues for a full Persian substrate while Evans (1981: 81–84) argues for a more attenuated Persian influence, but both scholars agree that Herodotus interpreted whatever Persian information he received in terms of contemporary Greek political discussions.

Otanes first argues that the unlimited power granted to a monarch insures that any man placed in that position will become insolent, lawless and jealous.[49] He then suggests that they institute a democracy, which, he claims, is characterized by equality under the law (ἰσονομίη), accountability and open discussion.[50] Otanes summarizes his proposal with a gnome: "for everything lies in the many" (ἐν γὰρ τῷ πολλῷ ἔνι τὰ πάντα, 3.80.6).

Megabyzus agrees with Otanes about the dangers of a monarchy, but argues that a democracy is even more dangerous, since a mob is inherently foolish, ignorant and undisciplined. He suggests that they grant power to a select group of top men (including themselves, of course), and concludes with the gnome "it is reasonable that the best men make the best plans" (ἀρίστων δὲ ἀνδρῶν οἰκὸς ἄριστα βουλεύματα γίνεσθαι, 3.81.3). The juxtaposition of ἄριστα and ἀρίστων adds force to his argument.

Darius agrees with Megabyzus that rule by the people breeds corruption (κακότητα), but argues that oligarchy produces stasis and bloodshed; the rule of one best man (ἀνδρὸς ἑνὸς τοῦ ἀρίστου, 3.82.2) would be the best solution. Darius then notes that the Persians have been ruled by a monarch since Cyrus brought them their freedom, and concludes with the gnome "do not destroy the good customs inherited from our fathers" (πατρίους νόμους μὴ λύειν ἔχοντας εὖ· οὐ γὰρ ἄμεινον, 3.82.5). By using this gnome, which expresses a sentiment similar to that of Gyges, that it is necessary to learn from "the fine things discovered by men long ago" (1.8.4), Darius affirms a principle of action that supersedes the arguments proposed for each particular type of government. A majority of the conspirators then vote for Darius' view (3.83.1), and a monarchy is soon established with Darius at its head.[51]

The fact that these three gnomai contradict one another contributes to their explanatory power. Because the first two speakers' gnomai summarize their opposing views, they indicate deep divisions within the conspiracy as to the best form of government to establish for the Persians. These differences are resolved only by Darius' appeal to their valued ancestral customs, a principle that a majority can uphold.[52] Thus Herodotus uses these three speeches, together with

[49]Otanes cites a gnome to support this contention: φθονός δὲ ἀρχῆθεν ἐμφύεται ἀνθρώπῳ (3.80.3).

[50]See Vlastos 2–6 and Ostwald 108.

[51]The deceitful means by which Darius obtains the kingship is a separate issue (3.85–86), although it is worth noting that an omen from Zeus seems to confirm Darius' selection (3.86.2). See Lateiner 1990 for a discussion of Herodotus' generally favorable presentation of artful deception.

[52]Evans 1991: 58; cf. Flory 1987: 131–32.

their contradictory gnomai, to explain why, in his view, the conspirators decided to preserve the monarchy: when they could not agree on a particular form of government on the basis of its own merits, they chose to preserve the traditional customs that had served them well.

3. Xerxes, Mardonius, and Artabanus (7.8–10)

The next group of contradictory gnomai also occurs within a verbal duel in which an important political decision must be made. In this passage, Mardonius, Artabanus and Xerxes express opposing views concerning the proposed Persian attack against the Greeks. Xerxes' invasion of Greece is perhaps the most important action of the *Histories*, and Herodotus' presentation of the decision-making process is correspondingly long and complex. The present analysis, however, will be limited to a consideration of the contradictory gnomai and their role in the deliberation process.[53]

At 7.8.1 Xerxes calls a meeting of the highest-ranking Persians to announce his intention of attacking Greece and to request their military aid. In outlining his reasons for the attack, Xerxes first mentions three general reasons for invading a foreign power (Persian nomos, religion, and emulation of his predecessors) and three specific reasons for the attack against Greece (glory, land acquisition and revenge). As Xerxes becomes more excited, however, he reveals a different motivation:

> We will make the Persian land coterminous with the heaven of Zeus. For the sun will look down on no other land sharing a border with ours, but I will make all of their lands into one single land for you, as I march through all of Europe…. Thus, both the innocent and the guilty alike will bear the yoke of slavery to us (7.8γ1–2).

Xerxes' stated intention to conquer the world casts doubt on his claim to be following Persian nomos, since Herodotus elsewhere reports that the Persians traditionally considered Europe to belong to the Greeks (1.4.4 and 9.116.3).[54] Xerxes' vow to enslave "both the innocent and guilty alike" also belies his claim to be seeking revenge.[55]

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[53]For discussions of this passage, see Pohlenz 120–24, Immerwahr 1954: 30–33 and 1956: 272–76, Evans 1961, and F. Solmsen 8–12.

[54]For the claim that Xerxes was in fact following Persian nomos, see Evans 1961 and 1991: 23–28.

