
Historiographical Patterning: 'The Constitutional Debate'

But we must admit that if we had to give an *a priori* estimate of the chances of success in writing history by Herodotus' method, we should probably shake our heads in sheer despondency. Herodotus' success in touring the world and handling oral traditions is something exceptional by any standard – something that we are not yet in a position to explain fully. The secrets of his workshop are not yet all out.

Arnaldo Momigliano 'The place of Herodotus
in the history of historiography'

History, from the beginning, has been a peculiar mode of thought, a science or an art peculiarly distinguished for its mixture of methodologies. Unlike lyric poetry or technical writing that explains how to do something, it has no self-evident pleasure or utility.¹ The facts of human life are untidy and are tangled in a web of experience; particular events can only find meaning in context. Any historical account requires ruthless selection of data, and selection presupposes a conception, that is, an interpretation. Any coherent vision of the past requires a literary organization, a unity of parts, actions that display an internal logic. Aristotle's definition of a 'fiction' demands a minimum of conditions, causes, events, and consequences, a series of actions which lead to a result implicit in the original situation.² Herodotus' *Histories* provide this, and every ancient historian strove to meet the expectation.

Reported events, their literary presentation, and their meaning in an historiographical text are three areas of analysis that can only momentarily be separated by the critic. Ancient literary critics recognized Herodotus' literary ability to mimic passion, confusion, and emotion. For instance, *On the Sublime* praises Herodotus' naturalism: 'The best prose writers imitate nature ... They arrange words and ideas in an unnatural way to convey the

character of vehement emotion ...' (22.1-2, citing *Histories* 6.11). Dionysius of Halicarnassus praises the historian's ability to integrate disparate subjects and themes: 'Choosing topics both numerous and nothing similar to each other, he has made one harmonious whole' (*Epistula ad Pompeium* § 3, 774U-R = Roberts 112). These basically literary judgments ignore, we might say, the scientific search for truth by the historian and his desire to fashion a new kind of understanding for a culture that had previously found its lessons in unreal or unverifiable events. Herodotus accepts the limitations and contradictions inherent in studying the recent as well as the distant past, as he records and preserves (more often than he explains) strange and even unique events and their connections. His solution to the 'problem basic to all historiography, of how to make a bare account carry an interpretation' led him to an inclusiveness that 'radically expanded the range of subject matter deemed worthy of literary treatment.'³ In other words, the range of his reports finds a paradoxical explanation in his ceaseless search for the meaning of seemingly unrelated events. Striving for intelligibility, he suggests connections among phenomena that have perplexed later readers who have different categories of relevance.

Questions about the structure, argument, and meaning of the *Histories* have no single satisfactory answer, but selective studies can uncover explanatory systems latent in the text. Without a comprehensive abstract explanatory language, jettisoning his predecessors' mythology, often with no more than Homer's methods of comparison (Circe, Calypso, and Penelope) and contrast (the Phaeacians, the Cyclops, and the Ithacans), Herodotus suggests the meaning of one story by telling another or by presenting a speech. Explicit, authorial evaluation and analysis are subordinated to the presentation of additional stories with similar issues. Multiple examples and recurring descriptive terms generally explain as much as he thinks appropriate. One example of latent but demonstrable systematization will be examined here: Herodotus' implied comparisons of tyrants, of empires, and of dynamic factors in domestic and international politics.

The most explicit programmatic passages are the statement of purpose in the proem, the statement of subject at 1.5.3, and a few statements of method such as those on sources (6.14.1, 7.152.3). The mutability of political (as well as personal) fortunes is one of his constants. Failure and (especially) success for states are revealed to be relative and temporary; human ignorance is discovered to be a dynamic and constant principle of political history, not a curable mistake; the circumstances that promote political freedom appear to be culturally and historically limited, while the urge towards imperial expansion transcends particular forms of domestic organization with results dangerous to ruler and ruled. The instability of personal and national power

provides the motor of historical action, and the catalogues of possible permutations of events engendered by power and empire sketch out the map of possible outcomes. Herodotus, however, 'does not discuss his interests; he pursues them.' The resulting account provides not scientific laws but 'casebook studies' that delimit the choices of 'civilized' man in politics and war.⁴

The exceptional 'Constitutional Debate' affords a uniquely analytical exposition of the historian's political beliefs. This *logos* is the most theoretical in the entire text. Its suggestive generalizations about politics confer a privileged position in a political history. It accounts for a very large number of phenomena by reducing them to their essential terms. Elsewhere Herodotus declines to separate narrative of actions from analysis of past events and political systems. The many accounts of various types of autocracies and constitutional governments will be found to illustrate and support the theoretical statements espoused here. That is, the author's perception of actual régimes shaped the arguments imaginatively presented here about various systems of government. The views presented by the Persians, historical or not, are inductions supported in various ways, positive and negative, by his data. The calm and rational discussion seems free from both the ubiquitous depotism of *nomos* (3.38) and the subsequent folktale roguery describing Darius' accession to, and consolidation of, power. The conspirators' debate clarifies significant differences among forms of government; the logic and clarity of the debate has brought its historicity into question but that schematic aspect of the event supports the hypothesis that the debate has interpretive significance.

Structure and Patterns

Since H.R. Immerwahr, following the lead of Bischoff and Hellman, published *Form and Thought in Herodotus*, most scholars have accepted the idea that Herodotus marshals and focuses his disparate material by patterning, by repeating or echoing key words, themes, motifs, and even series of events. Few would now dispute that 'preceding kings ... are in a sense the preparation for the full development of the figure of this last Persian king discussed by Herodotus. Hence Xerxes exhibits traits common to all other royal portraits.' He possesses many 'generic features that are characteristic of royalty as a whole. Xerxes ... is for Herodotus the typical Persian ... the typical tyrant ... motivated by passion rather than by reason.' Croesus, Cyrus, Cambyses, Darius and Xerxes are 'typical manifestations of royal power as such,' examples 'of a pattern that represents the typical and recurrent aspects of events.'⁵ This structural approach to understanding a

pluriform narrative can encompass all the modes of unification previously discussed. Here we apply it to an incident whose importance Herodotus himself underlines, in order to demonstrate the pervasiveness of this technique of marking recursive elements in human behaviour despite the multiplicity of particular events recorded by the *Histories*.

