

The divine is integral to Herodotus' *Histories*, shaping and influencing crucial moments within the narrative. However, though the divine is undoubtedly present in his *Histories*, it is largely through mediums, such as dreams and oracles, rather than anthropomorphized and tangible gods. Herodotus here breaks with Homeric precedent to engage with new and distinct ways of thinking about the gods and the divine, distancing the realm of the gods from that of the humans, and, consequently, his narrative. Herodotus' divinity influences, but necessarily remains distinctly separate from, the realm of humans, in order for Herodotus to conduct first and foremost a history of 'τὰ γενόμενα ἀνθρώπων'.

Herodotus' prologue and writing on the Trojan War set the scene for the importance and role of the divine throughout Book One. From the very first page of Herodotus' *Histories*, there is a notable absence of divinity. Herodotus breaks with the Homeric tradition of invoking the muse/the divine at the beginning of a work, and instead declares that he will explore the deeds of *men*: 'τὰ γενόμενα ἐξ ἀνθρώπων'¹ [1.1.2]. The first word of the *Histories* is Herodotus' own name, and it is in the genitive case – Ἡροδότου – emphasizing Herodotus' connection to the creation of the works, as well as the involved role he plays in shaping the narrative. In this way, Herodotus places himself into this role of the muse. As Smolin explains, "It cannot be emphasized enough, however, that Herodotus claims no such divine inspiration for himself. Rather than a presentation of what the Muses have shown him, his *Histories* are a ἱστορίας ἀπόδεξις [1.1.1], a 'presentation of inquiry'"² This absence of divinity is further emphasized in the paragraphs that follow, in which Herodotus discusses the causes of the Trojan War.

Herodotus writes, "Δευτέρη δὲ λέγουσι γενεῇ μετὰ ταῦτα Ἀλέξανδρον τὸν Πριάμου, ἀκηκοῦτα ταῦτα, ἐθελῆσαι οἱ ἐκ τῆς Ἑλλάδος δι' ἀρπαγῆς γενέσθαι γυναῖκα [...] οὕτω δὴ ἀρπάζαντος

¹ Herodotus. 2011. 'Herodotus Book I'. Edited by Sleeman, J.H.. 1.1.2. All further references from this edition.

² Smolin, Nathan Israel. 'Divine Vengeance in Herodotus' *Histories*' in *Journal of Ancient History* 6, no. 1 (2018): 2-43. 32

αὐτοῦ ‘Ἑλένην’ [1.3.1–5]”. Herodotus’ recount strikingly lacks any reference to the divine strife that is traditionally considered to be the impetus for the war. In emphasizing his focus on the deeds of men over the divine from the very beginning of his work, Herodotus establishes that the role the gods and the divine will have within his work will be subsidiary, in order to focally explore ‘τὰ γενόμενα ἀνθρώπων’.

Rather than anthropomorphized gods engaging with humans in a direct manner, Herodotus fills his *Histories* with divinity in the forms of oracles, omens, prophecies, and prophetic dreams which play an integral role in shaping Herodotus’ narrative. These mediums serve as a point of connection between the gods and humans, and function as ways the gods “‘show[]’ or ‘indicat[e]’ coming events, a recommended course of action, or other lessons to men”.³ In an effort to keep the gods removed from his historical narrative, Herodotus leans on prophetic messages and those who interpret them to provide structure for the narrative. Dreams, for example, feature heavily in the narratives of Croesus and Cyrus. After Croesus dismisses Solon for not declaring him ‘ἀνθρώπων ὀλβιώτατος’ [1.30.15], Herodotus writes that, “ἔλαβε ἐκ θεοῦ νέμεσις Κροῖσον [...] αὐτίκα δέ οἱ εὐδοντι ἐπέστη ὄνειρος, ὅς οἱ τὴν ἀληθείην ἔφαινε τῶν μελλόντων γενέσθαι κακῶν κατὰ τὸν παῖδα ” [1.34.1–6]. Herodotus engages with the Homeric personification of dreams,⁴ while still maintaining a distance from the gods, using the vague ‘ἐκ θεοῦ’⁵ rather than any named divinity. Herodotus does this consistently throughout his *Histories*, engaging “with the gods in generalized terms of divinity, speaking “only of the ‘the divinity’ and ‘the divine’ [...] apart from the exceptions noted above, every ‘statement of belief’ in Herodotus has to do with ‘the divine’ or ‘the god(s)’ (or the validity of oracles) rather than with named

³ Harrison, Thomas. 2002. ‘Divinity and History: The Religion of Herodotus’. (Oxford: Oxford University Press). 123

⁴ Herodotus, ‘Herodotus Book I’. 175

⁵ Scullion, Scott. 2006. ‘Herodotus and Greek Religion.’ Chapter. In *The Cambridge Companion to Herodotus*, edited by Carolyn Dewald and John Marincola, 192–208. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). 196

Greek divinities”.⁶ Though Herodotus maintains the separation of the gods from personal engagement with the narrative, there is no doubt that the dream is divine. Croesus receives the ἐκ θεοῦ νέμεσις: anger of the gods, and νέμεσις is a very specific type of anger – “just or deserved indignation, anger at anything unjust, righteous resentment, especially of the gods”.⁷ Not only that, but he αὐτίκα feels the consequences of this divine anger, being sent a dream in which he foresees the calamities to happen to his son. Croesus’ dream and the νέμεσις that follows establish the manner of divine involvement in the narrative of Book One, specifically the ways in which the divine, though essentially removed from the narrative, provides impetus to the narrative, influencing and shaping its course.

