Sources in Conversation: Herodotus' Proem and the *Odyssey*

Herodotus' extended proem (1.0-5.3) has provided food for thought to readers and scholars for understanding and analyzing his goals and methods in the *Histories*. It was standard to interpret the proem as a type of *recusatio,* in which Herodotus exposes a faulty method of causation and replaces it with his new historical and aetiological method (see Węcowski 2004). While this position seems to invite rejection of the alternative narratives offered, analysis of these alternative narratives yields rich insights into Herodotus' perspective on history and historical sources. Rood (2010) and Vasunia (2012) see in Herodotus' reimagination of epic geography an analysis of proto-international relations or an exploration of the tensions between polarity and pluralism respectively. Others focus particularly on Herodotus' engagement with Homer and draw out how Herodotus repurposes themes of violence and lust for his historical project (Saïd 2012 and Sansone 2016). In this paper, I will examine an underexplored allusion to the *Odyssey* in the proem to suggest that Herodotus is encouraging his readers to think carefully about source positionality and, in particular, the consideration of how sources may interact with each other in order to highlight further Herodotus' 'discovery' of the "*problem* of sources" (Fowler 1996).

In Book 1, sections 1.1-2.1, Herodotus' offers a version of Io's story from learned Persians. They claim that the Phoenician merchants came to Argos and, after five to six days of trading, decided to abduct Io and the women who were with her and sail off to Egypt. This, according to these Persians, was the first wrong in the conflict between Greek and non-Greek. They continue their narrative of abductions up to Helen; they claim Greek overreaction in this instance to the norm of women being abducted led to the Trojan War and the enmity between

Asia and Europe. After this, Herodotus provides a brief counter-narrative from the Phoenicians, who claim that Io slept with the Phoenician captain, became pregnant, and, driven by shame, sailed away with them willingly (1.5.2) The Phoenician version recalls Eumaeus' story in *Odyssey* book 15, and, more intriguingly, the Persian account uses a *hapax* in Herodotus describing the Phoenicians' trading (ἐξεμπολημένων 1.1.3) that is a compound form of a *hapax* found in Eurmaeus' description of their trading (ἐμπολόωντο 15.456). Herodotus gives two signals to consider Eumaeus' story in relation to this part of the proem.

Eumaeus' story of his abduction at the hands of his Phoenician nurse and enslavement by Phoenician sailors comes after Odysseus tells Eumaeus a story about his own abduction and enslavement by Phoenicians and Thesprotians (14.119-359). Odysseus tells this story in full knowledge of Eumaeus' own actual enslavement at the hands of the Phoenicians. Eumaeus' story reveals the history that Odysseus relies upon for the efficacy of his lying tale. Eumaeus was cared for by a Phoenician nurse in his childhood home. Some Phoenicians came to trade. After seducing the Phoenician nurse, the sailor offers to take her home, and she agrees on condition of the Phoenicians' good behavior and promises to steal goods and Eumaeus from the house on her way out. She dies seven days after her escape, and Eumaeus is taken to Ithaca and sold to Laertes. While Odysseus' story focuses on the greed and essential randomness of his potential enslavement, Eumaeus' story, like the Phoenicians' version in Herodotus' proem, offers a more human element to his story and resists the easy vilification we find in Odysseus' and the Persians' accounts.

Eumaeus' story gains in poignancy when considered side-by-side with Odysseus' and highlights the randomness and focus on greed in Odysseus' account. I argue that Herodotus' inclusion of the Phoenician counter-narrative, which inserts a more human element into Io's

abduction, showcases more clearly the problematic elements and hyper-focus of the Persian narrative of abductions. I will show how a deep dive into this allusion shows that Herodotus reveals his understanding of how sources may be motivated by their own goals and experiences, and also that these sources' positionality may either shift or become more illuminated when one explores not just how the sources work on their own, but how they work relative to one another.

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