

SCRIPTA CLASSICA ISRAELICA

YEARBOOK OF THE ISRAEL SOCIETY
FOR THE PROMOTION OF CLASSICAL STUDIES

VOLUME XLI

2022

The appearance of this volume has been made possible by the support of

Bar-Ilan University
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
The Open University
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PUBLISHED BY
THE ISRAEL SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF CLASSICAL STUDIES
<http://www.israel-classics.org>

Manuscripts in the form of e-mail attachments should be sent to one of these e-mail addresses:
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Scripta Classica Israelica, c/o Department of General History, Ben-Gurion University of the
Negev, P.O.B. 653 Beer Sheva 8410501, Israel.

Price \$50

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Camera-ready copy produced by the editorial staff of *Scripta Classica Israelica*
Printed in Israel by Magnes Press, Jerusalem

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
MARGALIT FINKELBERG, Fifty Years of the Israel Society for the Promotion of Classical Studies	1
RACHEL ZELMICK-ABRAMOVITZ, An Epic Formula in Herodotus	5
CARSTEN HJORT LANGE, Augustus as Commander in Chief: Approaching Strategy and Leadership in (Civil) War	31
WERNER ECK, Ein Grabbau für einen Legionssoldaten in Jerusalem, erbaut von seinem Bruder. Zur Aussagekraft einer Inschrift, publiziert in IEJ 70, 2020	57
JONATHAN PRICE AND MORDECHAI AVIAM, A Greek Inscription and Architectural Fragments, Possibly of a Synagogue, from Sejara (Ilaniya)	63
JOSEPH PATRICH, ERAN MEIR AND AHARONI AMITAI, A Provincial (Praetorium) in Tiberias? The Archaeological Finds and the Evidence of the Literary Sources	77
REVIEW ARTICLE	
Ellen Birnbaum and John M. Dillon, <i>Philo of Alexandria: On the Life of Abraham. Introduction, Translation, and Commentary</i> (by Cana Werman)	109
BOOK REVIEWS	
Robin Lane Fox, <i>The Invention of Medicine: A History from Homer to Hippocrates</i> (by Ido Israelowich)	119
Tosca Lynch and Eleonora Rocconi (eds.), <i>A Companion to Ancient Greek and Roman Music</i> (by Amir Yerucham)	120
Tazuko Angela Van Berkel, <i>The Economics of Friendship: Conceptions of Reciprocity in Classical Greece</i> (by Gabriel Danzig)	122
Daniela Dueck, <i>Illiterate Geography in Classical Athens and Rome</i> (by Jerry Toner)	125
Erich S. Gruen, <i>Ethnicity in the Ancient World—Did It Matter?</i> (by Craigie Champion)	128
John Glucker, <i>Classics and Classicists. Selected Essays, 1964-2000</i> (by Voula Tsouna)	131
María-Paz de Hoz, Juan Luis García Alonso and Luis Arturo Guichard Romero (eds.), <i>Greek Paideia and Local Tradition in the Graeco–Roman East</i> (by Balbina Bäßler)	134
Jonathan J. Price, Margalit Finkelberg and Yuval Shahar (eds.), <i>Rome: An Empire of Many Nations: New Perspectives on Ethnic Diversity and Cultural Identity</i> (by David Potter)	136
Katell Berthelot and Jonathan Price (eds.), <i>In the Crucible of Empire: The Impact of Roman Citizenship upon Greeks, Jews and Christians. Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Culture and Religion</i> (by Lucia Cecchet)	140
Oswaldo Cavallar and Julius Kirshner, <i>Jurists and Jurisprudence in Medieval Italy: Texts and Contexts</i> (by Ido Israelowich)	142
OBITUARIES: KLAUS BRINGMANN (by YITZHAK DANA)	145
DISSERTATIONS IN PROGRESS	147
PROCEEDINGS: THE ISRAEL SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF CLASSICAL STUDIES	153

An Epic Formula in Herodotus*

Rachel Zelnick-Abramovitz

Abstract: This paper examines Herodotus's use of a formulaic phrase, known from Homer and the drama, by analyzing four test cases. The analysis reveals how Herodotus embeds mythical and traditional stories and the epic language in the relatively new genre of historiography and how the historical narrative is shaped by them. By this technique Herodotus associates himself with Homer and presents a continuous historical narrative that stretches from mythical times to his own, but also undermines the traditional Homeric authority by giving the formulaic language new contexts and implications, sometimes contrary to their mythical model.

Keywords: Herodotus, Homer, epic formula, myth, historiography, history.

The winding road of Herodotus's narrative, his *eiromenē lexis*, to use Aristotle's words (*Rh.* 3.9.2, 1409a27–b1), is paved with uneven matter: historical accounts are infused with mythical and legendary elements in a way that presents an unbroken line leading from a remote mythical past to Herodotus's times.¹ Although chapter 1.5.3 has often been interpreted as manifesting Herodotus's own distinction between the *spatium mythicum* and *spatium historicum*,² it cannot be ignored that right after that Herodotus returns to mythical times and to legends (1.7–14) and that he frequently harnesses mythical figures and local stories to the historical narrative, while criticizing those stories which seem to him unverifiable or ridiculous.³

Herodotus's debt to Homer and the epic tradition has been widely studied in terms of themes, structure, narratological patterns and language.⁴ In this framework I analyze

* I am grateful to the anonymous readers of *SCI* for their useful comments. All translations from the Greek are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

¹ Dewald (1987), 149; Immerwahr (1966), 4–5; Dewald (2012), 67, and 71–2. By 'mythical' I mean traditional stories involving gods and heroes—quite differently from Herodotus himself, who employs the word *μῦθος* only twice (2.23, 2.45.1), to signify a story or a theory whose credibility he doubts, but not because it involves gods and heroes (cf. Harrison 2002, 206–7; Fowler 2011, 47–8; Baragwanath and de Bakker 2012, 1). The scholarship on myth and its definition is vast; see Fowler (2011) and the Introduction in Baragwanath and de Bakker (2012), with references to previous studies.

² E.g. Shimron (1973), and (1989), 7; cf. Lang (1984), 3; Lateiner (1989), 35–8.

³ Hunter (1982), 85–7; Gould (1994), 93; Harrison (2002), 197–207; Stadter (2004); Wesselmann (2011), 2. For a more nuanced view see Fowler (2011), who argues that for Herodotus there is a *spatium divinum* and a *spatium humanum* (62).

⁴ The literature on Herodotus's debt to the epic is too vast to cite here in full. For a select list see Giraudeau (1984); Romm (1998), esp. Chap. 2 and pp. 128–31; Harrison (2002), 197–207; Bakker (2002); Slings (2002); Boedeker (2002); Rengakos (2006); Grethlein (2006);

Herodotus's use of a formulaic question that frequently appears in the epic and drama. The phrase “who are you and whence do you come?” (τίς εἶ καὶ πόθεν), with some variants, is employed by Homer in scenes of welcoming strangers. Herodotus's application of this formula as an integral part of historical narratives shows his mastery in adapting traditional stories and embedding them in the relatively new genre of historiography.⁵ Moreover, it associates the text with epic language and motifs, endowing the historical, apparently factual, narrative with a mythical aura that not only makes the narrative more vivid, but also marks the text as important by elevating it.