Cyrus’ life is also influenced by divine involvement: his birth and death are both foretold through prophetic and divinely inspired dreams, and his continued survival explicitly interpreted as divine: ὦ παῖ Καμβύσεω, σὲ γὰρ θεοὶ ἐπορῶσι, οὐ γὰρ ἄν κοτε ἐς τοσοῦτο τύχης ἀπίκευ [...] τὸ δὲ κατὰ θεοῦς τε καὶ ἐμὲ περίεις’ [1.124.5–9]. The circumstances surrounding his birth are attributed to ‘κως κατὰ δαίμονα’ [1.111.4], “a kind of providence”,⁸ and in the divine dream that foretells Cyrus’ death, Herodotus writes that, “Κῦρος μὲν δοκέων οἱ Δαρεῖον ἐπιβουλεύειν ἔλεγε τάδε • τῷ δὲ ὁ δαίμων προέφαινε ὡς αὐτὸς μὲν τελευτήσειν αὐτοῦ ταύτη μέλλοι, ἡ δὲ βασιληίη αὐτοῦ περιχωροί ἐς Δαρεῖον” [1.210.1–4]. Herodotus writing that ‘ὁ δαίμων προέφαινε’ explicitly affirms the divine nature of the dream yet maintains an intended vagueness in the same manner as θεός, as no god is explicitly named.⁹ Though Herodotus associates Cyrus’s birth and survival with the divine, he still maintains his focus on the rationalism that his ἱστορίας

⁶ Ibid. 202

⁷ Liddell, Henry George, and Scott, Robert. 1958. ‘Liddell & Scott Abridged Greek-English Lexicon’. (Oxford: Oxford University Press). 461

⁸ Herodotus. ‘Herodotus Book I’. 219

⁹ I’m interested in Herodotus’ use of δαίμων vs θεός, which might indicate fate and divine providence vs a more tangible god. Characters tend to refer to θεός/θεοί, while Herodotus uses δαίμων [1.209 + 210!], which might be Herodotus representing differences in theological beliefs in the era of those he was writing about vs his own.

demands – “Though a cyclical view of history at the agency of the gods was traditional since Hesiod, it is of the greatest significance that Herodotus is not prepared simply to assume, in the manner of a Muse-inspired poet, that the gods play this role. Nothing would have been easier, but this was not doing history”¹⁰. He does this, for example, through his “rationalization of Cyrus’ birth”,¹¹ refuting the myth that Cyrus was brought up by a dog: “οὐνομα δὲ τῇ γυναικὶ ἦν τῇ συνοίκεε Κυνὸ κατὰ τὴν Ἑλλήνων γλῶσσαν, κατὰ δὲ τὴν Μηδικὴν Σπακῶ. τὴν γὰρ κύνα καλέουσι σπάκα Μηδοί [...] οἱ δὲ τοκέες παραλαβόντες τὸ οὐνομα τοῦτο, ἵνα θειστέρως δοκῆ τοῖσι Πέρσησι περιεῖναι σφι ὁ παῖς, κατέβαλον φάτιν ὡς ἐκκεῖμενον Κῦρον κύων ἐξέθρεψε. ἐνθεῦτεν μὲν ἡ φάτις¹² αὕτη κεχώρηκε” [1.110.5-8 – 1.122.13-16]. The divine frames Herodotus’ portrait of Cyrus, bookending his life with instances of divine involvement. The divine is essential in Herodotus’ crafting of Cyrus’ narrative, yet Herodotus indulges this divinity in Cyrus’ life only to a certain extent, ultimately prioritizing his rationalist view of history and aim to explore τὰ γενόμενα ἀνθρώπων over the divine.

Though Herodotus relies almost exclusively on divine interaction with the narrative through omens, oracles, prophecies, and dreams, there is an instance in Book One which diverges from this pattern, being an undeniable divine intervention into the realm of humans – the rescue of Croesus from the pyre. The whole scene is filled with references to the divine: in theorizing reasons for Cyrus’ putting Croesus on a pyre, Herodotus writes, “ἐν νόῳ ἔχων εἴτε δὴ ἀκροθίνα ταῦτα καταγαεῖν θεῶν ὅτεφ δὴ, εἴτε καὶ εὐχὴν ἐπιτελέσαι θέλων, εἴτε καὶ πυθόμενος τὸν Κροῖσον εἶναι θεσσεβέα τοῦδε εἵνεκεν ἀνεβίβασε ἐπὶ τὴν πυρὴν, βουλόμενος εἰδέναι εἴ τις μιν δαιμόνων ῥύσεται τοῦ μὴ ζῶντα κατακαυθῆναι” [1.86.9–14]. Each of these reasons has to do

¹⁰ Bremmer, Jan N., and Erskine, Andrew. 2010. ‘Gods in early Greek Historiography’, in *The Gods of Ancient Greece: Identities and Transformations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press). 323

¹¹ Herodotus. 2008. ‘The Histories’. Tr. Waterfield, Robin. Notes by Dewald, Carolyn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press). 607

¹² Perhaps implying the rumor was helped along by the divine, since ἡ φάτις has the double meaning of rumor and voice from heaven.

with the divine – a victory-offering, a vow fulfillment, and a test of his divine favor. The repetition of divine terms – θεῶν, θεσσεβέα, δαιμόνων – emphasizes the importance of the divine to this scene, as well as foreshadowing the divine nature of the intervention to come.