K.H. Waters argues, in the most thorough denial of the imposition of patterning in Herodotus, that the careers of monarchs and tyrants are naturally repetitious; that the autocrats are not 'mere representatives of a type,' and that 'Herodotus had no political or moral axe to grind when dealing with tyranny.' Furthermore he believes that no theme or pattern guides the *Histories* or influences the selection or arrangement of facts, and that the discovery of patterns in history amounts to a historiographical crime. References, moreover, in Herodotus' text to *hybris*, φθόνος, the jealousy of the gods, and the κύκλος, the cyclical nature of human (and other) affairs, could easily be excised without loss, since we encounter just the facts, without reflection on the morality of Xerxes and his invasion. While Waters rightly asserts that 'we should not expect sermons from Herodotus,' for historians need not preach, his denial that Herodotus prefers a government of institutions to the tyranny of an individual flatly contradicts the impression of casual readers and many other studies.⁶ Waters never adequately defines his own or Herodotus' concept of historical 'objectivity.' Moral and political judgments and unifying themes do not in themselves preclude objectivity. Further, a history 'purified' of all moral judgment cannot be written. The desire to report facts while rigorously excluding interpretation and judgment is a relatively recent obsession, one which Waters himself had earlier criticized,⁷ and his study cures one evil by a worse.

Such an awkward and dogmatically aschematic approach is, in the end, impossible of disproof, for it must be granted that human beings and governments, if capable of categorization at all, do share many characteristics prior to, and regardless of, any literary treatment of them. Reviewers have disposed of Waters' central thesis⁸ while supporting efforts to save Herodotus from those who consider him too poetic or too theological to be usefully historical. Kitto said that fourth-century historians 'were inquiring into what would never happen again, Thucydides into what he rightly thought would.'⁹ Herodotus establishes some intermediate level of generality. His method and original purpose encourages him to describe the events themselves and not to reach *exempla* of a high generality in Thucydides' manner. Nevertheless, he certainly believed in constants in human nature, although not in human fortunes. Successive events appear in linear order, each one told for itself and as if nothing like it was known.

Yet in this setting forth of facts, Herodotus embeds patterns and even predictions that shape the data of human experience.¹⁰ Instead of 'causal' historiography in the modern mode, one encounters a 'symptomatic' variety, a method that connects more than it explains, analogizes more than it analyses. Patterns, numerous and of varied origins (from, eg, folktales, legends, epic, and popular philosophy), occur and recur in order to guide the reader through the maze of historical data and to lead him to an interpretation lurking in the text, the intellectual result of a vast and obscure sorting process on the author's part. The so-called Constitutional Debate (3.80–2) provides a neglected opportunity to inspect a master-pattern, an analysis of the effects of different régimes on political communities.¹¹

The substance of the positions espoused by the Persian debaters and the sources for the antilogies have been thoroughly canvassed without final agreement.¹² Protagoras the Sophist has been frequently proposed as the original analyst, and Herodotus' interest here in the role of *nomos* as norm and positive law has been reasonably attributed to Sophistic influences in general. A Persian basis for the tale has been defended.¹³

Were we to ask if Herodotus invented the scene in order to propagate his personal views, or fashioned a report of something that he had heard or read of in such a way as to give the story a more universal meaning and pertinence to this text, the answer would be obvious. Herodotus had no more need here than elsewhere to insist on the veracity of his report, yet here he uniquely emphasizes the historicity of an event. Of course, that he believed that the debate was historical does not mean that it happened the way he describes it or even at all. With what we know today about Near Eastern contributions to Greek myth, philosophy, and fiction, a general discussion of the merits of monarchy in the Ancient Near East was certainly possible.¹⁴ Here we explore the programmatic significance of the political arguments for the larger historical narrative.

The Hypotheses of the Participants

Otanes speaks first among the conspirators (3.80). He criticizes monarchy and praises popular government. His condemnation musters both historical and theoretical arguments. 'Monarch' and 'tyrant' are used by Otanes (80.2, 4) of a man who can do what he wishes without institutional control or recourse by his subjects (3, ἀνεύθυνος, only here, a word which suggests a contrast to democratic Athens). Such a situation is neither good nor pleasant (2), for it encourages self-indulgence, ὕβρις (four times in this speech alone), as it did in the frightful cases of Cambyzes and the Magus. The autocrat's position in and of itself leads him to frequent vexation, envy, and

presumption (3), for the possession of unlimited goods engenders *hybris* (3), and permanent superior status renders illicit temptations irresistible. Envy, φθόνος (3–4, four times in this speech alone), unavoidable for the autocrat, and *hybris* produce all the immorality, confusion, and harm that power is capable of (3). With wealth the tyrant ought to be superior to jealousy, but he never is. He envies good men their very existence (4); their lives reproach his habits. At the same time, he rejoices in the deeds of the basest citizens, especially when they slander the good (4). A most illogical and distressing bundle of contradictions results (5, ἀναρμοστότατον, only here): a being who demands undeserved adulation and who grows angry if he receives it. His acts are outrageous and impious, ἀτάσθαλα (4, like those of the *Odyssey's* suitors and Aegisthus). The worst of an autocrat's defects can be summarized under three heads: he disturbs ancestral laws, he assaults other men's women, and he executes men without trial.¹⁵

These objections are set in higher relief by the contrasted virtues of popular government, government ἐς μέσον, ἐς τὸ κοινόν (2, 6). When the people (τὸ πλῆθος) rules, that noblest principle of government, equality before the law and equality of political rights, ἰσονομίη, obtains. It is declared free of the great faults of monarchy because its three essential features – sortition, accountability for offices held, and popular control of legislative assemblies¹⁶ – effectively discourage concentrations of power and consequent intimidating violence and disturbance of established customs and institutions. Sortition implies frequent rotation and the right of all to hold office, the rendering of accounts at trial implies responsibility for all official acts, and popular sovereignty implies a regular supervision of men in office and the ultimate authority of the entire citizenry in assembly. Thus justice, equity, and responsible government are best promoted by a participatory political system, self-government under law.

