

The Problem of Amphiaraos in Herodotus' *Histories*
David C. Carlisle (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill)

In this paper, I examine Herodotus' account of Croesus' consultation of the oracle of Amphiaraos (the "other" true oracle in Greece). I point out several problems surrounding this account which have led to confusion in the historical and archaeological understanding of his shrine, and propose a tentative solution for those problems.

I begin by outlining the problem, which occurs in a story which should be familiar: Croesus tests the Greek oracles, finds the Pythia to be reliable, sends lavish gifts and asks for an oracle about his planned war on the Lydians. He is told that, if he makes war on them, a great empire will fall; when, to his surprise, he loses the war, he censures the oracle and receives a stern rebuke pointing out that he did not clarify which empire was meant. Inserted into this familiar story, however, are a few details about a relatively obscure shrine which had the signal honor of being the only other oracle to pass Croesus' test: Amphiaraos, we are told, not only gave a correct response to Croesus' first question, but when consulted again, accorded with the Pythian response a second time. This inclusion of Amphiaraos as "the other accurate oracle" is extremely problematic. The archaeology and history of the Amphiaraean shrine are murky, owing in part to these passages in Herodotus (see for example Schachter, *Cults of Boiotia*, London: Institute of Classical Studies, 1981; page 22); the account itself also presents problems of inconsistency and illogic: why, for example, did Croesus send such (comparatively) paltry offerings to Amphiaraos? What connects these offerings to that shrine, given that in Herodotus' day they reside in the shrine of Ismenean Apollo (which is an altogether different oracle)? How, exactly, did Croesus manage to test Amphiaraos in the same manner as the other oracles he consulted, when the test question was "what is Croesus doing this instant," and Amphiaraos' oracles are sent in dreams? And how did the dream responses correspond with the sort of purely *verbal* (not visual) ambiguity which led Croesus to think he would win? Finally, if both oracles corresponded in their reports, why didn't Croesus rebuke Amphiaraos too when the war didn't turn out as he expected?

I then offer a possible explanation for the Herodotean account. Herodotus, I argue, had every reason to believe that Amphiaraos was an accurate oracle, and to present it as such in his *Histories*, because this accords with a demonstrable general pattern in the work, in which dreams, however false or misleading they may seem, are always truthful, and show the divine manipulation of events. This pattern becomes especially important when Herodotus wants to show the divine manipulation behind Xerxes' attack on Greece, manipulation which comes from not one, but three dreams. Amphiaraos, then, as a dream oracle must, by Herodotus' reasoning, have been accurate, even though he has no idea what the dream Croesus' delegate saw might have been. If we accept this as Herodotus' underlying assumption in dealing with the shrine of Amphiaraos, we can see why he would have accepted a report that their shrine gave an accurate response to Croesus (would any shrine report otherwise?), even though the Pythia was the only shrine for which he had hard evidence (the offerings in Ismenean Apollo could just as easily have been given to the shrine where he found them). This theory is admittedly speculative, but if adopted, does allow us, as I demonstrate, to clear up some of the confusion resulting from Herodotus' discussion of Amphiaraos, while at the same time to justify his assumptions about the shrine by observing the coherence of his theological logic.