[55]There are several passages throughout the *Histories* in which Herodotus speaks approvingly of men and women who pay retribution (τίσις) for injustices they have caused, e.g., 3.126–28, 6.71–72, 6.74–75, 8.105–106, 9.64; at 3.108 there is an example

Herodotus here presents Xerxes' plans for the expedition as marred by excessive ambition and even megalomania,[56] but Mardonius, motivated by his own hopes of becoming the governor of Greece (7.6.1), enthusiastically supports Xerxes' plans. First he flatters the monarch (7.9.1), then belittles the Greeks as poor fighters (7.9α–β), while praising the Persians as the greatest fighters of all (ἀνθρώπων ἄριστοι τὰ πολέμια, 7.9γ). He stresses Xerxes' strong numerical advantage (πλῆθος τὸ ἐκ τῆς Ἀσίης καὶ νέας τὰς ἁπάσας, 7.9γ), and concludes his speech with a gnome: "But let nothing go untried; for nothing comes automatically, but all things tend to come to men through trying" (ἔστω δ' ὧν μηδὲν ἀπείρητον· αὐτόματον γὰρ οὐδέν, ἀλλ' ἀπὸ πείρης πάντα ἀνθρώποισι φιλέει γίνεσθαι, 7.9γ). Thus, after first minimizing the risks, Mardonius encourages Xerxes' plans by focusing on the gains which can only be won "through trying."

Herodotus' next comment is revealing: "The other Persians were silent, since they did not dare to express an opinion opposite to the one that had been put forward" (7.10.1). After rousing speeches by Xerxes and Mardonius focusing only on the benefits to be gained, none of the Persians present favored making the attack. Their consistent lack of enthusiasm (cf. 7.14) may indicate a more realistic assessment of the gains and risks involved. Only Artabanus dares to openly question Xerxes' plan, relying on his close familial relationship with the king (πάτρως, 7.10.1). While Xerxes and Mardonius had glossed over the dangers of the expedition, Artabanus emphasizes the risks. He begins by discussing Darius' failed attack against the Scythians, noting that the Greeks "are far better fighters than the Scythians" and are "said to be the best fighters (ἄριστοι) on both sea and land" (7.10α3), thus challenging Mardonius' claim that the Persians are the best fighters of all (ἄριστοι, 7.9γ). If the Greeks were to win a sea battle and destroy the Hellespontine bridge, Artabanus continues, disaster would ensue, as almost happened to Darius during the Scythian campaign (7.10β2–γ). Artabanus then asks Xerxes to reconsider the expedition, supporting his point with a gnome: "For planning well is the greatest gain" (τὸ γὰρ εὖ βουλεύεσθαι κέρδος μέγιστον, 7.10δ2). Artabanus' gnome is meant as a direct challenge to Mardonius' claim that "all things come to men through trying." In Artabanus' view, the advice to "try anything" is foolish, because any attempt not supported by careful planning is bound to end in failure.

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of τίσις in the natural world. See Pagel, Pippidi, de Romilly, Flory 1987: 23–48, Lateiner 1989: 141–44, Gould 1989: 82–85, Evans 1991: 19–20, and Gray 194–200 for discussions of τίσις in Herodotus as a means of restoring a proper balance.

[56]F. Solmsen 9, Fornara 88, Lateiner 1989: 129.

Artabanus' next two gnomai, "The god likes to cut down everything that stands out" (φιλέει γὰρ ὁ θεὸς τὰ ὑπερέχοντα πάντα κολούειν, 7.10ε) and "The god does not allow anyone to 'think big' other than himself" (οὐ γὰρ ἐᾷ φρονέειν μέγα ὁ θεὸς ἄλλον ἢ ἑωυτόν, 7.10ε), recall Solon's maxim ἐπιστάμενόν με τὸ θεῖον πᾶν ἐὸν φθονερόν (1.32.1). They directly challenge Mardonius' point that Xerxes will have the advantage of size (7.9γ) and are also critical of Xerxes' plans for world domination.[57] Artabanus returns to the theme of planning near the end of his speech: "To always act in haste brings disaster, from which great penalties often result; but good things come with delay" (ἐπειχθῆναι μέν νυν πᾶν πρῆγμα τίκτει σφάλματα, ἐκ τῶν ζημίαι μεγάλαι φιλέουσι γίνεσθαι· ἐν δὲ τῷ ἐπισχεῖν ἔνεστι ἀγαθά, 7.10ζ). As Artabanus begs Xerxes to delay military action until he has considered the matter more carefully, he again contradicts Mardonius' maxim to "let nothing go untried."

Although Artabanus later changes his mind under the influence of divinely-inspired dreams (7.12–18) and encourages Xerxes to undertake the expedition, here he argues strongly against it.[58] Artabanus' gnomai in this passage are intended to contradict Mardonius': each man cites gnomai to support his argument and to persuade Xerxes that his view is correct. Furthermore, just as in the other verbal duels in the *Histories*, one side will later be vindicated at the expense of the other. When Xerxes' expedition ends in disaster, the reader or listener will recall that Mardonius' gnome "Let nothing go untried" had been opposed by Artabanus' two gnomai "Planning well is the greatest gain" and "To act in haste always brings disaster." Thus, Herodotus uses the opposing gnomai in their immediate context to summarize the two opposing arguments, but, in the larger context of the *Histories* as a whole, the two sets of gnomai illustrate the validity of Artabanus' view.[59]

It is important to note that the gnomai presented by one side in a Herodotean verbal duel are always proved correct by later events; one side ultimately "wins" the duel. Thus, the contradictory gnomai in the *Histories* do more than simply explain the motivation of particular historical agents; they

[57]For Herodotus' programmatic use of Solonian wisdom, see Shapiro 1996.

[58]For the role of the gods in encouraging the invasion of Greece to go forward, see Immerwahr 1954: 33–37, Marinatos, and Shapiro 1994. The precedent for a deceptive dream had been set at *Il.* 2.5–83.

[59]Herodotus' use of gnomai is closely linked with the warner or wise adviser theme. I am currently working on a study of the theme of advice in the *Histories*, a topic which has not been re-examined since Bischoff and Lattimore.

show, in retrospect, that one view of events was more accurate than the other. This is an important means of Herodotean historical explanation.