Megabyzus' short speech for oligarchy endorses all Otanes' reasoning against autocracy (here, kingship), but condemns government by the people as uninformed, unable to judge what is good for itself, brainless, impetuous, and altogether useless.¹⁷ Without judgment or wisdom, the people's government is bound to be unruly and to display a *hybris* (three more times in this speech) not much different from the tyrant's. It is preferable to select the best men to govern, for the best counsels and government will result from their thinking (81.3).

The surprising brevity of this paragraph promoting oligarchy, the type of government most commonly favoured in Greek intellectual circles, results not from a dearth of arguments, but from the unimportance of oligarchies in Herodotus' narrative. Monarchies, tyrannies, the unique Spartan system, and the Athenian democracy have important roles, but one hears very little of the

important régimes which were structured as traditional oligarchies.¹⁸ Corinth provides the notable exception, but even there tyranny receives more attention in the narrative than oligarchy (eg, 5.92β1) as a *form of government*.

Otanes' comments are longer and more detailed than Megabyzus' which follow (24 lines compared to 14), but Darius' third and decisive speech equals it in length (25 lines). He agreed with Megabyzus' criticisms of democracy, just as the latter had agreed with Otanes' criticisms of autocracy (82.1). But he proceeds to discuss the theoretically best (τῷ λόγῳ ἀρίστων) forms of the three constitutions, maintaining that monarchy is best, because nothing could be better than the careful and wise administration and quiet security against enemies that the one best man can devise by himself in secret. He, unlike his two comrades, eschews the word 'tyrant.' In oligarchies, the best men are excessively competitive with each other. This leads to faction, assassination, and, eventually, one-man rule (82.3). In democracies, trouble arises from the conspiracies for private profit among the wicked rather than from the competition of the good, until a leader from the people comes forward to meet the crisis. He gains adulation sufficient to achieve that same disliked autocratic power (4). Therefore in theory *and* actual practice, monarchy is the best and *inevitable* form of government, the result of natural political processes. Monarchy once gained the Persians their freedom from external oppression, and Darius concludes, 'leave our ancestral laws (πάτριοι νόμοι) alone; they have served us well and change will not bring improvement' (5).

Darius' brittle argument is as notable for what it omits as for what it includes.¹⁹ He pointedly equates monarchy with ancestral customs (*nomoi*), while Otanes had claimed that the monarch violates ancestral customs (*nomia*). He generally avoids questions of domestic administration, the substance of Otanes' criticism of autocracy. He is more interested in external aggression, by which means the Persians had achieved 'freedom' and power. He criticizes the degenerate forms of other constitutions while maintaining a discreet silence on tyranny.²⁰ Freedom in his speech refers only to the nation's freedom to dominate aliens.²¹ The king is an efficient manager (ἐπιτροπέυει).

In the subsequent vote Darius triumphed. Otanes then withdrew from the contest in which the other six competed for kingship, 'whether he be chosen by lot, popular election, or by some other mechanism,' on condition that he and his descendants not be ruled by the kings so long as they not overstep Persian *nomoi*. *Nomos* would be his only shield against power, a weak one as he realized. Herodotus comments that in Persia only Otanes' house has been free from then until his own day, before he retells the fraud by which Darius was selected to rule (3.83-4).

Otanes and Darius present parallel but opposite arguments. The former deliberately focuses on the reality of autocracy and the ideal democracy; the latter on the ideal autocracy and the reality of democracy. Their arguments complement rather than refute each other. But the narrative of Herodotus records the internal strains and external errors of policy of autocratic governments much more often than of governments structured by institutions. Granted, more examples of the former régime existed, but the advantages that Athens reaped from her change of régime from tyranny to self-government receive special stress, and Sparta's institutionalization of νόμος is directly compared to Xerxes' one-man rule. Ἰσοκρατίη and ἰσονομίη underline a participatory egalitarianism that most sharply differentiates the governments that Herodotus admired from despotic alternatives (5.92.α1*; 3.83.1, 142.3*; 5.37.2). The same may be claimed for the terms ἰσηγορίη and δημοκρατίη, specifically applied to Athens (5.78; 6.131.1)

When we turn to accounts of autocratic states, more than fifty traditional kingdoms and tyrannies with usurped power find significant mention in Herodotus.²² The table below summarizes the historical record that supports the chief criticisms of tyrants and despots, as they are expounded at length in the speech of Otanes the Persian, and later in that of Socles the Corinthian. Modern historians have been able to say much that is positive about the Greek tyrants.²³ They advanced the general level of Greek civilization by their patronage of literature, the arts, and religion; they raised the standard of living by their encouragement of agriculture and trade, by schemes of colonization, by socially progressive measures, extension of overseas commercial contacts, and so on. Their military and naval policies indirectly aided Hellas' later repulse of the Persian invasions. Herodotus however does not stress these contributions, nor does he ever assemble them so as to present tyranny as an attractive or progressive form of government. Although the magnificence of Cleisthenes of Sicyon, the power of Gelon of Syracuse, and the courage of Artemisia of Halicarnassus are acknowledged, their political policies are ignored or disparaged and their wilfulness emphasized. In the crisis of war, Gelon was ready to join forces with the Persians and Artemisia betrayed her allies and compatriots (7.163.2, 8.87.2-3). Polycrates of Samos and Cypselus and Periander of Corinth are extensively portrayed in a sinister light with emphasis on banishments, confiscations, vicious mutilations, executions, and sexual outrage. When Herodotus speaks of Samos' three man-made wonders (3.60), two architects but no ruler or financier is mentioned. Polycrates was responsible,²⁴ but Herodotus would rather couple his name with fratricide (3.39.2), foreign aggression (39.3), piracy (ibid), deceitful execution (44.2), threatened

incineration of his citizens' women and children (45.4), and so on. Pisistratus also is presented as repeatedly dishonest and duplicitous; Herodotus' generous but brief praise of the Pisistratid government (1.59.6) is overshadowed by tales of deceit, murder, constriction, and oppression (1.59.1,3–5, 60.3, 64.1, 66.1, 78, 91.1; 6.103.3, 109.3*).²⁵ Periander's benefactions to Corinth are ignored in order to emblazon his suspicious and bloodthirsty nature. His selection as an international arbitrator is mentioned in passing, but not explained, nor is the contradiction admitted. Herodotus endorses the thesis of Otanes, in others' speeches or on his own authority, namely that tyranny is incompatible with good government or justice (δικαιοσύνη) (3.142.3*, 7.164.1).²⁶