Admittedly, such locutions as τίς εἶ καὶ πόθεν might have passed from colloquial parlance into epic and dramatic scenes, or from the epic language into “rhetorical commonplaces”; hence they should not, perhaps, be seen as borrowed directly from Homer.⁶ Indeed, Herodotus uses the Ionic form κόθεν / ὀκόθεν, which might point to colloquial language.⁷ Furthermore, as we shall see, a more everyday form of this question—τίς εἶ καὶ ποδαπός; (“who are you and from where?”)—was in use in the fifth century BCE, in prose and Tragedy alike. Nonetheless, the almost complete absence of this phrase from non-dialogical poetry and most of the later prose suggests that it characterized epic poetry. Moreover, despite its diversity, the unvarying situation in which it appears—welcoming or encountering strangers—justifies treating this phrase as formulaic.⁸ Hence, its distinct Homeric flavor and its social context indicate that Herodotus was consciously imitating epic language; this, I believe, is true despite the paucity of the occurrences of this phrase in Herodotus and even though it loses its meter.⁹ In examining Herodotus's adaptation of this diction and his incorporation of traditional stories and mythical figures in the historical narrative, I aim at contributing to the discussion of Herodotus's debt to Homer as well as his concept of history as encompassing the mythical past.¹⁰

Pelling (2006); Marincola (2007); Wesselmann (2011); Baragwanath and de Bakker (2012), 44–6; Dewald (2012).

⁵ On the rise of Greek historiography see Grethlein (2011).

⁶ Boedeker (2002), 101; yet she cites Pythius's words to Xerxes in Hdt. 7.28.1 (discussed below) and Syargus's words to Gelon (Hdt. 7.159), as clearly recalling epic formulation. Pelling (2006), 77, comments that some Homeric phrases must have become clichés and perhaps were already proverbial or colloquial when Homer used them. For Herodotus's Homerisms see Mansour (2007).

⁷ Miller (2013), 180, maintains that interrogative and indefinite words in -κ- first developed in East Ionic before spreading to Aeolic and to literary Milesian, where they made their way into the manuscripts of Herodotus.

⁸ Webber (1989), 2, argues that by varying the formula the poet can emphasize the meaning of a key passage. On the flexibility of the Homeric formula, see Hainsworth (1968); Finkelberg (2004).

⁹ Except in 7.28 (see below). Pelling (2006), 77 n. 7, notes that ‘the metrical shape given to proverbs by canonical literature can itself help to fix their form as clichés, even if the precise metre is sometimes lost.’

¹⁰ See Boedeker (2002), although in (2011), 139, she writes that often poetic expressions ‘are best attributed to the familiarity and resonance of poetic language for the authors and many in their audiences, rather than to a special textual allusion.’ See also Stadter (2004), 33–8; Baragwanath and de Bakker (2012), 44–5.

1 THE FORMULA IN THE EPIC AND DRAMA

Homer uses the *pothen*-question in a stock situation: a stranger comes from afar; the host receives him (with or without entertainment); only then does the host ask the guest for his name and origin. The functions and conventions of this hospitality scene have been analyzed by Webber (1989) and Reece (1993). Reece divides it into many smaller type-scenes, all phrased in highly formulaic diction and arranged in a relatively fixed order. He views such conventions as dynamic ingredients of oral poetry ‘that have accrued deep and significant meaning over time through their accumulated use in various contexts, and in each particular instance, they call these associative meanings to mind for a well-informed audience’ (1993, 1–2). The type-scene that interests us here is the ‘Identification’. As Reece rightly observes (1993, 25), the revelation of the guest’s identity is particularly critical in the development of *xenia*-relationship between him and his host, and that is why the manner in which a guest’s identity is solicited and revealed assumes an almost ritualistic formality. This ritualistic inquiry entails a request for information about the stranger’s homeland and parentage, sometimes also information about the visitor’s means of transportation, his point of departure and the purpose of his visit. The host urges his guest to speak truthfully and accurately: ἀλλ’ ἄγε μοι τόδε εἰπέ καὶ ἀτρεκέως κατάλεξον; καὶ μοι τοῦτ’ ἀγόρευσον ἐτήτυμον (‘But come, tell me this and recount it truthfully’); in turn, the visitor often prefaces his answer with an assurance that he will be truthful and accurate: ταῦτα μάλ’ ἀτρεκέως ἀγορεύσω / καταλέξω (‘I will tell you these things very truthfully’).¹¹

The *pothen*-formula is typically more frequent in the *Odyssey*—where *xenia* features prominently¹²—than in the *Iliad*. For instance, in *Odyssey*, 1.169–70, Telemachus addresses Athena, disguised as Odysseus’s *xenos* Mentos; he invites the guest in, offers food, and only then asks for the purpose of the visit: ἀλλ’ ἄγε μοι τόδε εἰπέ καὶ ἀτρεκέως κατάλεξον; | τίς πόθεν εἰς ἀνδρῶν; πόθι τοι πόλις ἠδὲ τοκῆς; (‘But come, tell me this, and recount it accurately. Who among men are you and whence do you come? Where is your city and where your parents?’).¹³

This formula is also used when addressing more than one stranger, as, for example, when Nestor decides, after giving hospitality to Telemachus and Mentor, that it is time to find out who they are (*Od.* 3.69–71): νῦν δὲ κάλλιον ἐστὶ μεταλλῆσαι καὶ ἐρέσθαι | ξείνους, οἳ τίνες εἰσιν, ἐπεὶ τάρπησαν ἐδωδῆς. | ὦ ξεῖνοι, τίνες ἐστέ; πόθεν πλεῖθ’ ὕγρὰ κέλευθα; (‘Now indeed is it more appropriate to inquire and ask the strangers who they are, since now they have enjoyed their food. “Strangers, who are you? Whence did you

¹¹ Reece (1993), 26–7 with references. Webber (1989) notes that the visitor does not always reveal his name. Cf. de Jong (2001), 18–19. On the meaning and use of ἀτρεκέως, “truthfully/accurately”, see Finkelberg (1987); Crane (1996), 52–5. For Herodotus’s use of καταλέγειν and ἀτρεκέως, see below. See Tracy (2014) for an application of Game Theory to Homeric hospitality scenes. Cf. de Jong (2001), 18–19.

¹² See below, and cf. Vandiver (2012), 144.

¹³ Mari (2016) analyses this scene in the framework of Politeness Theory. Cf. lines 405–6, where Eurimachus asks Telemachus for the visitor’s identity, using the correlative *hopothen*.

sail across the sea?"). Note that the question is used twice, in indirect and direct discourse (for which see also below, in section 2.I).¹⁴

Among the variants of this formula, the phrase *τίς πόθεν εἰς ἀνδρῶν* ('who among men are you and whence do you come?') is more frequent,¹⁵ but *pothen* can also be used in other constructions, as in *Odyssey* 3.71. Moreover, the formula may be employed in an inverted situation, as when Circe's offered welcome is intended to mislead Odysseus and his friends.¹⁶ An atypical scene, which seems to deviate from the pattern, occurs in *Odyssey* 15, where Theoclymenus, fleeing his country because he killed his kin, approaches Telemachus and asks *τίς πόθεν εἰς ἀνδρῶν; πόθι τοι πόλις ἠδὲ τοκῆες;* (l. 264). Both men are guests in Pylos, and contrary to the conventions of the situation, it is the newcomer who addresses the question to the person he happens upon. Hence, this formula became so conventional that it was employed in encounters between strangers, whether the situation required it or not.¹⁷

This impression is strengthened by the use of the formula in drama, where it is even more diversified and the inquirers are not really hosts, yet on all occasions the *pothen*-question is addressed to a visitor. Thus Philoctetes in Sophocles' play asks Neoptolemus and the chorus (*Phil.* 219–21): *ἰὼ ξένοι, / τίνες ποτ' ἐς γῆν τήνδε κάκ ποίας πάτρας / κατέσχετ' οὐτ' εὐορμον οὐτ' οἰκουμένην;* ('Oh, strangers! Who are you, and from what country have you sailed to this land, which is neither well-moored nor inhabited?').¹⁸ More 'formulaic' is Ion's question to Creusa in Euripides' play (*Ion* 258–59): *τίς δ' εἶ; πόθεν γῆς ἦλθες; ἐκ ποίας πάτρας / πέφυκας;* ('Who are you? From what land have you come? What is your fatherland?').¹⁹