4. The Conversation at Abydos (7.47–51)

About five years later (7.20.1), Xerxes and Artabanus sit on a hill at Abydos, viewing the enormous Persian army and navy, before Xerxes crosses the Hellespont into Europe.[60] As Xerxes shows Artabanus his vast armament, covering all the visible land and sea (7.45), he asks him whether, if the dream had not appeared to him, he would still advise against making the attack (7.47.1).[61] In framing the question in these terms, Xerxes is asking Artabanus to judge the expedition solely on its merits, without the divine help he believes they were promised (7.18.3). Xerxes assumes that the great size of his forces will ensure an easy victory (7.48), and he expects Artabanus to say so as well. But Artabanus sees danger in the very things Xerxes is most counting on: the great size of their forces and the possibility that the Greeks will not oppose them (7.8γ1–2). Artabanus first notes that, because the navy is so huge, there is no harbor large enough to shelter it in a storm, citing the gnome "Learn that misfortunes rule men, men do not rule misfortunes" (μάθε ὅτι αἱ συμφοραὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἄρχουσι καὶ οὐκὶ ὥνθρωποι τῶν συμφορέων, 7.49.3).[62] He then describes the famine that may result if, because of their success, the army marches too far to maintain adequate provisions (7.49.5).[63] Both of Artabanus' fears will soon come true: Xerxes' navy is severely damaged by storms (7.188 and 8.12). Later, after the Persian defeat at Salamis, his retreating army is forced to eat grass, leaves and tree bark in order to survive (8.115.2–3). Artabanus concludes his speech with a gnome: "That man is best who is fearful in planning, because he considers everything he will suffer, but bold in action" (ἀνὴρ δὲ οὕτω ἂν εἴη ἄριστος, εἰ βουλευόμενος μὲν ἀρρωδέοι, πᾶν ἐπιλεγόμενος πείσεσθαι χρῆμα, ἐν δὲ τῷ ἔργῳ θρασὺς εἴη, 7.49.5). Although Artabanus no longer advises against making the attack, he is still urging Xerxes to plan it more carefully in order to minimize the dangers of unforeseen misfortunes. Artabanus' gnomai consistently advocate the importance of careful planning in an uncertain world.

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[60]For discussions of this passage, see Bischoff 60–63, Pohlenz 132–33, Immerwahr 1954: 41–44 and 1966: 75, F. Solmsen 21–23, Flory 1978a, and Konstan 1987: 63–64.

[61]This is parallel to Croesus' first showing Solon his great wealth and then asking him who was the happiest man he had ever seen; cf. Flory 1978a: 148 and Konstan 1987: 68.

[62]Cf. Solon's gnome at 1.32.4: πᾶν ἐστι ἄνθρωπος συμφορή.

[63]At 7.49.5: ὡς οὐδενὸς ἐναντιευμένου, λέγω τὴν χώρην πλεῦνα ἐν πλέονι χρόνῳ γινομένην λιμὸν τέξεσθαι. For the interpretation of this passage see Lateiner 1989: 130.

But in his reply Xerxes pointedly rejects the need for careful planning: "It is better to be bold in everything and suffer half of what you fear, than to fear everything in advance and not to suffer at all" (κρέσσον δὲ πάντα θαρσέοντα ἥμισυ τῶν δεινῶν πάσχειν μᾶλλον ἢ πᾶν χρῆμα προδειμαίνοντα μηδαμὰ μηδὲν παθεῖν, 7.50.1). Xerxes' gnome is meant to contrast with Artabanus' in form as well as content. Whereas Artabanus had begun with the phrase "that man is best (ἄριστος)," Xerxes replies, "it is better (κρέσσον)…." Where Artabanus had advised Xerxes to "be bold in action" (ἐν δὲ τῷ ἔργῳ θρασὺς εἴη), Xerxes prefers to "be bold in everything" (πάντα θαρσέοντα). While Artabanus praises the man who "is fearful because he considers everything he will suffer" (ἀρρωδέοι, πᾶν ἐπιλεγόμενος πείσεσθαι χρῆμα), Xerxes criticizes the man who "fears everything in advance" (πᾶν χρῆμα προδειμαίνοντα).

Xerxes' opposition to Artabanus now becomes more pointed. Using a gnome reminiscent of Mardonius' "Let nothing go untried" (7.9γ), he declares: "Gains usually go to those who are willing to act, not to those who consider everything and hang back" (τοῖσι τοίνυν βουλομένοισι ποιέειν ὡς τὸ ἐπίπαν φιλέει γίνεσθαι τὰ κέρδεα, τοῖσι δὲ ἐπιλεγομένοισί τε πάντα καὶ ὀκνέουσι οὐ μάλα ἐθέλει, 7.50.2). Xerxes' use of the term τὰ κέρδεα recalls Artabanus' gnome at 7.10δ2 (τὸ γὰρ εὖ βουλεύεσθαι κέρδος μέγιστον εὑρίσκω ἐόν), and highlights his rejection of it. Xerxes sees planning as nothing but a coward's excuse for inaction (cf. his dismissive reply to Artabanus at 7.11.1).