The theoretical views of Otanes are reinforced by the historical lesson that the Corinthian Socles inflicts on the Spartans; ironically enough, since tyranny contradicts Spartan principles. A Corinthian knows full well that tyrannical régimes are blood-stained, unjust, and amount to a negation of freedom (5.92.α1*, η5*, ζ1*; cf 1.62.1). The tyrannies of book 5 continually subvert *nomos* and peace, and are inherently unstable, σφαλερόν (3.53.4*).²⁷ Even the often criticized Ionians endeavour to escape despotism, when given a chance (1.164.2; 5.49.2*; 9.90.2).

Herodotus does not categorically condemn one-man rule.²⁸ The Egyptians, he condescendingly comments, could not get along without it (2.147.1), and perhaps none but the Greeks could. Croesus, Cyrus, Pisistratus, and Darius receive credit for their achievements (eg, 1.29.1; 1.191; 3.88–9), but autocracy at best depends on the character of a talented individual, as the sons of Cyrus, Pisistratus, and Darius demonstrated.

Cambyzes' reign was short but memorable. Herodotus' portrait of him is grotesque.²⁹ The account concentrates on his sadistic, sacrilegious behaviour and his military failures. Herodotus minimizes the great importance of the conquest of Egypt and the extension of Persian influence in Africa to the south and west (Xerxes' reconquest of Egypt similarly receives a bare sentence [7.7]). Cambyzes' mustering of the amphibious invasionary force, and his engineering triumphs are treated primarily as symptoms of megalomania. His administrative and architectural achievements are ignored.³⁰

Even when the offences of an autocrat in power are barely mentioned, as in the cautionary tale of the rise of Deioces to a tyrant's state, the aspects of deception,³¹ ambition for power, and oppression are highlighted. Among the free and hitherto autonomous Medes, Deioces came to power because of his strict dispensation of justice, but once his power was secured, hierarchical ceremonies, centralization of authority, and bizarre uses of compulsion revealed his tyrannous intent and consolidated his autocratic government and exalted position (1.98.3–99.2).³² For Herodotus, oriental kingship was

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTOCRATS AND THEIR ILLUSTRATION IN THE *HISTORIES* OF HERODOTUS
(# = *contra*)

I	Cyrus	Cambyses	Darius	Xerxes	Persians in General
A THE PERSONALITY OF THE AUTOCRAT					
1 He is ruled by arrogant pride: <i>hybris & megalophrosyne</i> (3.80.2-3)		3.29.1-2, 37.1-3, 38.1, 80.2*		7.16α2*, 7.8γ1*, 24, 136.2; 8.77.1 [or.]	3.80.2*, 127.3*
2 He equates his will or fancy with the law (80.3) His acts are impulsive, unpredictable	2.1.1.	3.1.5, 14.1, 36.1 & 6 3.14.11, 25.1, 64.2, 65.3*	3.119.7, 134.6 3.130.4, 133.2; 6.119.1	7.41.1, 43.1, 128.2; 9.109.2 7.27.1 & 38.1, 45; 8.118.4; 9.109.2-3	1.132.3
3 He exhibits rapacious greed and unchecked aggression (80.4)	1.177, 201; 7.8α1*	3.21.3*, 25.1, 26.1; 7.8α1*	3.134.1-3; 4.1.1, 167.2-3; 5.31.2*; 6.44.1, 94.1; 7.8α1*	7.5.2-3, 16α2, 8α1-2*, 8γ1-3*, 50.3-4*, 54.2;	3.117.6; 7.16α2*#
4 He fears for his own life and shows jealousy of others' (80.4-5) His delicate honour always seems threatened (need for revenge)			3.119.1-2 4.1.1, 118.1; 6.94.1	8.97.1, 100.1 7.5.2*, 8α2*, β2*, 11.2; 9.116.3	

I	Cyrus	Cambyzes	Darius	Xerxes	Persians in General
B THE UNJUST AND VIOLENT ACTS OF THE AUTOCRAT					
1 He commits atrocities: <i>atasthala</i> & <i>anarsia</i> (80.4: thematic words)	1.114.5	3.74.1		7.35.2; 8.109.3*; 9.78.2*-79.1*, 110.3 (Amestris)	9.116 & 7.33
2 And he perpetrates other outrages		3.14.5, 16.1-2, 27.3, 29.2, 31.6, 32.4, 33, 35-38; 5.25.1-2	3.155.2, 159.1; 6.32	7.39, 114.2 (Amestris); 8.90.3; 9.112	3.69.2 & 4, 92.1, 125.2, 126.2; 5.18.5
3 He forces his will on women (80.5) He confuses sex and politics		3.14.2, 31.1 & 6	3.118.1	9.108.1-2, 111.4* & 112 7.39.1; 9.108-13;	9.116 & 7.33
4 He executes subjects without trial (80.5)		3.15.1, 32.4, 35.3 & 5, 36.1* & 4, 64.2, 65.3*, 67.1	3.118-20, 4.84.1-2	7.35.3, 39, 146.3#; 8.90.3	1.137.1#

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTOCRATS ... (Continued)