Euripides' satyr play *Cyclops*, although thematically closer to the Homeric *Odyssey*, shows an even looser phrasing: Silenus asks Odysseus: *ὅστις δ' εἶ φράσον πάτραν τε σῆν* ('But tell me what your name and country are', 102), and the Cyclops asks *πόθεν ἐπλεύσατ', ὃ ξένοι; ποδαποί; τίς ὑμᾶς ἐξεπαίδευσεν πόλις;* ('whence have you sailed, strangers? From what country? What city has brought you up?', 275–6). This looser wording may be explained by the Cyclops's rejection of the rules of hospitality and his "un-Greek" ways. Moreover, the Cyclops combines epic language with the colloquial variant *podapoi*, a mixture we also see in Aristophanes' *Birds*, where Peisetairus encounters Iris, who has been sent by the hungry and angry gods: *τίς εἶ; ποδαπή; λέγειν*

¹⁴ In line 80 Telemachus repeats Nestor's question, again as indirect discourse, using the correlative *hopothen*: *εἴρειαι ὀππόθεν εἰμέν: ἐγὼ δὲ κέ τοι καταλέξω* ('you ask whence we are; in that case, I will tell you'). De Jong (2001), 93–4 characterizes this scene as the 'delayed recognition' story pattern.

¹⁵ E.g. *Od.* 7.237–8; 14.187, and cf. lines 45–7; 19.162.

¹⁶ *Od.* 10.325: *τίς πόθεν εἰς ἀνδρῶν; πόθι τοι πόλις ἠδὲ τοκῆες;* ('who among men are you and whence do you come? Where is your city, and where your parents?'). See also the Cyclops's question at *Od.* 9.252, which, although identical to Nestor's question to Telemachus (3.71), opens a highly non-hospitable scene. Cf. Webber (1989), 3–4.

¹⁷ Cf. *Il.* 21.150, where Achilles, rushing to attack Asteropaeus, asks him: *τίς πόθεν εἰς ἀνδρῶν ὃ μὲν ἔτλης ἀντίος ἐλθεῖν;* ('Who among men are you and whence do you come, that you dare come forth against me?').

¹⁸ This 'welcoming' scene is ironic, since the newcomers have no goodwill towards their "host". See also below.

¹⁹ Cf. Eur. *Hel.* 83, 86; *El.* 774–80; *IT* 479; *Phoen.* 123; *Rhes.* 702.

ἐχρῆν ὁπόθεν πότ' εἶ ('Who are you? Where from? You must tell me whence you come', 1201).²⁰

But this seemingly less poetic phrasing is also found in Tragedy. For example, in Aeschylus's *Choephoroi*, in what has sometimes been interpreted as a comic scene, Orestes knocks on the palace's door and calls the slave to open it. Finally, the slave answers from within: εἶεν, ἀκούω. ποδαπὸς ὁ ξένος; πόθεν; ('Alright, I hear! From what country is the stranger? Whence?', 657).²¹ Another possible use is ascribed to Aeschylus's *Edonoi* in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*, 134–6, where Mnesilochus asks Agathon: καί σ' ὃ νεανίσχ' ὅστις εἶ, κατ' Αἰσχύλον | ἐκ τῆς Λυκουργείας ἐρέσθαι βούλομαι. | ποδαπὸς ὁ γύννης; τίς πάτρα; τίς ἡ στολή; ('And you, young man, whoever you are, I wish to ask as Aeschylus does in the *Lycurgeia*: "Wherefrom comes this womanish man? What is his country? What is this dress?"' Fr. 61 Radt).²²

We see that the playwrights adopted and dramatized a formulaic phrase, familiar from epic welcoming-scenes (often parodied in Comedy), but with greater variation in its wording and context. However, when it is applied in a situation where hospitality and *xenia*-relationship are impossible, as in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, the contrast with the more familiar model emphasizes the violation of normal etiquette. This is also true with the more prosaic *podapos* and the parodic use of the formula in Comedy. We may assume that on hearing such phrases the audience recognized their epic origin and setting, as well as their function as part of a ritualistic interaction that should (but not always does) lead to an amiable and peaceful relationship. As we will see, the same observations are applicable to Herodotus' use of the formula.²³

2 THE *HOKOTHEN*-FORMULA IN HERODOTUS

There are only four examples in Herodotus of the *ho/kothēn* formula applied to scenes involving encounters with strangers.²⁴ But beside evident parallels to the epic language and situations, this very small number suggests that where the formula *is* used it consciously imitates the epic usage and is significant in its context. Furthermore, since this phrase does not appear in other hospitality scenes,²⁵ its use seems to have a purpose beyond a deliberately elevated language. This impression is strengthened by the fact that

²⁰ Cf. Ar. *Ach.* 768, with Olson (2002) ad loc.; 818; *Pax* II, fr. 307, Henderson (2007); Alexis, fr. 94.1 K-A with Arnott (1996), 247.

²¹ Earlier (l. 575), Orestes declares that if he sees Aegysthus sitting on his father's throne, he will kill him before Aegysthus has a chance to ask: ποδαπὸς ὁ ξένος; ('whence comes the stranger?'). On the colloquial language in this play see Stevens (1945), 97; Garvie (1986), 224; Sommerstein (2002), 163–4; contra Brown (2000), 2–4.

²² On this comic scene and the context of the Aeschylean fragment, see Austin and Olson (2004), to lines 134–36.

²³ Flower (1998), 376 n. 52 (discussing another epic phrase): 'Herodotus is not fabricating details as much as he is endowing events with greater dignity in a way which his contemporary audience would have both recognized and appreciated.'

²⁴ Herodotus also uses the *hokothēn* formula in contexts other than welcoming-scenes: 1.116.3; 2.106.4. In three cases (5.13.1; 7.218.2; 9.16.2) he employs the more prosaic *hopodapos*; however, none of these cases describes the situation of inquiring about a stranger's identity.

²⁵ E.g. 3.14.4, where Syloson comes to Darius' court.

no other historian uses it, even in contexts of welcoming strangers,²⁶ and that after Herodotus it appears in much later writers.²⁷

In the following sections I examine the four cases where Herodotus uses the *ho/kothēn* formula and explore their function within the historical narrative.

I. CROESUS AND ADRASTUS (1.34–45)

The story of Croesus and Adrastus is presented as one episode in a historical sequence, starting with the ancestral sin of Gyges (1.7.13), which, in accordance with the Delphic oracle (1.13), is avenged in the fifth generation after him, that is, in the reign of Croesus. Moreover, Croesus is the first man whom Herodotus *knows* (as against mythical tradition) to have wronged the Greeks (1.5.3), hence the ἀρχή—the beginning, or the cause—of the hostility between East and West, Asia and Europe, Persians and Greeks.²⁸ But the long Croesus Logos also resounds with mythical associations, epic language, and folktale motifs.²⁹ In its course we learn that Croesus transgressed geographical boundaries, as well as the one between men and gods, by claiming to be the most fortunate man on earth due to his wealth (1.30–2). After Solon’s visit, Herodotus speculates, ‘a great *nemesis* [a *hapax* in Herodotus], sent by a god, seized Croesus, as seems likely (ὡς εἰκάσαι), because he considered himself the most blessed of all people’.³⁰ In his sleep he saw a prophetic vision, warning him that his son Atys would

²⁶ E.g. Thuc. 1.136, where Themistocles comes as a suppliant to Admetus King of the Molossians and sits by the hearth (see below).