Xerxes next argues that if previous Persian kings had held Artabanus' views, or if they had had advisers like Artabanus, they would never have acquired a great empire. Xerxes caps his argument with a gnome: "Great gains are achieved through great risks" (μεγάλα γὰρ πρήγματα μεγάλοισι κινδύνοισι ἐθέλει καταιρέεσθαι, 7.50.3). But Herodotus' account does not support Xerxes' claim. The successful military actions made by Xerxes' predecessors were endorsed by his advisers.[64] On the other hand, Croesus, Cyrus, Cambyses, and Darius might not have suffered defeat if they had listened to the cautionary advice they received.[65] The *Histories* show that great gains are

[64]Harpagus advises Cyrus to organize a Persian revolt against the Medes (1.124), and to use camels against Croesus' Lydian cavalry (1.80). Herodotus notes that Cyrus may have received advice on how to capture Babylon (1.191), and Phanes, a mercenary soldier from Halicarnassus, gives Cambyses crucial advice in his march against Egypt (3.4).

[65]Sandanis advises Croesus not to attack Cyrus (1.71); Tomyris advises Cyrus to leave her territory while he is still alive (1.212); the Ethiopian king advises Cambyses not to attack his people (3.21.3); and Artabanus advises Darius not to attack the Scythians (4.83). Some of the passages cited in this and the previous note are discussed by Lattimore.

achieved, not through great risks as Xerxes claims, but through moderate risks supported by careful planning.

Xerxes concludes his speech by re-affirming his aspirations to world domination while scoffing at Artabanus' fears: "Having conquered all of Europe, we will return home, having encountered no famine anywhere, nor having suffered anything else unpleasant" (ἄχαρι, 7.50.4; cf. χρηστὰ πρήγματα, 7.47.1). Xerxes' predictions of a complete and painless victory indicate a stubborn refusal to acknowledge the dangers they are about to face. In his reply, Artabanus cites one more gnome stressing the need for better planning: "And therefore take to heart this ancient saying (τὸ παλαιὸν ἔπος), since it was well said: the end is not always clear at the beginning" (τὸ μὴ ἅμα ἀρχῇ πᾶν τέλος καταφάινεσθαι, 7.51.3).[66] These are Artabanus' final words in the *Histories*.

Artabanus' gnomai have consistently emphasized the importance of forethought and planning. But Xerxes' gnomai, too, are consistent: "It is better to be bold in everything," he says, "Great gains are achieved through great risks." Herodotus has presented the verbal duel between Xerxes and Artabanus in order to highlight Xerxes' impatience for action and his willful ignorance of the dangers he is about to incur. The eventual failure of Xerxes' expedition and the almost total destruction of his forces will soon reveal the folly of his "just do it" approach. By clarifying the opposition between Xerxes' and Artabanus' views through the use of contradictory gnomai, and then juxtaposing their argument with the eventual outcome, Herodotus provides a partial explanation for the Persian military defeat. Because he believed in being bold and taking risks, Xerxes did not adequately plan his campaign; he raised a force that was too large to fight effectively, as events at Thermopylae and Salamis later showed. By articulating two consistent but opposing viewpoints, each summarized by gnomai, and then showing that one of these two views was proved correct, Herodotus uses the contradictory gnomai as a means of historical explanation.

5. Themistocles and Adeimantus at Salamis (8.56–59)

A final example of contradictory gnomai in a verbal duel is the argument between Themistocles and Adeimantus as to whether the allied Greek fleet should fight the Persians at Salamis or withdraw to the Peloponnese. Although Herodotus treats their altercation with some humor, it is clear that a crucial decision is about to be made.

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[66]Cf. Solon's gnome to Croesus at 1.32.9: σκοπέειν δὲ χρὴ παντὸς χρήματος τὴν τελευτὴν κῇ ἀποβήσεται.

When the Greek fleet at Salamis hears that the Persians have taken Athens, some of the generals immediately board their ships and set sail; those who remain simply vote to retreat to the Isthmus (8.56). When Themistocles returns to his ship, one of his crewmen persuades him that withdrawing to the Isthmus would mean the destruction of Greece. Themistocles then returns to the Spartan commander Eurybiades, who reconvenes the generals for another meeting (8.58). But before Eurybiades can explain why he has called them, Themistocles begins to speak passionately in favor of staying at Salamis. Adeimantus, the Corinthian general, interrupts him with the gnome: "Themistocles, in the games, those who jump the gun are flogged" (Ὦ Θεμιστόκλεες, ἐν τοῖσι ἀγῶσι οἱ προεξανιστάμενοι ῥαπίζονται, 8.59.1). But Themistocles replies with a contradictory gnome, and, Herodotus implies, wins the verbal duel between them: "And he said, releasing himself, 'but those who are left behind are not crowned'" (ὁ δὲ ἀπολυόμενος ἔφη· Οἱ δέ γε ἐγκαταλειπόμενοι οὐ στεφανοῦνται, 8.59.1).

In this brief exchange, Herodotus uses contradictory gnomai to characterize the two speakers and clarify their opposing points of view. Adeimantus, the Corinthian general, who is no doubt particularly anxious for the fleet to withdraw to the Isthmus, wishes to shame Themistocles and prevent the others from taking him seriously. Themistocles, however, shows himself to be quick-witted and resourceful by coming up with a gnome that blunts the force of Adeimantus' remark. The contradictory gnomai in this passage focus our attention on the opposing strategies of these two very different men. The events at the Battle of Salamis later demonstrate the wisdom of Themistocles' plan.[67]

As we have seen, the contradictory gnomai in the *Histories* that occur in verbal duels are part of Herodotus' historical analysis. In each of the five cases discussed above, the opposing speeches with their supporting gnomai serve to clarify the main positions when an important political or military decision must be made.[68] But Herodotus himself does not maintain a neutral position on these issues. The fact that one view is supported by later events is the key to Herodotus' historical analysis. The Greek victory at Salamis was, in Herodotus'

[67]Herodotus elsewhere shows Themistocles using threats, bribery, and deceit to pressure the Greek fleet to remain and fight, first at Artemisium (8.4–5) and then at Salamis (8.61, 8.75, 8.80). Herodotus' portrayal of Themistocles is somewhat controversial. According to Evans 1991: 77, Herodotus portrayed Themistocles as "a political opportunist who used his opportunism and political skill to save Greece." Cf. Fornara 66–72 and Konstan 1987: 70–72. For the view that Herodotus presents an essentially negative portrait of Themistocles, see Patterson 146–48 and Waters 1985: 142–43.

