

Eastern Leaders and Greek Oracles: a Narrative Pattern in Herodotus

Two oracular *logoi* appear in the first and penultimate books of Herodotus' *History*: Croesus' testing of the oracles (1.46-56.1) and Mardonius' sending of Mys to various oracles (8.133-136). This paper explores the similarities and differences, both verbal and thematic, between the two stories and posits that Herodotus introduces in the Croesus *logos* a narrative pattern of Eastern leaders wanting to make war and consulting Greek oracles for advice, a pattern which he employs again later in his *History*. Finally, the paper will address the question of whether Herodotus' use of patterning in these two stories affirms or calls into question his truthfulness as a historian.

The concept of repeated narrative patterns in Herodotus is well-known. H. R. Immerwahr (1966) and D. Lateiner (1989) have treated the topic generally; others have pointed out specific motifs such as "the wise advisor" or "the duel and the sole survivor" (Dillery 1996). The question that naturally arises from any discussion of patterning in a work that claims to be completely non-fictional is whether Herodotus is deliberately inventing or altering some of his material to fit the pattern. Although D. Fehling (1989) argues that Herodotus does not always attempt to tell the truth in his *History*, other scholars have maintained that Herodotus does not intentionally write fiction or lie to his readers but instead, recording only what he has heard, he intentionally organizes his material or unconsciously employs patterns. This paper will show that, in the case of Croesus' and Mardonius/Mys' oracle-stories, Herodotus is consciously using patterning specifically because he *cannot* invent facts and *will not* write fictions; thus the pattern actually reinforces the image of Herodotus as a truthful historian.

The two stories include common narrative elements as well as verbal similarities. In both an Eastern leader (in one story a king, in the other a general) wants to go to war, sends to various oracles for advice, and as a result makes an alliance with a Greek state before going to war and ultimately being defeated. The biggest difference between the stories is that Herodotus reports much less about what happens when Mardonius sends Mys; in fact, he says that he does not even know what Mys asked the oracles (8.133), and he only speculates about what their response was (8.136). One possible explanation for this is the fact that Herodotus knows more about the goings-on at the Delphic oracle than he does at other shrines. Looking at other instances of oracles in the *History*, one notes that Herodotus never gives a direct quotation of any oracular shrine except Delphi. Therefore Herodotus does not have the raw information with which he could flesh out the story of Mys and the oracles, because Mys did not go to Delphi. By emphasizing the common narrative elements with verbal echoes (e.g., 1.147.1; 8.133), Herodotus can draw the connection between the stories without inventing details.

The purpose of examining the connection between the two *logoi* is, first, to show Herodotus' historiographic method: both how he accomplishes ring composition by placing these two stories prominently in his *History* and also how he uses a pattern set up in an earlier story to help him tell a later story for which he has less information. Secondly, these *logoi* show that Herodotus can consciously write his historical narrative in repeating patterns and *not* consciously invent material or lie. The similarities between the *logoi* are strong enough to argue that Herodotus intentionally patterned them, and a lying historian, by creatively filling in the gaps in the Mys *logos*, could have made the pattern even clearer and the ring composition even neater. But he did not, and, in not doing so, Herodotus shows himself to be a truthful historian, accurately reporting only what he has seen and heard but still artistically framing his narrative and representing the reality that history often repeats itself.

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