²⁷ This phrase had a long history of use, both in serious and parodic contexts. See Joseph. *AJ* 1.287; 6.360; 9.211; *BJ* 6.305; Plut. *Alex.* 69.2 (in the epitaph of Cyrus); *De def. or.* 418f. In Diog. Laert. 4.46 the question is put to the philosopher Bion by Antigonos Gonatas: τίς πόθεν εἰς ἀνδρῶν; πόθι τοι πόλις ἠδὲ τοκῆς; —which is also a perfect hexameter, taken from *Od.* 10.325. The philosopher Menippus is thus addressed by Zeus in Lucian’s *Icaromenippus*, 23 (τίς πόθεν εἰς ἀνδρῶν, πόθι τοι πόλις ἠδὲ τοκῆς;). In Sen. *Apoc.* 5, Hercules, ‘as a Greekling (*graeculus*)’, asks Claudius τίς πόθεν εἰς ἀνδρῶν, ποίη πόλις ἠδὲ τοκῆς; see O’Gorman (2005), 95–8, who discusses the ‘knowing your Homer’ competition between Hercules and Claudius. See also del Giovane (2017), 30–1. The formula also appears in one Hellenistic epigram attributed to Philodemus (*A.P.* 5.113), addressed, quite out of character, by a *hetaera* to an impoverished ex-lover: τίς πόθεν εἰς ἀνδρῶν; πόθι τοι πτόλις; (‘Who among men are you? Where is your city?’, l. 5).

²⁸ Cf. Calame (2009), 69–70. On this story as exemplifying historical continuity, see Stadter (2004), 34; Grethlein (2010), 187–202.

²⁹ Huber (1965), 30–1, 34–5; Gould (1989), 34; Hansen (1996), 281; Stadter (2004), 38; Luraghi (2013), 101–2.

³⁰ Herodotus’s words ὡς εἰκάσαι are often taken as expressing his doubts about divine intervention (e.g. Fisher 1992, 357; 2002, 218). But in Herodotus this verb usually denotes inference from comparison (e.g. 2.104.2; 4.132.2; 7.162.2) and the infinitival phrase ὡς εἰκάσαι is used elsewhere in his work (9.34.1) to express a cautious conjecture but not sheer doubt. I therefore argue that in 1.34.1 Herodotus is inferring divine punishment from comparison with events believed by the Greeks to be divine retributions; cf. Harrison (2002), 40–1; Stadter (2004), 35; Flower (2013), 146; Pelling (2019), 155 (against Lang 1984, 61, and Shimron 1989, 35, who object to seeing divine retribution in Herodotus’s work). I follow Gould (1994), 95, Harrison (2002), 36, and Vandiver (2012), 156 and n. 50 (with discussion of earlier scholarship) in understanding ὡς εἰκάσαι as limiting only the

be killed by an ‘iron point’ (34.1). In an attempt to keep his son safe, Croesus decided to bring him a wife. While he was busy preparing the wedding, there arrived Adrastus, son of Midas the Phrygian, who—like Theoclymenus in *Odyssey* 15—had fled from his country because he had accidentally killed his brother (35.1). Adrastus asked Croesus to purify him, and the king, in a very Homeric scene,³¹ first complied with his request and only then asked about his and the victim’s identity (1.35.2–3): ἐπυνθάνετο ὀκόθεν τε καὶ τίς εἴη, λέγων τάδε: ‘ὄνθρωπε, τίς τε ἐὼν καὶ κόθεν τῆς Φρυγίης ἦκων ἐπιστιός μοι ἐγένεο;’ (‘he asked [Adrastus] whence he came and who he was: “Man,” he said, “who are you and whence in Phrygia do you come to my *hestia*?”’).

Using first the indirect speech—unlike the more common Homeric usage (but see below) but typical of most of its other occurrences in Herodotus and in other instances of epic language in his work³²—Herodotus reports what Croesus asked and then quotes the question, with slightly different wording. The repeated question, in both indirect and direct speech, might look as if Herodotus vacillated between *reporting* the dialogue and *quoting* from a story he heard—perhaps a folktale. It has been argued that such repetition is characteristic of Herodotus’s style and typical of oral strategy or of folktales and marks a critical moment in the narrative;³³ I suggest that the repetition serves an additional goal, to which I shall return below.

There is another aspect to this episode that may support its interpretation as a traditional story, adapted by Herodotus in a way that gives it a mythical aura. Later in the story (1.43) Adrastus, again accidentally, kills Croesus’s son Atys in a boar hunt. Scholars have proposed that the names Adrastus and Atys are symbolic, the former meaning Inevitability and the latter Ruin, and that the story had local roots.³⁴ It has also been suggested that the name Atys was the Lydian version of the Phrygian Attis, Kybele’s son and lover, killed by a boar or, in another version, by self-mutilation.³⁵ Moreover, Adrasteia was the name of an important Mysian city, where stood a temple to

second part of the sentence—that is, the reason of the punishment—hence, in understanding that Herodotus does not doubt divine retribution, but makes a cautious conjecture about the reason. On divine retribution see also 2.120.5 with Munson (2001), 183–94; Harrison (2002), 105; Stadter (2004), 35, and see below. Fisher (1992), 357–9, and (2002), 218 defines Croesus’s offences as blind over-confidence, punished in a disproportionate way, and the whole episode as a tragic tale—but not as an act of *hybris*.

³¹ Cf. Long (1987), 84; Arieti (1995), 57; Asheri (2007), 105; Vandiver (2012), 157–9.

³² See de Bakker (2012), esp. 124–5.

³³ Long (1987), 74–105, esp. 84; See also Reece (1993), 197; de Jong (1999), esp. 248–50; Slings (2002), 76–7; Rutherford (2012), 34; de Jong (2012), focusing on the Helen Logos; (2014), 179.

³⁴ E.g. Riexs (1975), 29–30; Stadter (2004), 39; Asheri (2007), 104; de Jong (2014), 179.

³⁵ In Hdt. 1.7.3 and 94.3, Atys is also the name of a Lydian king, father of the eponymous Lydus, and Pythius in Hdt. 7.27 seems to be his son. Hermesianax said that Attis was the son of a Phrygian king, who later migrated to Lydia, established the cult of the Great Mother and afterwards was killed by a boar sent by Zeus (Paus. 7.17.9–10). See also How and Wells (1928), *ad* 1.34.2; Vermaseren (1977), 88–90; Stadter (2004), 39 (who also detects elements of traditional Greek stories); Asheri (2007), 104. For a different version of Adrastus’s story see Phot. *Bibl.* 190, summarizing Ptolemy Hephaestion’s *New History*.

Nemesis,³⁶ a divine power mentioned just before our story (1.34.1), who punishes Croesus's sins in the same way as the Greeks and Trojans were punished (2.120.5).³⁷

Herodotus thus seems to reconstruct a traditional story (perhaps several versions of it), rationalize it and integrate it into the historical narrative.³⁸ But then, by artfully employing the formulaic *ho/kothēn* question he brings us back to the realm of the epic, of great wars and divine schemes. The switch from indirect to direct speech may itself be a poetical device imitating the epic, as it resembles *Odyssey* 3.69–71, where Nestor says to his people that it is time to ask his guests who they are, and then proceeds to ask them directly (see section 1 above).³⁹ The welcoming scene and the role played by Adrastus in the life of Croesus's son also evoke, although in a reversed way, those played by Phoenix in Achilles' life (*Il.* 9.438–95).⁴⁰ We should also note the use of the word ἐπίστιος (= ἐφέστιος) in Croesus's direct question to Adrastus (1.35.3), a word we will encounter again in the context of the third use of this formula and which presents Adrastus as a suppliant at the hearth of his host (see below, section III).