[68]On Herodotean speeches see L. Solmsen 1943, 1944 and Waters 1966.

view, the turning point of the Persian War (7.139; cf. 8.57.2 = 8.68β2), while the Peloponnesian generals' desire to withdraw to the Isthmus nearly cost them their victory (7.139.4; cf. 8.94). Xerxes' blind ambition, his foolish trust in the enormous size of his armament, and his lack of strategic planning were crucial factors in his defeat. Herodotus uses these verbal duels, with their contradictory gnomai, to emphasize what he sees as the causes of historical events.

6. Candaules and Xerxes (1.8.2 and 7.39.1)

I hope I have demonstrated that Herodotus uses contradictory gnomai within verbal duels to clarify opposing views on important issues and, by juxtaposing the verbal duel with the outcome of events, to indicate which side "wins." The final example of contradictory gnomai in the *Histories* occurs outside of a verbal duel; when considered in context, however, it is clear that even these gnomai contribute to Herodotus' coherent presentation of events, if not to his analysis of them. As discussed above, Candaules cites the gnome "People trust their eyes more than their ears" (1.8.2) to encourage his bodyguard to violate a cultural norm. In his reply, Gyges does not respond to the content of Candaules' gnome (that is, he does not argue that people actually trust their ears more than their eyes), but responds directly to the impropriety of the king's request: "I beg you not to require me to do unlawful things" (1.8.3–4). Xerxes' gnome at 7.39.1, though expressing the opposite point of view, is similarly used to justify an inappropriate action. In his march through Sardis on his way to attack the Greeks, Xerxes stays at the home of a wealthy Lydian named Pythius, probably Croesus' grandson.[69] Pythius entertains Xerxes lavishly, and Xerxes responds with even greater generosity (7.29). But later, after a troubling omen, an eclipse of the sun (7.37.2–3), Pythius begs Xerxes to allow the eldest of his five sons to stay home from the war. At this, Xerxes becomes enraged (κάρτα ἐθυμώθη) and lectures Pythius: "Now understand this well, a man's spirit dwells in his ears" (εὖ νυν τόδ' ἐξεπίστασο, ὡς ἐν τοῖσι ὠσὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων οἰκεέι ὁ θυμός, 7.39.1). Xerxes explains that the θυμός either fills the body with joy or swells in anger, depending on what it hears. Since, after hearing Pythius' request, Xerxes' θυμός is now full of anger, he cuts Pythias' eldest son in two, sets one half on either side of the roadway, and marches his army between them (7.39.3).[70] Herodotus frequently shows Persians engaging in the disfigurement

[69]See How and Wells II.138. For discussions of the Pythius logos, see Aly 171–72, Flory 1987: 59–60, and Evans 1988.

[70]Evans 1988 argues that Xerxes' act may be a religious ritual, but this possibility is not considered by Herodotus; cf. How and Wells 2:145 and West 52–53.

of the body or the mutilation of corpses,[71] and, as Pausanias states in rejecting the suggestion that he impale Mardonius' corpse (9.79.1), the Greeks blame such action in the Persians and they consider this to be a distinction between the barbarians and themselves.[72] Xerxes' violent response to Pythius' request helps characterize the king as barbaric and impulsive, unable (or unwilling) to restrain his θυμός (cf. θυμωθείς, 7.11.1 and ἐθυμώθη at 7.238.2). Like Candaules, Xerxes misuses a gnome to justify his action. The fact that Candaules trusts the eyes while Xerxes follows his ears only emphasizes the similar impulsiveness of their actions and the irrelevance of the gnomai used to support them. Neither eyes nor ears should be trusted, but rather good judgment, which both Xerxes and Candaules significantly lack. I am not suggesting that Herodotus intends his audience to compare the two contradictory gnomai and note the underlying similarities between them. But I do want to stress that, even outside of verbal duels, contradictory gnomai in Herodotus do not simply cancel one another out. In these two parallel passages, Herodotus emphasizes the two kings' similar misapprehension of what good sense requires.[73]

IV. Conclusion

While the proverbs in Herodotus' *Histories* do reflect contemporary modes of thought, they also have an explanatory function. Contradictory gnomai are used in verbal duels not only to clarify and distinguish two (or more) opposing points of view, but also (after one of these views has been proved correct by later events) to provide an explanation of why events turned out the way they did. The Persians retained their monarchy not because they saw no other alternative, but because they decided to reaffirm their traditional form of government. Xerxes, who inherited that monarchy, raised an oversized and ill-planned expedition aimed at world conquest, but refused to take into account the dangers

[71]Cambyses mutilates Amasis' corpse (3.16.1); Cyrus cuts off Smerdis' ears (3.69.5); Intaphernes cuts off the ears and noses of Darius' messenger and guard (3.118.2); Oroetes kills Polycrates and impales his corpse (3.125.3); Darius intends to impale his Egyptian doctors (3.132.2); Zopyrus mutilates his own body to help Darius take Babylon (3.154.2); after capturing Babylon, Darius impales the heads of three thousand of its foremost citizens (3.159.1); Xerxes kills Sataspes and impales his body (4.43.6); Xerxes impales Leonidas' head (παρενόμησε, 7.238.2); and Amestris disfigures Masistes' wife (9.112). When Pheretime (who is Greek) mutilates and impales her defeated enemies (4.202.1), Herodotus relates that she was punished by the gods for "excessively violent revenge" (λίην ἰσχυραὶ τιμωρίαι, 4.205); cf. Africa and Chiasson.

