Herodotus 1.53.1-2: What were Croesus' Instructions?*

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Τοῖσι δὲ ἄγειν μέλλουσι τῶν Λυδῶν ταῦτα τὰ δῶρα ἐς τὰ ἱρὰ ἐνετέλλετο ὁ Κροῖσος ἐπειρωτᾶν τὰ χρηστήρια, εἰ στρατεύηται ἐπὶ Πέρσας Κροῖσος καὶ εἴ τινα στρατὸν ἀνδρῶν <u>προσθέοιτο</u> φίλον ... ‘Κροῖσος, ὁ Λυδῶν τε καὶ ἄλλων ἐθνέων βασιλεύς, νομίσας τάδε μαντήια εἶναι μοῦνα ἐν ἀνθρώποισι ὑμῖν τε ἄξια δῶρα ἔδωκε τῶν ἐξευρημάτων καὶ νῦν ὑμέας ἐπειρωτᾷ, εἰ στρατεύηται ἐπὶ Πέρσας καὶ εἴ τινα στρατὸν ἀνδρῶν <u>προσθέοιτο</u> σύμμαχον.’

Croesus instructed the Lydians who were to bring these gifts to the shrines to ask the oracles whether Croesus should march against the Persians and whether he should make an alliance with any army of men . . . 'Croesus, king of the Lydians and of other peoples, believing that these are the only true oracles among mankind, has sent you gifts worthy of what you have found out and is now asking you whether he should march against the Persians and whether he should make an alliance with any army of men.'

Apollo and Amphiaraus have passed the test Croesus set them, correctly naming the improbable activity — boiling a tortoise and lamb together in a bronze pot — in which Croesus was engaged at the moment of consultation (1.46-9). Now it is time to ask the question of substance for which the test had been a preparation. The text, however, is in some respects puzzling.

When Herodotus reports in *oratio obliqua* the questions Croesus instructs his Lydian emissaries to ask, it is mildly puzzling that one of the verbs, στρατεύηται, is given with its deliberative subjunctive unchanged (the "vivid" construction when the main verb is a past tense), while in the other, προσθέοιτο, the deliberative subjunctive has been changed to optative. In explanation How and Wells offer the alternation of subjunctive and optative in a purpose clause at 1.185.6, which is not the same thing. Since, however, both the vivid and the ordinary construction are good Greek[1] and since life is both full of minor puzzles and short, we might put the variation down to inexplicable whim and move on. But when we reach the consultation as reported in *oratio recta*, the same variation persists, and here the optative is without any explanation whatever since the main verb is in the present.[2] Stephanus proposed reading προσθέηται,[3] which gives good

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1   See, e.g., W.W. Goodwin, *Syntax of the Moods & Tenses of the Greek Verb* (London 1889, rpt. London 1999), § 677.

2   Theoretically one could evade the difficulty by calling this an instance of 'historic sequence *ad sensum*', on which see Goodwin, § 676. But Herodotus contrasts Croesus' past action of

grammar but leaves the corruption unexplained.

What possibilities are there for explaining this alternation of mood? Kühner-Gerth, discussing the alternation of subjunctives and optatives in purpose clauses, say that in several cases, where the subjunctive precedes the optative, the subjunctive serves 'den nächsten unmittelbaren Zweck zu bezeichnen, dessen Verwirklichung erwartet wird, der Optativ dagegen eine hieraus sich ergebende Folge oder eine als bloss möglich vorgestellte Handlung' (2.387, § 553.6). Croesus' second question is dependent on a positive answer to the first, and so the second might fall under the category of 'a consequence resulting therefrom'.[4] But apart from one Homeric example (Homer, *Od.* 12.156) the leading verbs in Kühner-Gerth's examples are all historic.[5] Jebb on *OC* 11 cites three kinds of exceptions to the sequence-of-moods rule: 'in Homeric Greek, where the case is merely imaginary', i.e. the purpose applies only 'in that (remote) case'; 'After words expressing an *aspiration* or *prayer*', i.e. the subjunctive is assimilated to the main-verb optative; and 'Where the primary tense implies a secondary', where e.g. 'the law has this character' implies 'the law was so drawn up'.[6] I know of only one exception, Hdt. 2.93.4, where a purpose clause introduced by a present main verb takes optative and schools of fish are represented as hugging the shoreline ἵνα δὴ μὴ ἁμάρτοιεν τῆς ὁδοῦ. I cannot explain this but note that it is a purpose clause and not an indirect deliberative question.[7]

What other construction would explain the optatives? We might consider a slightly different view of the two questions Croesus asks the oracles. The first is a yes-or-no question about *whether* he should march against the Persians. The second question, which depends on an affirmative answer to the first, might have taken the form 'What army of men might I take as my ally?' There are similar questions, employing the potential optative, at 56.1 (μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ἐφρόντιζε ἱστορέων, τοὺς ἂν Ἑλλήνων δυνατωτάτους ἐόντας προσκτήσαιτο φίλους) and at 67.2 (ἐπειρώτων, τίνα ἂν θεῶν ἱλασάμενοι κατύπερθε τῷ πολέμῳ Τεγεητέων γενοίατο). Herodotus therefore might have written in the first passage εἰ στρατεύηται ἐπὶ Πέρσας καὶ [εἴ] τίνα <ἂν>

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sending gifts (ἔδωκε) with his present action of inquiring (καὶ νῦν ὑμέας ἐπειρωτᾷ).