Croesus's repeated question can also be read as a narrative ploy: Herodotus first adopts the stance of a detached narrator and then abruptly illuminates the stage on which the conversation takes place.⁴¹ But this ploy can also be seen as having another function. While indirect speech might give the epic formula a factual, historical guise, which transfers the story from the oral, dialogical domain to that of a narrator's voice, from the *performed* ritual of receiving guests to that of *reporting* the ritual, Herodotus's adherence to the Homeric phrasing indicates his intention that we see the story as belonging to the mythical past—and therefore as sanctioned by tradition. Repeating the question in direct speech intensifies the Homeric impression: the traditional story is interwoven with the historical narrative, but is also re-enacted and revived as if we are

³⁶ Asheri (2007), 104. Dillery (2019) interprets 'nemesis', a hapax in Herodotus, as 'in some sense Adrastus himself, both as a human agent of divine anger, but also as an emblem of this "process"' (32); see also pp. 41–44 on Nemesis and Phrygia.

³⁷ Dillery (2019) argues that the Atys–Adrastus story is meant to explain how 'a great nemesis from a god' seized Croesus for believing that he was the most fortunate of men and also 'as an interpretative guide to the rest of the *History* through its use of significant name' (29).

³⁸ How and Wells (1928), ad loc., suggest that Herodotus (or his sources) introduced a cult-myth, with Greek colouring, into his historical narrative. On the possible origins of this story and its mythologization cf. Gould (1989), 34; de Jong (1999), 245; Griffith (2001), Stadter (2004), 38–40; Asheri (2007), 104–5; Wesselmann (2011), 226–39 (the 'jugendliche Flüchtling'). Dewald (2012), 71–2 argues that many of the figures in this story 'were taken for granted by fifth-century Greeks as part of a real prehistory, even if in actuality they were imaginative reconstructions pointing to an otherwise vanished past.'

³⁹ And Telemachus again repeats the question in *Od.* 3.80. Cf. *Il.* 194–6, 207–9.

⁴⁰ I am grateful to the anonymous reader for pointing out this connection. Another analogy between the story of Atys and that of Phoenix is the boar hunt (see *Ov. Met.* 8.307).

⁴¹ For other interpretations see Gould (1989), 53–4 (the power of the story lies 'in the control of pace'); Fowler (2006), 41 (indirect speech 'signals the shifting-out by the author'); Scardino (2012), 70: ('... in *oratio obliqua* the narrator remains in continuous presence as a more or less reliable agent of transmission ... With these devices he signals his distance from the original utterance').

listening to a Homeric dialogue or watching a performance on stage. Indeed, the Croesus Logos reads like a tragedy, as noted by many scholars.⁴²

II. HELEN AND ALEXANDER IN EGYPT (2.112–20)

In 1.3 Herodotus offers a rationalized version of Helen's abduction, ascribed to the 'Learned Persians' and presented as the cause of the Trojan War.⁴³ In the framework of his investigation of Egypt in Book 2 Herodotus elaborates the story of Helen and, as Calame (2000), 158, observes, makes King Proteus, not Helen, the central figure. Applying his role as an investigator, Herodotus is inspired by the sight of a temple dedicated to the Foreign Aphrodite (ξείνη Ἀφροδίτη; 2.112.2) to seek answers from his informers, the Egyptian priests. They, like the Learned Persians of Book 1, give a more rational account than the traditional Greek one, an account, moreover, that is based on what Menelaus himself told their predecessors when he arrived at Egypt after sacking Troy and not finding Helen there (2.118). The priests' version, presented as independent and unbiased, is adopted by Herodotus.⁴⁴

In contrast to the epic version, but in agreement with Euripides' *Helen*, bad weather compels Alexander (Paris) and Helen to land in Egypt, where Helen stays as Proteus's protégée. But unlike the poet Stesichorus's and Euripides' versions, no idol (εἶδωλον) of her is sent by the gods to Troy, so the Trojan War is fought for no reason at all. Moreover, it is the Egyptian king, Proteus, who displays wisdom and justice and behaves according to the Greek rules of hospitality.⁴⁵ After he has learned what Alexander had done he summons him to his palace, inquires about his identity and then decrees that Alexander may leave in peace, as behooves the rules of *xenia*, but Helen should stay in Egypt until her husband comes looking for her (2.113–15).

It has been suggested that Herodotus criticizes the traditional Greek version of the myth and presents an alternative version, combining Egyptian narrative and his own autopsy and *historia*.⁴⁶ But Herodotus's narrative is not only a rationalized or corrected version of the Greek myth.⁴⁷ Like the Croesus Logos, Herodotus's historical narrative stretches from the remote mythical past to the present time of his investigations. The Greeks Menelaus and Helen, and the Trojan Alexander, become part of a verifiable

⁴² Stahl (1975), 6, suggests that Herodotus replaces the far-seeing god of the prologue in contemporary tragedy with himself. Cf. Riels (1975); Gould (1989), 53; Saïd (2002), 134–7; Chiasson (2003); Wesselmann (2011), 238; Vandiver (2012), 157; Dillery (2019).

⁴³ Aphrodite's promise to Alexander (Paris) to give him Helen is here replaced by Alexander's desire to win for himself a woman by kidnapping her like his predecessors. See Saïd (2012), 91–2.

⁴⁴ See Stadter (2004), 34, on Herodotus's use of the priests to confirm his opinion and his linking to the narrative-present two temples dedicated to mythological figures: Helen and Heracles. Fowler (2011), 61, sees in Herodotus's treatment of Helen's story a maneuver, which, by eliminating supernatural involvement, enables him to discuss such heroic legends.

⁴⁵ See Calame (2000), 154; de Bakker (2012), 113–14. The Greekness of Proteus's behavior seems to contradict Herodotus's claim in 2.91.1 that the Egyptians shun Greek customs.

⁴⁶ E.g. Vandiver (1991), 124–31; Munson (2001), 142–4; Grethlein (2010), 152.

⁴⁷ On the question of whether Herodotus used what the priests and himself believed to be an Egyptian account, or a mixed Greek-Egyptian tradition, see Lloyd (1988), 46, 109; Nesselrath (1996), 288–91, and cf. Nesselrath (2013); de Jong (2012), 127–9.

Egyptian history, told and validated by the Egyptian priests, the keepers of old wisdom and facts.⁴⁸ Thus, the myth becomes a piece of historical evidence. But in the middle of this historicized tale, comes the question that evokes the epic formula (2.115.2): ἀνακομισθέντων δὲ πάντων, εἰρώτα τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον ὁ Πρωτεύς τίς εἶη καὶ ὁκόθεν πλέοι ('After all had arrived, Proteus asked Alexander who he was and whence he sailed').

Although Proteus's question is not identical to the Homeric formula, there is no mistaking its epic resonance, especially since its context is connected to the epic cycle.⁴⁹ This epic reverberation in a rationalized version of the Helen story, which is almost devoid of divine intervention,⁵⁰ might create the impression that Herodotus is wavering between *historia* and myth, either intentionally or because he was not completely detached from the epic tradition. It seems to me that this was not just an exercise in defying tradition by jumbling the myth's elements and then reconstructing it; Herodotus wished to make his version credible or more authoritative precisely by using familiar Homeric phraseology. The use of indirect speech, like in the Croesus Logos, seems to distance Herodotus's narrative from the epic tradition, thereby emphasizing the role of both the Egyptian priests and Herodotus as authoritative reporters. Moreover, although the situation is formulaic—an encounter between a stranger and a host—no hospitality is offered and *xenia*-relationships are not formed; how could *xenia* be formed with a man who had violated it?⁵¹ But the formulaic question itself and its context are clearly epic.

