

More Greek than a Greek: Herodotos' Silence on the Lydian Pantheon

In the *Histories*, Herodotos often includes lists of the gods present in several foreign pantheons in his ethnographic passages. What is noticeable about these pantheons is that they appear incomplete, as they never possess a full set of analogous deities for every Olympian god. But does Herodotos have a methodology for understanding why each culture worships only a certain selection of gods? In this paper, I will be testing a hypothesis that there exists a correlation between the *nomoi*, customs, that Herodotos attributes to any given culture and the makeup of the corresponding culture's pantheon. By examining the customs Herodotos highlights in his text, we can find clues for why these foreign pantheons are composed in the way Herodotos has describes them as. This type of analysis will not only shed light on these non-Greek pantheons, but also on Herodotos' role as an ethnographer in his text.

First, I will be using Herodotos' depiction of the Lydians as my case study to demonstrate how a culture's *nomoi* influence his interpretation of foreign pantheons. What is unique about the Lydians in the *Histories* is that, unlike many other nations, like the Egyptians, Skythians, and Persians, Herodotos omits a catalogue of the Lydian pantheon. Some scholars, like Mikalson, have argued that this suppression of the Lydian religion is a technique by Herodotos to force his audience to self-reflect on their own identity, especially when they see Kroisos acting "more Greek than a Greek" in his text (2003:161-4). However, I will suggest an alternative (but not mutually exclusive) interpretation of Herodotos's near silence on the Lydian pantheon. Namely, the beginning of the *logoi* about the Lydian *nomoi* provides an explanation: the Lydians and Greeks practice near identical customs (Hdt. 1.94.1). Furthermore, Herodotos remains consistent elsewhere in his *Histories* in presenting the Lydians as resembling the Greeks, including their

purification rituals and military weaponry (1.35.2, 7.74.1). If the Lydian religious practices were so similar to the Greeks, why would Herodotos need to explain their pantheon to his audience in Greek terms?

Next, I will contend with the single exception to the absence of the Lydian gods from the *Histories*: Kybebe. Assuming the goddesses in these passages all represent the same deity, Kybebe appears in the *Histories* three times (1.80, 4.76.1, and 5.102). This final appearance presents the greatest contradiction to Herodotos' earlier statement about the similarities between Lydian and Greek customs. In 5.102, we learn that the Temple of Kybebe becomes a casualty during the Ionian revolt, which provides a pretext for Dareios to seek retribution against the Athenians. In this passage, Herodotos marks a distinction between Kybebe's temple and those the Persians would later destroy in Greece by labeling Kybebe as a local deity (ἐπιχωρίης). The implication here is that, much like the kidnappings of women in 1.1-5, the non-Greek nature of Kybebe allowed for the justification for the reciprocal destruction of Greek temples. Therefore, should we just accept this non-Greek quality of Kybebe as an exception, much like the Lydian practice of filial prostitution?

I will end this paper by examining Kybebe's appearance in 4.76.1 as the Mother of the Gods to resolve this potential contradiction. In this chapter, we see Anakharsis adopting the rituals of the Mother of the Gods. When the Skythians discover Anakharsis' adoption of non-Skythian practices, their king, Saulios immediately murders him due to Anakharsis' openness to foreign *nomoi*. In the context of 4.76.1, the Mother of the Gods represents the Hellenicity that the Skythians ultimately reject. Therefore, when taken with 5.102, we can see how Kybebe can straddle the line between Greekness and otherness; according to the passage's context, she embodies one or the other. As the Lydians are the closest to the Greeks in respect to their *nomoi*,

it is no surprise Herodotos neglects their pantheon except for when Kybebe highlights the dichotomy between Greek and non-Greek identity.

Bibliography

Gould, John. 2013. "Herodotus and Religion." In *Herodotus: Volume 2*, edited by Rosaria Vignolo Munson, 183-97. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harrison, Thomas. 2000. *Divinity and History: the Religion of Herodotus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hartog, François. 1988. *The Mirror of Herodotus: the Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*. Translated by Janet Lloyd. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Mikalson, Jon D. 2003. *Herodotus and Religion in the Persian Wars*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Roller, Lynn E. 1999. *In Search of God the Mother: The Cult of Anatolian Cybele*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Scullion, Scott. 2006. "Herodotus and Greek religion." In *The Cambridge Companion to Herodotus*, edited by Carolyn and John Marincola Dewald, 192-208. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.