I	Cyrus	Cambyzes	Darius	Xerxes	Persians in General
C THE AUTOCRAT SUFFERS SERIOUS LIABILITIES IN POLITICAL DECISIONS					
1 He is not accountable: <i>aneuthynos</i> (80.3)		3.31.4		9.109.2-3	
2 He is hard to suit: <i>anarmostos</i> (80.5)		3.34-5, 36.5-6		7.882; 9.109.3,	
3 He shows hostility to virtue and pleasure in wicked subjects: <i>phthonos</i> & <i>charis</i> (80.3-4)		3.30.1, 74.1			
4 He is gullible and prone to believe slander: <i>diabolas endekesthai</i> (80.4)		3.62.2-4		7.237*#; 8.90.1; 9.116.1-2	
5 His behaviour promotes flattery and lies, and leads to treachery (80.5)		3.65.1*, 67.1	3.72.4-5*; 4.134.3* & 135.2		1.136.2, 138.1#
6 He inhibits speech and thought (80.5)	1.88.2	3.35-6	4.97.5	7.10 (init.), 101.3-102.1*, 104.5*, 209.2*; 8.68α1*	

l	Cyrus	Cambyses	Darius	Xerxes	Persians in General
7	He errs seriously in his isolation (80.6)			7.103.1, 105, 209.1; 8.86(fin), 88.3, 90.4, 97.1	
	He becomes wise only after a great loss	1.86.6#	3.64.3	4.134.2* 7.234.1*; 8.101.1	
8	He considers his subjects to be slaves and promotes servility (80.5)		2.1.2	3.88.1, 119.1, 155.5 & 157.2-4	7.135.3*
	His rule is based on his own and his subjects' fears		3.35.4	3.86.2	9.111.3-5
9	He disturbs ancestral law & custom: <i>nomaia kineeï patria</i> (80.5)		3.3.3, 16.1, 30.1, 31.2-4, 38.1	7.238.1-2; 8.109.3*	
10	Power depends on one untried man, not on self-correcting institutions	1.107-30	2.1#	3.86.2, 88.3; 7.1072*	7.3.4, 1072*; 8.102.3*

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTOCRATS ... (Continued)

II	Lydian Kings	Median Kings	Egyptian Kings	Corinthian Tyrants	Other Greek Tyrants	Institutional Governments
A THE PERSONALITY OF THE AUTOCRAT						
1 He is ruled by arrogant pride: <i>hybris & megalophrosyne</i> (3.80.2-3)	1.30.3, 38.2	1.99.1-2	2.136.4, 169.2		6.127.3	7.136.1#
2 He equates his will or fancy with the law (80.3)		1.100.1#,		5.92η1*	1.59.6#	3.142.1#; 7.102.1*#, 104.4*#
His acts are impulsive, unpredictable (80.3)	1.54.1	1.73.4				
3 He exhibits rapacious greed, and unchecked aggression (80.4)	1.73.1, 1.76.2	1.108.4, 119.3, 1.99.1		5.92€2*, η1*	3.39.3-4, 3.122.2, 123.1; 5.92ζ3*	
4 He fears for his own life (80.4-5) and shows jealousy of others' His delicate honour always seems threatened (need for revenge)	1.73.1	1.108.2, 98.2	2.161.2(bis), 173.1#	5.92ζ2*	1.64.1; 3.44.2, 143.1 1.64.1	

II	Lydian Kings	Median Kings	Egyptian Kings	Corinthian Tyrants	Other Greek Tyrants	Institutional Governments
B THE UNJUST AND VIOLENT ACTS OF THE AUTOCRAT						
1 He commits atrocities: <i>atasthala</i> & <i>anarsia</i> (80.4: thematic words)			2.111.2	3.49.2		5.89.3; 9.37.1, 79.1*#
2 And he perpetrates other outrages	1.76.1-2	1.119.3-5, 128.2	2.129#, 162.5	3.48.2	3.44.2, 45.4; 4.202; 6.23.6	6.23.6#, 79; 7.133.1, 9.120
3 He forces his will on women (80.5)	1.11.2		2.131.1, 172.3	3.48.2, 5.92η1* & 3*	1.16.1	
He confuses sex and politics	1.8-12		2.121€2, 126.1	3.48.2	1.61.2; 6.126	
4 He executes subjects without trial (80.5)	1.92.4	1.108.4, 119.3	2.129.1-2#	3.50.1; 5.92.η1*, €2*, ζ1*	3.39.2, 143.2; 5.92α1*	5.87.2, 87.3#; 9.5.2

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTOCRATS ... (Concluded)

II	Lydian Kings	Median Kings	Egyptian Kings	Corinthian Tyrants	Other Greek Tyrants	Institutional Governments
C THE AUTOCRAT SUFFERS SERIOUS LIABILITIES IN POLITICAL DECISIONS						
1 He is not accountable: <i>aneuthynos</i> (80.3)						5.92α1*#; 6.104.2#
2 He is hard to suit: <i>anarmostos</i> (80.5)	1.30-2*	1.117-18				
3 He shows hostility to virtue, and pleasure in wicked subjects: <i>phthonos & charis</i> (80.3-4)	1.30.3, 33	1.108.2			3.146.1	7.237.2*
4 He is gullible and prone to believe slander: <i>diabolos endekesthai</i> (80.4)						5.97.2
5 His behaviour promotes flattery and lies, and leads to treachery (80.5)		1.116.4-5, 118.1, 123.1				5.97.2
6 He inhibits speech and thought (80.5)	1.30.3	1.99.1, 100.2		3.52.6		5.78#
7 He errs seriously in his isolation (80.6)	1.56.1					5.51#, 97.2; 7.143.3#, 144.1#
He becomes wise only after a great loss	1.86.3	1.129	3.15.4#	3.124.2		