In Herodotus, the Helen Logos has a historical date: it is part of the history of Egypt under King Proteus. Herodotus begins by reporting that the kingship passed from Pheros to a man from Memphis, 'whose name, in the Greek language, was Proteus' (2.112.1). To Greek ears this name was of course more than a Greek form of an Egyptian name and would have immediately evoked the Homeric sea-god Proteus.⁵² The Egyptian priests, then (like the Learned Persians in Book 1), are portrayed as versed in Greek myths, but Greek readers would be alerted to the quasi-historical, quasi-mythical nature of the story by Herodotus's recourse to epic formulas. Whether contriving his own

⁴⁸ Cf. Stadter (2004), 35; Fowler (2011), 61. For analyses of Herodotus's Helen Logos, see also Fehling (1989), 59–65; Marincola (2006), 21; Grethlein (2010), 152–3; de Bakker (2012); de Jong (2012); Vandiver (2012), 146–55. On the Egyptian priests: Calame (2000), 159; de Jong (2012), 137.

⁴⁹ See 2.116–17. For a similar query see *Od.* 3.71 (addressed to Telemachus) and *Od.* 9.252 (addressed to Odysseus). Cf. Webber (1989), 4; Reece (1993), 26. De Jong (2012), 136, interprets Proteus's enquiry as a 'typically Herodotean story pattern of a king carrying out enquiries.' In reporting Alexander's answer, Herodotus also uses the epic verb καταλέγω (see e.g. *Il.* 9.262; 10.384; 24.380; *Od.* 1.169; 3.331; 4.239); see Finkelberg (1987), and Zelnick-Abramovitz (forthcoming), and below, section IV.

⁵⁰ It is only in the last sentence of this Logos (2.120.5) that Herodotus declares his opinion quite forcefully (ὡς μὲν ἐγὼ γνώμην ἀποφαίνομαι ... καὶ ταῦτα μὲν τῇ ἐμοὶ δοκέει εἶρηται) that Troy fell and so many men perished because great wrongdoings bring great retributions from the gods. See also below, and cf. Stadter (2004), 35, 39; Fowler (2009), 37; Grethlein (2010), 156–8.

⁵¹ The formulaic question indeed highlights Alexander's immoral behaviour. On *xenia* in this story, see Vandiver (2012), 146–55.

⁵² On Herodotus's reshaping of the figure of Proteus, see de Bakker (2012).

version or accepting the Egyptian version as the more correct, Herodotus interthreads the historical narrative with a myth and a typical Homeric situation. His use of epic language enhances the effect of historical continuity from the epic world to his own time.⁵³

The next two examples are different, as they do not immediately read as the reworking of known myths, but they still demonstrate Herodotus's method of embedding mythical and epic elements in the historical narrative.

III. THE MINYAE

My third example is one of several narrative threads, which, typically of Herodotus, diverge from the main storyline, but are then picked up again and merged into it. The main storyline is the Persian military expedition to Libya in the reign of Darius, mentioned briefly in 4.145.1, but immediately abandoned for the sake of another story and returned to only in 4.167. Between these two points, Herodotus recounts three traditions on the foundation of Cyrene (4.150–8), preceded by the story of the foundation of Thera (4.147–9), itself preceded by the story of the Minyae, a contingent of whom joined in colonizing Thera (4.145.2–148).

Driven out of Lemnos, the Minyae arrived at Sparta, sat on Mount Taÿgetus and kindled a fire. At this point, the Spartans 'sent a messenger to inquire who they were and whence they came' (ἄγγελον ἔπεμπον πεισόμενοι **τίνες τε καὶ ὀκόθεν εἰσί;** 4.145.3).⁵⁴ When the Minyae answered that they were the Argonauts' descendants, the Spartans again sent a messenger to ask what their purpose was in coming to this land and kindling fire. The Minyae said that, expelled by the Pelasgians, they came to 'their fathers' and asked to live with the Spartans, have a share in their rights and be given land. Induced especially by the fact that the Dioscuri were among the Argonauts, the Spartans accepted the Minyae and their demands and intermarried with them.⁵⁵ Later, some of the Minyae joined Theras in founding Thera.

Herodotus adopted the myth of the Argonauts' Minyan origin, but the other details are otherwise not attested in any earlier text,⁵⁶ although they appear in later

⁵³ Cf. Stadter (2004), 33–4, and 38 ('Myth becomes history, history becomes myth'). Pelling (1999), 333–5, argues that the 'textual to-and fro' between the *spatium mythicum* and the *spatium historicum* is Herodotus's way of making sense of events. According to Thomas (2001), esp. 210, in Book 2 Herodotus grapples with the need to incorporate the Homeric poems and 'to rationalize and incorporate the Greek traditions of painfully short time-span into the artificially lengthened extent of the Egyptian past.'

⁵⁴ A different version of the story is found in Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.4.11, and Diod. Sic. 4.10.3. See Harrison (2002), 108 and n. 23.

⁵⁵ Afterwards, the Minyae demanded a share in the kingship and were arrested. They were smuggled out of prison by their Spartan wives, who exchanged clothes with them, and then settled again on the Taÿgetus (4.146). See Calame (2003), 87–8. For the motif of swapping clothes see also Ps.-Plut. *Parallela Minora* 30a = Dositheus, *FGrH* 290 F5.

⁵⁶ Pind. *Pyth.* 4.252–9 mentions the Minyae's coming to Lemnos, but not their descendants' expulsion from there, and refers briefly to their coming later to Laconia but not to what happened there. For Herodotus's insertion of the Argonauts' myth in Book 4, see Zali (2018), 129–31.

sources.⁵⁷ For his narrative purposes, Herodotus seems to have modified the story he received, conceivably from a Spartan source (seeking to emphasize Sparta's involvement in the foundation of Thera),⁵⁸ and he presents the Minyae's myth as part of the historical narrative.⁵⁹

The Minyae's act of sitting on the Taÿgetus and lighting fire has been interpreted in different ways.⁶⁰ I argue that Herodotus's narrative here and his use of the formulaic question aim to portray the Minyae as suppliants, who request to settle in Sparta with equal rights, and the formulaic question helps to identify them as such. Indeed, Apollonius Rhodius (4.1759–61), in a version that differs only slightly from Herodotus's, describes how the Minyae, descendants of Euphamus, an Argonaut and ancestor of the Battidae in Thera (Pind. *Pyth.* 4.44–52), were driven from Lemnos by the Tyrrhenians and came to Sparta as ἐφέστιοι, 'those who come to the hearth (*hestia*)' (Σπάρτην εἰσαφίκανον ἐφέστιοι). Those who 'come to the hearth' of others are strangers who seek protection and hospitality, suppliants. As such, they are in a vulnerable position until they are granted their request. Remember that Croesus (1.35.3, discussed above in section I) explicitly refers to Adrastus as ἐπίστιος (= ἐφέστιος). The *scholia* to Apollonius, lines 1760–1 (p. 327 Wendell), gloss ἐφέστιοι as ἐποικοί, a word which mostly denoted 'additional settlers', and this is exactly what the Minyae in Herodotus's narrative request to become.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Paus. 7.2.2; Val. Max. 4.6. ext. 3. For other traditions, identifying the Pelasgians with the Etruscans, see Hellenic. *FGrH* 4 F 4; Th. 4.109; Philoch. *FGrH* 328 F 100–1; Ap. Rhod. 4.1755–64; Plut. *De mul. vir.* 8, 247A–F *Quaest. Gr.* 21, 296B; Polyaeus, *Strat.* 7.49.