Furthermore, Sleemen writes that “the legend of the burning of Croesus as given by Herod[otus] is most improbable, as no Persian would have dared to pollute his sacred element by contact with a corpse”.¹³ Therefore, Herodotus here is actively diverging from mainstream historical recounts to favor a version inextricably linked with the divine. Croesus is saved in a miraculous and clearly divine manner, with ‘αἰθρίης τε καὶ νηνεμίας’ being ἐξαπίνης replaced by ‘καὶ χειμῶνά τε καταρραγῆναι καὶ ὕσαι ὕδατι λαβροτάτῳ’ [note the καὶ τε καὶ for emphasis], mirroring the νέμεσις that followed αὐτίκα after Croesus before, indicating a sure sign of divinity. Cyrus realizes that Croesus is ‘θεοφιλῆς’ – literally: loved by the gods – from this event. However, though Croesus’ rescue is clearly divine, there is still no physical presence of a god within this scene. Instead, this divine intervention is sent through a storm. A miraculous and divine storm, but one that is nevertheless an agent of interference, not a tangible interference by a god.

Additionally, this section diverges from vague naming of the gods, instead clearly referring to Apollo: “ἐπιβώσασθαι τὸν Ἀπόλλωνα ἐπικαλούμενον” [1.87.15] and later the Pythia explicitly refers to Apollo when explaining Croesus’ experiences: “προθυμομένου δὲ Λοξίῳ ὄκως ...” and “προγόρευε γὰρ οἱ Λοξίης...” [1.101.8, 17]. However, these statements again come through a medium, here the Pythia, and not through direct contact between Apollo and Croesus.

Ultimately, therefore, the distance between humans and gods is still maintained. This moment in Book One highlights the way that Herodotus grapples with his desire to highlight τὰ γενόμενα ἀνθρώπων over the divine, yet the fundamental essence of the divine that ultimately and inextricably runs as an undercurrent in the narrative.

¹³ Herodotus, ‘Herodotus Book I’. 207

Herodotus, throughout Book One of his *Histories*, engages with divinity in a manner that is essential to the narrative, with divine moments providing a narrative framework for the stories he wishes to tell, especially of those who shape the narrative most – Croesus and Cyrus. Herodotus, however, is reluctant to and resists leaning on the divine as narrative explanation. Instead, he presents stories with divine elements that can be rationalized: Cyrus being brought up by a woman with a name meaning dog and Croesus being saved by a sudden storm. Yet Herodotus only aims to rationalize divinity in this manner when he sees it as excessively engaging with humanity: “Where Herodotus does become profoundly sceptical is when the gods are supposed to have walked on to the stage of history, and spoken directly to humans or directly determined the course of events in the Biblical manner.”¹⁴ Herodotus’ divinity influences and shapes, but remains distinctly separate from the realm of humans – “divinity has a meta-narrative character, helping to tie together and explain the events and broad historical patterns present in the *Histories*”.¹⁵ The importance of the divine in Herodotus’ *Histories*, that of a ‘meta-narrative character’, is integral to the foundation of Herodotus’ narrative. However, this function of the gods and the divine heavily breaks tradition with Herodotus’ Homeric-influenced predecessors. In treating the divine as an arbitrator and influencer rather than anthropomorphized and tangible characters, Herodotus engages with ideas of divinity developing during the time he was writing in. The gods were becoming less anthropomorphized and instead headed in a ‘divine justice system’ of sorts under Zeus – “The moralization of the *phthonos* introduces us to a second characteristic feature of archaic religious thought – the tendency to transform the supernatural in general, and Zeus in particular, into an agent of justice”.¹⁶ As Scullion explains, “Herodotus’

¹⁴ Bremmer and Erskine. ‘Gods in early Greek Historiography’. 324

¹⁵ Smolin. ‘Divine Vengeance’. 29

¹⁶ Dodds, E.R.. 1973. ‘From Shame-Culture to Guilt-Culture’ in *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 28–63. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press). 31

divinity is real and active but remote, intelligible primarily as a set of principles governing the universe.”¹⁷ In his depiction of the gods as such – functioning as divine arbitrators within a meta-narrative rather than the main narrative – Herodotus gives himself space to explore the history of humans and their deeds – τὰ γινόμενα ἐξ ἀνθρώπων – and conduct a new and radical ιστορίας into humanity itself, without an overwhelming overshadowing of humans by the divine.

¹⁷ Scullion. ‘Herodotus and Greek Religion’. 203

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