3   According to Schweighäuser's edition (Glasgow 1818) this conjecture first appeared in Stephanus' second edition, which I have not seen.

4   A similar explanation is suggested for such variation in Homer by J. Willmott, *The Moods of Homeric Greek* (Cambridge 2007) 164-5.

5   G.C. Wakker, *Conditions and Conditionals: an Investigation of Ancient Greek* (Amsterdam 1994), pp. 382-3, mentions our Herodotus passage but can only refer to the same Kühner-Gerth discussion of purpose clauses, which, as we have seen, is a different problem. She takes no note of the difficulty that in the *oratio recta* part the leading verb is a present tense.

6   R.C. Jebb, *The Oedipus Coloneus* (Cambridge 1900, rpt. London 2004).

7   In the instances cited by Kühner-Gerth of the substitution of optatives for indicatives or subjunctives (1.254-5, § 399.5, 2.361-3, § 550.4, 2.545-7, § 594.1-2) there are no instances with a primary main verb.

στρατὸν ἀνδρῶν προσθέοιτο φίλον. That a scribe should reflexively repeat εἰ is not difficult to imagine, for it would be natural to expect both questions to be yes-or-no. In fact, at 7.145.2 εἰ is repeated after εἴ πως and bracketed by Cobet, who is followed by some editors. Likewise, Herodotus' mss. all wrongly omit ἄν at 1.75.6, 3.127.3, 8.111.3, and 9.94.2, and it is wrongly omitted in one or more mss. at 1.99.2, 2.22.4 (ἄν τι), 2.49.2, 2.57.2, 2.66.4, 2.120.1, 3.25.5, 3.151.2, 4.62.3, 4.66, 5.91.1, 5.92.2, 6.124.2, 6.129.4, 7.139.2, 7.158.4, 7.214.3, and 9.90.2.[8] A scribe could have made the same error twice; alternatively, once the *oratio obliqua* passage had been corrupted, the *oratio recta* passage might have been consciously or unconsciously adjusted. It should be noted as further confirmation of this suggestion that in the oracles' answer to the second question (τοὺς δὲ ῾Ελλήνων δυνατωτάτους συνεβούλευόν οἱ ἐξευρόντα φίλους προσθέσθαι) the word order suggests that they are answering 'Which alliance shall I make?' rather than 'Shall I make an alliance?'.

Herodotus does not explicitly underline (but his audience would have needed no help in realizing) the crafty and manipulative manner in which Croesus tested the oracles, putting a question to them to which he already knew the answer.[9] By contrast, his second consultation is marked by haste and carelessness. He asks two questions, and in the text as transmitted, they are both yes-or-no questions. But the second question makes sense in the context only if the answer to the first is yes: it is *for this expedition* that the question of allies arises, and hence his second question already implies that he should make the expedition. The impression of imprudence, I suggest, is heightened by the text I have ventured to restore, for with it Croesus asks not *whether* he should make allies for the expedition but *with whom he should ally himself*. This presupposes the answer to *two* questions: 'Shall I march against the Persians?' and 'Shall I make an alliance?'

Conjectural alteration of the transmitted text often provokes the conservative question 'Isn't it rash to challenge the paradosis when you don't know for sure that it is wrong?' To this two replies are in order. First, while it is true that we do not yet completely understand the alternation between subjunctives and optatives,[10] the fact that apparently neither Herodotus elsewhere nor any other post-Homeric author uses the optative in indirect speech after a non-past main verb speaks powerfully against the transmitted text. Second, to print a conjecture in the text or the apparatus is not as risky as it seems since editors put such changes in plain view: the reading of the mss. is there for any future scholar to reinstate. A scholar who *can* produce a good defense of the

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8   Obviously omission would have been facilitated if Herodotus had written τίνα <ἄν> ἀνδρῶν στρατὸν, but examples where ἄν is omitted without obvious cause make such a rearrangement unnecessary.

9   This is well brought out by J. Kindt, 'Delphic Oracle Stories and the Beginning of Historiography: Herodotus' Croesus *logos*', *CP* 101 (2006) 34-51, esp. 37-8.

10 Coulter George tells me that the whole question of subjunctives and optatives as alternatives is something the Paris research group on the Greek verb has considered undertaking as its next project.

paradosis will deserve well of the author, of other scholars, and of the editor who printed the conjecture. This last will not be shown up as rash but as someone acting prudently on the basis of the state of knowledge current in his day. By contrast, meek acquiescence in the transmitted text is not the risk-free course of action some suppose since it lays such an editor open to the charge of being blind to real difficulties. In phrases chosen, perhaps, for their air of paradox Housman in his Manilius preface says that he may have occasionally been led 'to err on the side of caution, and timorously to alter what I might without temerity have defended'.[11] That altering the text or putting a conjecture in the apparatus is the path of safety while simply printing the paradosis involves risk will be a paradox only to those who have not thought the matter through. Caution here requires printing either Stephanus' προσθέηται or my καὶ [εἴ] τίνα <ἂν> at the foot of the page.

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[11]   A.E. Housman, *M. Manilii Astronomicon Liber Primus* (London 1903), p. xli.