[72]On Herodotus' depiction of physical mutilation as a barbarian trait, see Hartog 142 and 332–34, Lateiner 1989: 139, Hall 158–59 and Gray 202.

[73]For further similarities between the two kings, see Wolff.

that were involved. While Xerxes hampered his own expedition through blind impulsiveness, the Greeks' courageous decision to remain and fight at Salamis is presented as the key to their victory.

Beyond the explanation of specific events, Herodotus uses repeating patterns of opposing gnomai compared with later results to provide larger explanatory principles. Proverbs expressing the transitory nature of human happiness and the concomitant need for careful planning are validated again and again throughout the *Histories*, forming a kind of leitmotif to the whole. Herodotus, of course, does not rely solely on gnomai for his complex presentation of historical events, nor are the events described by contradictory gnomai the only important factors in his account of the Persian Wars. Nevertheless, Herodotus' use of the contradictory gnomai does play a significant role in his historical explanation. Herodotus may use traditional wisdom and other literary methods, but he uses them as a historian to explain the causes of historical events.[74]

[74]I would like to thank Charles C. Chiasson and Alexander P. D. Mourelatos for their helpful comments on this paper, as well as the *TAPA* editor, Marilyn B. Skinner, and the anonymous readers for the journal.

Appendix:
Eighty-six Gnomai in Herodotus' *Histories*[75]

Book 1

1. 1.5.4: τὴν ἀνθρωπηίην…εὐδαιμονίην οὐδαμὰ ἐν τὠυτῷ μένουσαν.

2. 1.8.2: ὦτα γὰρ τυγχάνει ἀνθρώποισι ἐόντα ἀπιστότερα ὀφθαλμῶν.

3. 1.8.3: ἅμα δὲ κιθῶνι ἐκδυομένῳ συνεκδύεται καὶ τὴν αἰδῶ γυνή.

4. 1.8.4: πάλαι δὲ τὰ καλὰ ἀνθρώποισι ἐξεύρηται, ἐκ τῶν μανθάνειν δεῖ· ἐν τοῖσι ἓν τόδε ἐστί, σκοπέειν τινὰ τὰ ἑωυτοῦ.

5. 1.32.1: τὸ θεῖον πᾶν ἐὸν φθονερόν…

6. 1.32.4: πᾶν ἐστι ἄνθρωπος συμφορή.

7. 1.32.8: σῶμα ἕν οὐδὲν αὔταρκές ἐστι.

8. 1.32.9: σκοπέειν δὲ χρὴ παντὸς χρήματος τὴν τελευτὴν κῇ ἀποβήσεται.

9. 1.74.4: ἄνευ γὰρ ἀναγκαίης ἰσχυρῆς συμβάσιες ἰσχυραὶ οὐκ ἐθέλουσι συμμένειν.

10. 1.87.4: ἐν μὲν γὰρ τῇ [εἰρήνῃ] οἱ παῖδες τοὺς πατέρας θάπτουσι, ἐν δὲ τῷ [πολέμῳ] οἱ πατέρες τοὺς παῖδας.

11. 1.91.1: τὴν πεπρωμένην μοῖραν ἀδύνατά ἐστι ἀποφυγεῖν καὶ θεῷ.

12. 1.96.2: τῷ δικαίῳ τὸ ἄδικον πολέμιόν ἐστι.

13. 1.120.3: παρὰ σμικρὰ γὰρ καὶ τῶν λογίων ἡμῖν ἕνια κεχώρηκε.

14. 1.207.1: τὰ δέ μοι παθήματα ἐόντα ἀχάριτα μαθήματα γέγονε.

15. 1.207.2: κύκλος τῶν ἀνθρωπηίων ἐστὶ πρηγμάτων, περιφερόμενος δὲ οὐκ ἐᾷ αἰεὶ τοὺς αὐτοὺς εὐτυχέειν.

Book 2

16. 2.120.5: τῶν μεγάλων ἀδικημάτων μεγάλαι εἰσί καὶ αἱ τιμωρίαι παρὰ τῶν θεῶν.

17S. 2.173.2: οὕτω Αἰγύπτιοί τ' ἂν ἠπιστέατο ὡς ὑπ' ἀνδρὸς μεγάλου ἄρχονται.

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[75]All gnomai are taken from the citations in Lang 58–67 and 161–62 nn. 10–24, except those designated with "S," which were added by the present author.

Book 3

18. 3.36.1: ἀγαθόν τοι πρόνοον εἶναι, σοφὸν δὲ ἡ προμηθίη.

19S. 3.38.4: νόμον πάντων βασιλέα…εἶναι.

20. 3.40.2: τὸ θεῖον ὡς ἔστι φθονερόν.

21. 3.43.1: ἐκκομίσαι τε ἀδύνατον εἴη ἀνθρώπῳ ἄνθρωπον ἐκ τοῦ μέλλοντος γίνεσθαι πρήγματος.

22. 3.52.5: φθονέεσθαι κρέσσον ἐστὶ ἢ οἰκτίρεσθαι…

23. 3.53.4: ἡ φιλοτιμίη κτῆμα σκαιόν.

24. 3.53.4: μὴ τῷ κακῷ τὸ κακὸν ἰῶ.