⁵⁸ Macan (1895), ad loc. Fehling (1989), 91–92, argues that Herodotus ascribes various parts of an integral story to three sources; Evans (2013), 116, 122, suggests that Herodotus relied on professionals from Sparta, Thera, and Cyrene, whose role was to provide 'official' accounts of events. Note that in 4.150.1 Herodotus says that the Spartan and the Theran versions coincide.

⁵⁹ Thomas (2018), 270–84, is a valuable analysis of Pindar's and Herodotus's narratives of the histories of Cyrene and Thera. As she rightly observes, Herodotus seems to have had no doubt about the story's validity and he presents 'the Minyae part of the tale as uncontroversial' (274), rationalizing it to make it plausible (276).

⁶⁰ Blakesley (1854), ad loc., suggested to connect the fire to Hephaestus's cult and the fire rituals associated with Lemnos (on which see Philostr. *Her.* 53.5–7; cf. Burkert 1970). How and Wells (1928), and Macan (1895), ad 4.145, interpret this story as preserving memories of pre-Dorian populations in Laconia (see also Conon, *Narr.* 36, with the comments of Brown (2002), 248–50; Nic. Dam. *FGrH* 90 F 28). Macan (1895), ad loc. also suggests to link the fire to the Sun-worship on Taleton, the highest summit of Taÿgetus, which, according to Pausanias (3.20.4), was sacred to Helios. Malkin (1987), 117, 121–2, 133–4, followed by Asheri (2007), 672, argues that the fire signifies the sacred fire customarily transferred by colonists from their metropolis to a new settlement. However, the Minyae did not bring fire from Lemnos but lit a new one; they were *driven* away, not sent as colonists; and they ask to live *with* the Spartans, not to found a new settlement. Calame (2003), 87–8, and (2014), 323 n. 99, suggests that the fire marks the Minyae's claim to return to their forefathers' land and may be interpreted as a sacrifice to Hestia.

⁶¹ On this meaning of *epoikoi* see e.g. Arist. *Pol.* 1303A 28. See also Ehrenberg (1952); Casevitz (1985), 153–60; Figueira (1991), 24, 36, 175, 198, and 230.

Three elements in Herodotus's narrative may prove that he considers the Minyae suppliants.⁶² First, the Minyae come as refugees. In the ancient literature, many suppliants come as refugees or outcasts, such as Theoclymenus and Adrastus (described as ἐπίστιος), discussed above, or the Danaids in Aeschylus's *Suppliants* and the Heraclidae in Euripides's play of that name. Second, they sit (ἰζόμενοι, 4.145.2) on the Ταῦγετος. Sitting, as well as crouching, is one of the positions taken by suppliants and symbolizes their vulnerable situation.⁶³ Third, in several cases we find suppliants coming to the *hestia* of the person or the community to whom they supplicate. Thus Themistocles, seeking refuge with Admetus, King of the Molossians, sits by the king's hearth holding the latter's infant in his arms (Thuc. 1.136.3).⁶⁴ The hearth plays an important part in the *Odyssey*, and the formula ἴστω νῦν Ζεὺς πρῶτα θεῶν, ξενίη τε τράπεζα, | ἰστίη τ' Ὀδυσῆος ἀμύμονος, ἦν ἀφικάνω (14.158–9, 17.155–6: 'Now let Zeus know, before all gods, and the hospitable table and the hearth of noble Odysseus, to which I come'), or ἴστω νῦν Ζεὺς πρῶτα, θεῶν ὕπατος καὶ ἄριστος, | ἰστίη τ' Ὀδυσῆος ἀμύμονος, ἦν ἀφικάνω (19.303–4, 20.231–2: 'Now let Zeus know, the highest and best of all gods, and the hearth of noble Odysseus, to which I come') presents Odysseus' hearth as the haven of all visitors (in 17.156 it is the shelter of Theoclymenus, who—as mentioned above—is a refugee guilty of killing a kin like Adrastus). Valerius Maximus (4.6, ext. 3), whose version is clearly based on Herodotus 4.145, writes that the Minyae 'occupied the ridges of the Ταῦγετος as suppliants (*supplices*)'. Like the Danaids in Aeschylus's *Suppliants*, who sit by the altars of the ἀγώνιοι θεοί, gods of the Assembly (Il. 189, 242, 333), before addressing their plea to the king,⁶⁵ the Minyae may have kindled a fire to symbolize a public hearth.

If I am right that the Minyae in Herodotus's text are suppliants, asking for protection and hospitality, the question posed to them, τίνας τε καὶ ὁκόθεν εἰσί, accords with the stock scene of welcoming strangers, who come to the hearth (private or public) and ask for protection or integration. Whether Herodotus merely repeated what he was told or whether he invented this part, its incorporation into the historical narrative of the colonization of Thera and Cyrene again shows how he historicizes a myth but keeps its mythic flavor: the epic formula and the heroic lineage of the Minyae remind us that at least this part of the story is linked to the mythical sphere.⁶⁶ The history of Thera and Cyrene is thus presented as stretching continuously from the remote and mythical past of the Argonauts and Minyae to Herodotus's present.

⁶² For the characteristics of supplications see Gould (1973); Naiden (2006).

⁶³ E.g. Aesch. *Suppl.* 189, 365–6; *Eum.* 41–2; Soph. *OT* 12–13; Thuc. 1.136.3 and Plut. *Them.* 24.3 (on Themistocles' supplication in the house of Admetus, King of the Molossians; see below). Another attested posture is prostration (προσπίπτειν), e.g. in one of Plutarch's versions of Themistocles' supplication. Cf. Gould (1973), 76.

⁶⁴ Cf. Aesch. *Suppl.* 365–6, 503; Soph. *OT* 32; *Tr.* 262; Th. 1.136.3; Plut. *Them.* 24.3. See also Aesch. *Eu.* 577; *Suppl.* 365; Gould (1973), 97–8; Naiden (2006), 39; Parker (1996), 24. On supplication to the political institutions in Classical Athens see Zelnick-Abramovitz (1998).

⁶⁵ Zelnick-Abramovitz (1998), 570.

⁶⁶ Asheri (2007), 672 sees in Herodotus's description of the Minyae as τῶν ἐκ τῆς Ἀργούδος ἐπιβατέων παίδων παῖδες ('the children of the children of those sailing on the Argo,' 1.145.2), an 'epic-sounding' expression, citing *Il.* 20.308.

IV. XERXES AND PYTHIUS

This last example is also embedded in a historical narrative. The Persian king Xerxes, on his way to invade Greece, is entertained with his whole army in the Phrygian city of Celaenae by Pythius son of Atys, a Lydian, who also offers to donate money for the war. So the king asks the men present ‘who among men this Pythius is’ (τίς ... ἐὼν ἀνδρῶν Πύθιος) and how much wealth he possesses in making this offer (7.27.2). When the men answer that Pythius is the man who gave a generous gift to Xerxes’s father Darius and that he is the richest man known after Xerxes, the king himself asks Pythius how much wealth he has. Pythius’s answer is also reminiscent of Homeric parlance: ἀλλ’ ἐπιστάμενός τοι ἀτρεκέως καταλέξω (‘but knowing, I will tell you accurately’),⁶⁷ and he promises to give Xerxes all his enormous fortune (7.28.1). Xerxes gratefully declines and instead rewards Pythius by making him his friend (*xeinós*) and increasing his fortune (7.29.2). But later, when Pythius, frightened by an eclipse, asks Xerxes to exempt his eldest son from joining the military expedition, he is punished cruelly: Xerxes orders that this son be cut in two and that the army march between the two halves (7.38–9).