II	Lydian Kings	Median Kings	Egyptian Kings	Corinthian Tyrants	Other Greek Tyrants	Institutional Governments
8 He considers his subjects to be slaves and promotes servility (80.5)		1.98.2, 98.3, 100.2	2.124.1-2, 172.5		5.92α1*, 96.1; 7.156.3	3.142.4*; 5.62.1, 65.5, 66.1, 78, 91.1, 92α1*; 7.104.4*, 135.3*, 136.1; 8.143.1*; (all #)
His rule is based on his own and his subjects' fears	1.34.3	1.107.2		3.52.2; 5.92ε2*	1.64.1	6.12.4#
9 He disturbs ancestral law & custom: <i>nomaia kineeī patria</i> (80.5)	1.8.4, 10.3, 11.2-4	1.108.4, 99.1, 119.3	2.124.1 & 1#, 127.1, 128, 129.1#, 177.1; 3.10.2, 43.1#		1.59.6#; 5.67.1-5, 68.1	7.102.1*#
10 Power depends on one untried man, not on self-correcting institutions	1.8-13, 34.3	1.99.2, 108.2, 120.6	2.147.2#	3.53.4*	3.142.3*	3.142.3*#; 5.78#; 6.109.1-2#

equivalent to unlimited authority and power. He appreciated the paradox that the law for the king of Persia was that he could do whatever he wished (3.31.4).³³ Artabanus refers to Xerxes' rule as a despotism (7.51.2*), because he regards the king's subjects as slaves (3.88.1; 7.7). So does Xerxes himself (7.39.1*).³⁴ The despot's generosity is always untrustworthy (3.130.4; 4.84; 7.39; 8.140α* with 142.4–5*). The two Herodotean portraits – the efficient and energetic Xerxes and the Xerxes who is an imprudent aggressor against a poor people – are not entirely integrated, and yet the latter is emphasized, not because of ethnic prejudice, but because of the dominant theme of the self-destructive tendencies of autocracies.

The atrocities 'incidental to unbridled power' and 'to the failure of nerve after defeat' are 'normally described without censure,'³⁵ only because further judgment is not needed. Bodily mutilation and perverted sexual acts, 'harem intrigues,' and the confusion of sex and power illustrate the *hybris* of autocrats.³⁶ Their pre-emptive, inhuman actions (often in response to prophecies and omens) backfire, for instance for Astyages, Cambyses, and Periander (1.108.4; 3.29–35; 3.50–2). Apries' *hybris* met quick punishment (2.169.2–3); Cambyses' reversal was not long delayed (3.66.2); Cyrus' and Xerxes' recompensive punishment is both explicit and implicit (1.214.3–5; 8.109.3*, 9.110.3).

Having declared autocracy to be self-contradictory (ἀναρμοστότατον, 3.80.5*) by nature, Herodotus focuses on the descents rather than the ascents of despots,³⁷ because their collapse confirms his opinion. Various strategies reinforce the dogma. The 'wise adviser motif' offers a 'fictional ... poetic and philosophic dimension' which serves to illustrate despots' lack of common sense. The good advice is rarely followed. The verbs 'maltreat' and 'whip' (λυμαίνομαι, μαστίγω) belong to autocracy: Gigante calls 'the μάστιξ the inglorious symbol of Persian *nomos*.'³⁸ Ἀτασθαλίη, reckless wickedness, ascribed to tyrants as typical by Otanes, repeatedly characterizes Xerxes (3.80.4*; 7.35.2, 8.109.3*, 9.78.2*). The Persian kings abuse the dead and brutalize the living *pour encourager les autres*, but frequently without trial and sometimes on whim alone. Humiliation, disfigurement of defeated opponents, public punishment, and vengeful retribution are symbolic demonstrations of unfettered power in Herodotus, and the old Persian inscription of Darius at Behistun boasts of his gruesome mutilations of his challengers. Apries' mutilation of Patarbemis' face provides an egregious Egyptian parallel (2.162.5). Cambyses exemplifies every fault that Otanes mentions.

Persian rulers are portrayed as grasping, tyrannical, and aggressive. They embody greed and selfishness. The Ethiopian king says to Cambyses' spies: 'If he were just, he would not desire a land other than his own, nor would he

lead into slavery men from whom he suffered no wrong' (3.21.4*). The scheme to march 'to the end of the world' is called 'mad and insane' (3.25.2-3, words reserved to and lavished upon Cambyzes). Similarly Darius expresses the same systematic urge to conquer European territory, and Cyrus does also, when trying to subjugate the Massagetans (1.201, 205.1; 3.134). The Persian general Aryandes attacks North Africa with an excuse (πρόσχημα, 4.167.3) of wrong suffered, but in reality to subject more nations to Darius; he imitates his masters (5.105.2*, 6.94.1; 6.44.1). Mardonius too speaks the language of revenge (7.5.3), but concludes with the argument that a country as beautiful and fruitful as Greece deserved no less a master than the Persian king. He boasts of the conquest of races who have done the Persians no wrong (7.9.2*).³⁹ Herodotus presents Xerxes' real freedom of choice as somehow limited metaphysically by fate and his tragic destiny, but most importantly by his status and Persian νόμοι, from which any concept of international justice is absent. *Nomos* requires no explanation, because for Xerxes it is one. Xerxes justifies the proposed invasion to his council (7.8α1-2*):

The following *nomos* I do not introduce as new to you, but I received it and will use it. I hear from our elders that never yet have we Persians kept still, ever since we snatched power from the Medes ... But god leads us on and when we obey, it turns out for the better. What nations Cyrus, Cambyzes, and my father subdued and acquired in addition, no one need tell to you who know it well. Now when I ascended this throne, I considered how I might not be left behind by earlier men who held it, and how I could acquire additional empire for the Persians ...⁴⁰

The speech then chooses Greece as the obvious object of the further expansion mandated by the logic of empire. The conclusion reached is that *not* to attack Greece would be un-Persian, in fact passive (cf 7.50.3*, Xerxes again). The campaign will enslave guilty and innocent alike (7.8γ3*). Although Herodotus nowhere states that it is 'wrong to seek to rule others,' 'the ethics of the historian are incompatible with oppression.'⁴¹ This latter proposition has now been buttressed by the preceding analysis of the conspirators' political theories.