25. 3.53.4: πολλοὶ τῶν δικαίων τὰ ἐπιεικέστερα προτιθεῖσι.

26. 3.53.4: πολλοὶ δὲ ἤδη τὰ μητρώια διζήμενοι τὰ πατρώια ἀπέβαλον.

27S. 3.53.4: τυραννὶς χρῆμα σφαλερόν, πολλοὶ δὲ αὐτῆς ἐρασταί εἰσι.

28S. 3.53.4: μὴ δῷς τὰ σεωυτοῦ ἀγαθὰ ἄλλοισι.

29. 3.65.3: ἐν τῇ γὰρ ἀνθρωπηίῃ φύσι οὐκ ἐνῆν ἄρα τὸ μέλλον γίνεσθαι ἀποτρέπειν.

30. 3.72.2: πολλά ἐστι τὰ λόγῳ μὲν οὐκ οἵά τε δηλῶσαι, ἔργῳ δέ· ἄλλα δ᾽ ἐστὶ τὰ λόγῳ μὲν οἵά τε, ἔργον δὲ οὐδὲν ἀπ᾽ αὐτῶν λαμπρὸν γίνεται.

31S. 3.72.4: ἔνθα γάρ τι δεῖ ψεῦδος λέγεσθαι, λεγέσθω.

32. 3.80.3: φθόνος δὲ ἀρχῆθεν ἐμφύεται ἀνθρώπῳ.

33S. 3.80.6: ἐν γὰρ τῷ πολλῷ ἔνι τὰ πάντα.

34. 3.81.3: ἀρίστων δὲ ἀνδρῶν οἰκὸς ἄριστα βουλεύματα γίνεσθαι.

35S. 3.82.5: πατρίους νόμους μὴ λύειν ἔχοντας εὖ· οὐ γὰρ ἄμεινον.

36. 3.127.2: ἔνθα γὰρ σοφίης δεῖ, βίης ἔργον οὐδέν.

37. 3.134.2: ἵνα καὶ Πέρσαι ἐκμάθωσι ὅτι ὑπ᾽ ἀνδρὸς ἄρχονται.

38. 3.134.3: αὐξομένῳ γὰρ τῷ σώματι συναύξονται καὶ αἱ φρένες, γηράσκοντι δὲ συγγηράσκουσι καὶ ἐς τὰ πρήγματα πάντα ἀπαμβλύνονται.

39S. 3.134.6: ἅμα ἔπος τε καὶ ἔργον ἐποίεε.

Book 4

40S. 4.205: ἀνθρώποισι αἱ λίην ἰσχυραὶ τιμωρίαι πρὸς θεῶν ἐπίφθονοι γίνονται.

Book 5

41. 5.24.3: κτημάτων πάντων ἐστὶ τιμιώτατον ἀνὴρ φίλος συνετός τε καὶ εὔνοος.

Book 6

42. 6.1.2: τοῦτο τὸ ὑπόδημα ἔρραψας μὲν σύ, ὑπεδήσατο δὲ Ἀριστα γόρης.

43. 6.11.2: ἐπὶ ξυροῦ γὰρ ἀκμῆς ἔχεται ἡμῖν τὰ πρήγματα.

Book 7

44. 7.9γ: ἔστω δ' ὧν μηδὲν ἀπείρητον· αὐτόματον γὰρ οὐδέν, ἀλλ' ἀπὸ πείρης πάντα ἀνθρώποισι φιλέει γίνεσθαι.

45. 7.10δ2: τὸ γὰρ εὖ βουλεύεσθαι κέρδος μέγιστον εὑρίσκω ἐόν.

46. 7.10ε: φιλέει γὰρ ὁ θεὸς τὰ ὑπερέχοντα πάντα κολούειν.

47. 7.10ε: οὐ γὰρ ἐᾷ φρονέειν μέγα ὁ θεὸς ἄλλον ἢ ἑωυτόν.

48S. 7.10ζ: ἐπειχθῆναι μέν νυν πᾶν πρῆγμα τίκτει σφάλματα, ἐκ τῶν ζημίαι μεγάλαι φιλέουσι γίνεσθαι· ἐν δὲ τῷ ἐπισχεῖν ἔνεστι ἀγαθά.

49. 7.10η2: διαβολὴ γάρ ἐστι δεινότατον.

50. 7.11.3: ποιέειν ἢ παθεῖν πρόκειται ἀγών.

51. 7.16α: ἴσον ἐκεῖνο…φρονέειν τε εὖ καὶ τῷ λέγοντι χρηστὰ ἐθέλειν πείθεσθαι.

52S. 7.16α2: ὡς κακὸν εἴη διδάσκειν τὴν ψυχὴν πλέον τι δίζησθαι αἰεὶ ἔχειν τοῦ παρεόντος….

53S. 7.18.2: πολλά τε καὶ μεγάλα πεσόντα πρήγματα ὑπὸ ἠσσόνων.

54. 7.18.2: ἐπιστάμενος ὡς κακὸν εἴη τὸ πολλῶν ἐπιθυμέειν.

55. 7.39.1: ἐν τοῖσι ὡσὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων οἰκέει ὁ θυμός.

56. 7.46.2: ὡς βραχὺς εἴη ὁ πᾶς ἀνθρώπινος βίος.

57. 7.46.4: οὕτως ὁ μὲν θάνατος μοχθηρῆς ἐούσης τῆς ζόης καταφυγὴ αἱρετωτάτη τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ γέγονε, ὁ δὲ θεὸς γλυκὺν γεύσας τὸν αἰῶνα φθονερὸς ἐν αὐτῷ εὑρίσκεται ἐών.