Autocrats in the *Histories*

In Herodotus' view democracy is not a perfect system of government or even obviously preferable to other, more limited forms of national autonomy. He sympathizes with Megabyzus' and Darius' objections to the thoughtless haste of the people. *À propos* of the absence of Peloponnesian vessels and the

presence of twenty Athenian ships bound for Miletus at the beginning of the Persian Wars, Herodotus remarks that 'one may reasonably conclude that it is easier to deceive many than one, since Aristagoras failed to deceive one Lacedaemonian, Cleomenes, but did deceive thirty thousand Athenians' (5.97.2). Darius' criticism of democracy and Otanes' praise for self-government obviously apply to the government of Athens itself. Herodotus does not proselytize for unlimited participation in political decision-making; but despotism, because it cannot help but violate law and custom, is self-limiting as well as undependable. Nor is he a chauvinist for any one city;⁴² Hellas would have perished without Athens, Sparta would have fought Xerxes even if Athens had surrendered to Persia,⁴³ Corinth's good deeds at Salamis survive Athenian defamation (7.139.2-3; 7.102.2; 7.209; 8.94.4).⁴⁴ All have some form of institutional self-government and equal access to justice which make liberty and valour effective. Proponents of *ἰσονομία* do not always succeed, as Otanes himself, Maeandrius of Samos, and Aristagoras demonstrate (3.80.6*, 3.142.3*, 5.37.2), but Herodotus praises their intentions: individual freedom, self-government, and justice for their communities (3.83.3, 142.4*, 143.2).

The narrative of Clisthenes' political reformation of Athens, moreover, illustrates the 'Seminar on Government.' Herodotus declares of Athens that 'although it was great before, once rid of the tyrants it became even greater' (5.66.1). Freedom of speech, 'a desirable thing,' brought Athens new increase in wealth and military power that Herodotus explicitly connects with the new form of government. He argues that a despot's soldiers have too little stake in battle to confront with success free men who fight to preserve self-government and to advance their state's power (5.78; cf 6.109.3, 6). The Spartans calculate that Athens ruled by a tyrant would be weak and obedient, but a free Athens would grow to threaten their own authority and power (5.91.1). Herodotus has Histiaeus state as an obvious fact that the cities of Ionia would prefer democracy to tyranny (4.137.2*). Freedom once inspired the Medes to liberate themselves from the Assyrians and to show themselves to be brave men (1.95.2), and freedom would inspire Hydarnes if only he experienced it: 'You know how to be a slave, but you have not yet tried freedom (*ἐλευθερίη*), nor do you know whether it is sweet or not. If you could try it, you would advise us to fight you for it not with spears only but even with axes' (7.135.3*).

Herodotus considers Greek governments other than tyrannies superior to oriental autocracies because of their relative moderation and humanity: they recognize human dignity and respect persons and ancestral institutions,⁴⁵ they require accountability to law and custom, and they are able to profit from criticism and select policies wisely. Unlike the autocrats who are

tendered sound analyses but ignore them, in Herodotus Greek states can and often do benefit from open expression and from competition among proposals (eg, 5.66.1 with 78; 5.93.2; 6.109–10; 7.142–4; 8.79.3*). Of course, public debate does not insure success (eg, 5.97.2). All nations – except the Androphagoi, ‘most brutish of all men’ (4.106) – have *nomoi* and some system of justice, but these *nomoi* are not all equally valid or equally secured by geography and military preparedness. In the great war itself, it is not merely courage and tactical skill that win Herodotus’ praise for the Greeks, but – above all – moral purpose, the cause of self-determination for which they fought.⁴⁶

On occasion, a combination of patriotic local sources and his own preferences lead Herodotus to suppress or minimize unattractive truths. The Athenians’ offering to Darius of earth and water in the last decade of the sixth century (5.73) in order ‘to make an alliance with the Persians against the threat of certain war with Sparta,’ is improbably presented as the independent and unsupported decision of the ‘messenger-envoys’ (ἄγγελοι). Herodotus maintains a discreet silence on Athenian politics after Clisthenes’ reforms; on Clisthenes’ possible participation in the deal; on the now eminent Alcmaeonids’ past dealings with the tyrants and with the Persian Empire. These lacunae minimize the implication of the reported fact: the new democracy and perhaps its champion, just freed from a tyrant, had immediately (and wisely) appealed to the most powerful autocracy for aid against another Greek government. The power of the threatening barbarian autocrat, they must have reasoned, was further removed than the threatening Spartans. Herodotus’ careful account does not strictly rule out the historical possibility that the Athenians temporarily observed the treaty and later disavowed it at a convenient moment.⁴⁷ Not only autocrats break faith.

A similar obfuscation surrounds the truth about Polycrates’ alliance with Egypt. Local ‘revisionists’ in Samos blamed Amasis for what certainly seems to have been Polycrates’ decision to abandon their mutual alliance, once Persian power extended to his frontiers. Here a tyrant benefits from the suppression of the historical truth, because a more weighty historiographical theme, the danger of excessive prosperity, shapes the main narrative.⁴⁸ The principle to recognize, in such cases, is that from the many-sided facts of history, the historian presents the facet immediately useful or relevant to his present concern. Although autocrats in Herodotus are characterized by their irregular and ferocious acts, and Greek institutional governments are portrayed by their most admirable accomplishments, it is not hard to find, in an honest historian’s text, good acts of bad men and bad acts of praised régimes.

Hohti has demonstrated the significance of the difference between Greek

governments which did not restrict *isegorie* and the tyrannies and other autocracies that did.⁴⁹ Inhibition of candid views is 'characteristic of tyranny.' Herodotus often depicts scenes where even important viziers must like slaves request permission to speak (eg, 1.88.2*, 4.97.2);⁵⁰ or where subjects express a fear of speaking frankly (3.31.5; 4.97.5*; 7.10α1*; 7.101.3*; 8.68α1*); or where nervous subjects believe or opine to one another that honest advice cannot be proffered at all (7.10.1; 8.65.4-5*, to Dicaeus; 9.16.4-5*, to Thersander). When sound advice is tendered, the autocrat frequently rejects or rashly disbelieves it (7.11, 103-104.1*, 237.1*; 8.69.1-2). To speak one's mind is to act 'in a free manner' (7.46.1); those who behave thus with a despot often regret it (3.36, 7.11.1, 9.111.3-5).⁵¹ Freedom, for Herodotus, promotes good counsel and effective government (as Otanes argued in 3.80.6*); despotisms may prosper but they carry the seed of self-destruction.