58S. 7.47.1: μηδὲ κακῶν μεμνώμεθα χρηστὰ ἔχοντες πρήγματα ἐν χερσί.

59. 7.49.3: αἱ συμφοραὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἄρχουσι καὶ οὐκὶ ὥνθρωποι τῶν συμφορέων.

60. 7.49.4: εὐπρηξίης δὲ οὐκ ἔστι ἀνθρώποισι οὐδεμία πληθώρη.

61. 7.49.5: ἀνὴρ δὲ οὕτω ἂν εἴη ἄριστος, εἰ βουλευόμενος μὲν ἀρρωδέοι, πᾶν ἐπιλεγόμενος πείσεσθαι χρῆμα, ἐν δὲ τῷ ἔργῳ θρασὺς εἴη.

62. 7.50.1: κρέσσον δὲ πάντα θαρσέοντα ἥμισυ τῶν δεινῶν πάσχειν μᾶλλον ἢ πᾶν χρῆμα προδειμαίνοντα μηδαμὰ μηδὲν παθεῖν.

63. 7.50.2: εἰδέναι δὲ ἄνθρωπον ἐόντα κῶς χρὴ τὸ βέβαιον;

64. 7.50.2: τοῖσι τοίνυν βουλομένοισι ποιέειν ὡς τὸ ἐπίπαν φιλέει γίνεσθαι τὰ κέρδεα, τοῖσι δὲ ἐπιλεγομένοισί τε πάντα καὶ ὀκνέουσι οὐ μάλα ἐθέλει.

65. 7.50.3: μεγάλα γὰρ πρήγματα μεγάλοισι κινδύνοισι ἐθέλει καταιρέεσθαι.

66. 7.51.1: ἀναγκαίως γὰρ ἔχει περὶ πολλῶν πρηγμάτων πλεῦνα λόγον ἐκτεῖναι.

67. 7.51.3: ἐς θυμὸν ὦν βαλεῦ καὶ τὸ παλαιὸν ἔπος ὡς εὖ εἴρηται, τὸ μὴ ἅμα ἀρχῇ πᾶν τέλος καταφάινεσθαι.

68. 7.104.2: οὐκ ὦν οἰκός ἐστι ἄνδρα τὸν σώφρονα εὐνοίην φαινομένην διωθέεσθαι, ἀλλὰ στέργειν μάλιστα.

69. 7.157.3: τῷ δὲ εὖ βουλευθέντι πρήγματι τελευτὴ ὡς τὸ ἐπίπαν χρηστὴ ἐθέλει ἐπιγίνεσθαι.

70. 7.160.1: ὀνείδεα κατιόντα ἀνθρώπῳ φιλέει ἐπανάγειν τὸν θυμόν.

71. 7.162.1: ὑμεῖς οἴκατε τοὺς μὲν ἄρχοντας ἔχειν, τοὺς δὲ ἀρξομένους οὐκ ἔξειν.

72. 7.162.1: ἐκ τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ τὸ ἔαρ…ἐξαραίρηται.

73. 7.173.4: ἀρρωδίη ἦν τὸ πεῖθον.

Book 8

74. 8.59.1: ἐν τοῖσι ἀγῶσι οἱ προεξανιστάμενοι ῥαπίζονται.

75. 8.59.1: οἱ δέ γε ἐγκαταλειπόμενοι οὐ στεφανοῦνται.

76. 8.60γ: οἰκότα μέν νυν βουλευομένοισι ἀνθρώποισι ὡς τὸ ἐπίπαν ἐθέλει γίνεσθαι· μὴ δὲ οἰκότα βουλευομένοισι οὐκ ἐθέλει οὐδὲ ὁ θεὸς προσχωρέειν πρὸς τὰς ἀνθρωπηίας γνώμας.

77. 8.68γ: τοῖσι μὲν χρηστοῖσι τῶν ἀνθρώπων κακοὶ δοῦλοι φιλέουσι γίνεσθαι, τοῖσι δὲ κακοῖσι χρηστοί.

78. 8.142.5: βαρβάροισί ἐστι οὔτε πιστὸν οὔτε ἀληθὲς οὐδέν.

Book 9

79. 9.16.4: ὅ τι δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀμήχανον ἀποτρέψαι ἀνθρώπῳ.

80. 9.16.4: οὐδὲ γὰρ πιστὰ λέγουσι ἐθέλει πείθεσθαι οὐδείς.

81S. 9.16.5: ἐχθίστη δὲ ὀδύνη [ἐστὶ] τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποισι αὕτη, πολλὰ φρονέοντα μηδενὸς κρατέειν.

82. 9.17.4: κρέσσον γὰρ ποιεῦντάς τι καὶ ἀμυνομένους τελευτῆσαι τὸν ἀιῶνα ἤ περ παρέχοντας διαφθαρῆναι αἰσχίστῳ μόρῳ.

83S. 9.27.4 : καὶ γὰρ ἂν χρηστοὶ τότε ἐόντες ὡυτοὶ νῦν ἂν εἶεν φλαυρότεροι καὶ τότε ἐόντες φλαῦροι νῦν ἂν εἶεν ἀμείνονες.

84. 9.54.1: …ἄλλα φρονεόντων καὶ ἄλλα λεγόντων.

85. 9.122.3: φιλέειν γὰρ ἐκ τῶν μαλακῶν χώρων μαλακοὺς ἄνδρας γίνεσθαι.

86S. 9.122.3: οὐ γάρ τι τῆς αὐτῆς γῆς εἶναι καρπόν τε θωμαστὸν φύειν καὶ ἄνδρας ἀγαθοὺς τὰ πολέμια.

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