The paradoxical advantage of non-autocratic governments is, Herodotus believes, that envy, strife, and disunity – among men and nations – promote human freedom and perpetuate a fruitful diversity for the human race.⁵² From the varied *nomoi* of the contumacious Greeks come growth and independence, whereas from oriental despotism and tyranny come conformity, irrationality, brutality, and fear of individual enterprise. Local autonomy encourages a sense of community identity, increased strife and envy on the parochial level (7.236.1*, 237.2*), but such competition sustains freedom, itself a necessary condition for *arete*.⁵³ Otanes says: 'Envy (φθόνος) is fundamental in human nature' (3.80.3*). The agonistic character of Greek institutions harnesses this energy. Hellenic strength results from disunity and strife, even war. Competitive units survive better 'because they are closer to the historical process.' Even local injustice sometimes promotes the good of Greece.⁵⁴ Dynamic cities extract energy from political conflict. Strenuous liberty, Demaratus implies, has unique advantages over autocracy.⁵⁵ Greek adaptability, flexibility, and contentiousness, promoted by a variable climate, poor land, institutional government, local autarchy and national near-anarchy, produces a peculiar *arete* and promotes survival in a threatening world (cf 5.66.1, 78; 7.10α3*, β1*, 102*, 104*, 135, 139).

When the unrestricted *nomos* of despotism contends with the restrictive *nomoi* of the little Greek states, the heterogeneous Greeks are victorious. Herodotus asks why. He seems to have found his answer in the way different political systems respond to the demands of *nomos* understood both as custom and as law. When the despot constitutes *nomos*, it is unstable and self-interested; when *nomos* is despot, the limitations provide an arena of freedom. Self-discipline and valour are encouraged by self-governing

institutions; the 'Constitutional Debate' points to the outcome of the wars between the Greeks and the barbarians.

Isonomia

We conclude, first, that Herodotus' 'shares' Otanes' views, not because he endorses the ideology of democracy, but because Otanes' propositions most clearly favour the preservation of political and social *nomoi*, government by institutions, not undependable or absurd individuals. Otanes' proposal best promotes individual autonomy within a political context.⁵⁶ This position yields equal admiration for Sparta and Athens. Herodotus profoundly admires the unique and inimitable society of Sparta ruled by *nomos* and traditional institutions, not men.⁵⁷ The Spartans govern themselves and are free within clear and stable limits, within *nomoi*, despots more fear-provoking than Xerxes (7.104.4*). This praise of the despotic power of law and custom at Sparta varies the theme of the undependable and destructive despot. Because Spartan *nomoi* were suitable only for Sparta's uniquely demanding but self-governing system, Athens appears as the type of a community which prospered and became great quickly, specifically because of freedom and constitutional government (5.66.1, 78). The freedom of the Athenians is consonant with *nomos*; it recognizes limit; it enforces obligations, for instance, to help fellow Ionians and even all like-minded Hellenes.

Secondly, the Persian's criticism of all monarchs, in form quite theoretical, is borne out by the earlier and the subsequent narrative. The Constitutional Debate is a benchmark, for it shapes an expectation of the three forms of government in actual practice that is not disappointed in the narrative. This seminar in political theory presented as a dramatic confrontation does not however turn history into fiction. Reasoned inductions are based on wide observation reported in the narratives. The Persian despots and Greek tyrants are 'not mere representatives of a [well-known] type.'⁵⁸ They are historical personages who shape Herodotus' generalizing profile of unlimited power.

'Absolutism was bound to fail.' Herodotus' accumulation of evidence leads him to believe that absolute power and unlimited unification of diverse peoples and *nomoi* engender moral and social decay.⁵⁹ The Persians fail to conquer Greece because of inadequately conceived strategy (7.107*, 49*), but also because of contradictions built into their system and empire. Their rulers mock even their own *nomoi* and break them; the Persians abandon the habits and life-style that had made them strong (3.31; 5.18–21; 1.126*, 7.8α2*, 9.122.3, etc).⁶⁰ Whereas despotism crushes initiative, *isonomie* and

freedom encourage individual effort by holding out rewards to individuals and their nations (eg. 5.78 and 6.109.3*). Self-imposed constraints or *nomos* can promote national achievement. Greeks exert themselves for recognition of excellence (*ἀρετή*), for 'worthless' laurels, and for freedom, not for money, a tyrant's benediction, or from fear (7.102.2*, 103.3*, 8.26.3). There is a kind of explanation latent in this view, namely that social structure determines a nation's political fate, although Herodotus has not yet found the theoretical and abstract terminology to express it so concisely.

Thirdly, Herodotus' selection and arrangement of material produced clear and not unhistorical patterns of despotic behaviour. The positive accomplishments of tyrants and other despots gain less attention than their errors, sins, and failures. Herodotus argues by examples, he shows (*apodexis*), and the cumulative weight establishes an expectation, a pattern. In Toynbee's biological metaphor, which has demonstrable Herodotean antecedents (3.108–9), challenge promotes productive responses; certain groups are better adapted to respond to external and internal stimuli and challenges, namely the ones that promote their citizens' self-determination and individual development. The 'time of troubles,' 522–425 BCE (6.98.1–2) was also an acme of Hellenic accomplishment. 'The virtues of adversity' provides a fitting title to Toynbee's transcription of the conversation of Cyrus and Artembares that concludes the *Histories*.⁶¹

Selection and arrangement always govern historical emphasis. Herodotus calls Xerxes' expedition the largest ever (7.20.2–21), and its repulse the greatest Greek accomplishment to date (9.78.2*). The latter judgment reflects not quantity, but significance: free men defeat their would-be enslaver (cf 9.90.2*). The *Histories'* narratives, dialogues, and statistics provide the basis for these judgments; the patterns of behaviour displayed by autocrats and institutional governments entitle the historian's judgments to serious respect.