It has been noted that the fate of Pythius’s son resembles that of Oeobazus’s three sons (Hdt. 4.83–4), whom Darius executed, and that the two stories highlight the Persian kings’ cruelty, to be visited by the gods’ wrath (in both cases, the failure of the Persian invasions—against the Scythians and against Greece), or reflect a Persian point of view.⁶⁸ Thomas also suggests that cutting Pythius’s son in twain should be seen as referring to a Near Eastern purification ritual and that Herodotus retells an Eastern story but shifts the emphasis to the cruelty of the Persian king.⁶⁹ Another possible intertextual link may be embodied in Pythius himself. Scholars have suggested that Atys, Pythius’s father, was Croesus’s son,⁷⁰ whose story has been discussed above. It might be argued that had Herodotus known of such a connection he would not have missed the opportunity to point it out so as to enhance the dramatic effect and stress that Croesus’s punishment extended to his grandson’s time. Nevertheless, as Lewis (1998), 186, rightly notes, there are enough indications in the story to suggest a possible connection between the historical Pythius and the half-mythical Atys.⁷¹

Moreover, just before narrating this episode Herodotus recounts how Xerxes’s army entered the Phrygian city of Celaenae, adding that the ‘skin of Marsyas the Silenus also

⁶⁷ For Homeric parallels, see e.g. *Il.* 10.384, *Od.* 1.169, and section *I* above. Although perhaps ‘hardly appropriate in the mouth of Pythius’ (Macan 1895, ad loc.), this Homeric allusion helps to enhance the epic aura of the tale. Cf. Boedeker (2002), 101–2; Montiglio (2005), 142–4. Note that the words ἀτρεκέως καταλέξω are also hexametrical (— — — — —).

⁶⁸ See Thomas (2012), 236–42. Fisher (1992), 378–9, 383, interprets these episodes as reflecting the Persian *nomos* of exacting absolute obedience from the Empire’s subjects (‘slaves’). For Baragwanath (2008), 271–78, these punishments are a rational response to breaches of *xenia* relations. Note, however, that the Persian kings’ cruelty and excessiveness, punished in their turn, is a recurrent motif in Herodotus.

⁶⁹ Thomas (2012), 235–44 (with bibliography), argues that this story manifests the Greeks’ fascination with the East and its cultures.

⁷⁰ How and Wells (1928), ad loc.; Macan (1895), ad loc.; Lewis (1998), 189; Fisher (2002), 206; Baragwanath (2008), 270.

⁷¹ See also Thomas (2012), 243–4 for other connections to the Croesus Logos.

hangs there, which, according to the Phrygian story (*logos*), had been flayed and hung there by Apollo (7.26.3).⁷² Like the Persian *logioi* and the Egyptian priests, the Phrygians are here credited with knowledge of a Greek myth (or, at least, one version of it). And as in the Helen Logos in Book 2, Herodotus seems to adapt a myth while giving it a rational context. Even if the identification of Pythius's father with Croesus's son is a modern construct, the mention of the Phrygian myth and city in connection to Xerxes's encounter with Pythius must have evoked in the minds of Herodotus's audience the Croesus's Logos. By reminding his audience of the myths of Atyr and Marsyas (who, like Croesus, was visited by a god's wrath⁷³), Herodotus presents a chain of events, stretching from mythical times through Croesus, and reaching Xerxes's campaign.

The Xerxes-Pythius meeting is not, of course, a typical Homeric welcoming-situation: Xerxes is the guest, not the host, and he uses only half of the formulaic question. Moreover, the formulaic question is addressed by Xerxes to his people, not directly to Pythius.⁷⁴ But the words τίς τε ἐὼν ἀνδρῶν and ἀλλ' ἐπιστάμενός τοι ἀτρεκέως καταλέξω are clearly epic formulas and could not have failed to remind Herodotus's audience of the epic language and scenes. The inverted situation is also reminiscent of the encounter between Theoclymenus and Telemachus in *Odyssey*, 15.264, and of Alexander's behavior in Herodotus's Helen Logos, thus emphasizing the broken rules of *xenia* and, in Pythius's case, also the Persian king's cruelty.⁷⁵ Xerxes's cruelty also evokes the violation of all rules of *xenia* by Poliphemus in *Odyssey* 9, whose almost formulaic question to Odysseus and his men (ὦ ξεῖνοι, τίνας ἐστέ; πόθεν πλεῖθ' ὕγρὰ κέλευθα; 252) is belied by his actions. Macan (1895), ad loc., commented that the formulaic phrase is 'hardly appropriate in the mouth of Pythius'; but I argue that this non-heroic, but tragic, figure was chosen by Herodotus to utter epic words as an actor in a welcoming scene which went wrong, perhaps because Herodotus knew of Pythius's possible connection to Croesus's son. Thus the epic phrases find a natural place in the historical narrative and are harnessed to adorn the text with epic dignity as well as to link it to the remote past.⁷⁶

⁷² Herodotus's use of the word *logos* might seem to confer a more historical tint to it, but the word is used in his work for myths as well, e.g. 1.5.3; cf. Dillery (2018), 51. See Chiasson (2005) for similar views regarding Herodotus's treatment of the story of Cleobis and Biton—also presented as *logos* (1.31.2).

⁷³ See Bowie (2012), 275.

⁷⁴ As pointed out by an anonymous reader for *SCI*, the question might also be consistent with the Persian kings' habit, as when Cyrus asks about the Spartans (Hdt. 1.153.1) or Darius about the Paeonians (Hdt. 5.13.2) and the Athenians (5.105.1). But these questions do not have the epic formulation.

⁷⁵ Thomas (2012), 244, argues that Xerxes is presented as operating a system of reciprocity that does not work and that this is Herodotus's elaboration (or 'addition') of the Pythius story. Baragwanath (2008), 271–8, emphasizes Pythius's contribution to the breach of *xenia* relationship by demanding to exempt his son from fighting.

⁷⁶ The story of Pythius and Xerxes also has tragic features, in the same way as the story of Adrastus and Croesus (as well as that of Gyges, the cause of this chain of tragic events). It also appears with some variants of the name and location in later authors, who all stress Pythius's wealth: Plut. *De mul. vir.* 27; Plin. *HN* 33.47(10); Steph. Byz. (*Ethnica*, s.v. Πυθόπολις); Sen. *De ira* 3.16.

It seems that here Herodotus used a local tale, which may have had a historical kernel but by his time had acquired legendary elements.⁷⁷ I suggest that he adapted this story in a way that would suit the lesson he wished to convey, as formulated in his conclusion to the Helen Logos (2.120.5), ‘that great wrongdoings bring great retributions from the gods.’ In Herodotus’s work, Xerxes concludes the historical narrative that started with Croesus. These two kings frame the *Histories*: Croesus, the historical instigator of the hostilities between Asia and Europe, and Xerxes, the party who ended it, were both punished, for over-confidence, for imperialistic drive or for *hybris*.⁷⁸ If we accept the connection of the Xerxes-Pythius story to that of Croesus-Adrastus via the figure of Atys, we cannot avoid noticing the overarching theme that all non-Greek kings were guilty of wrongdoing or *hybris*.⁷⁹ It may also be significant that on his way to Celaenae and before meeting Pythius, Xerxes crosses the river Halys—thus reminding us of the oracle given to Croesus, that if he crossed the Halys he would destroy a great kingdom, which turned out to be his own (1.53, 76); here too the Persians cross the river on their way to disaster.

3 CONCLUSIONS

Focusing on four passages where Herodotus employs the epic formulaic question addressed to strangers in typical welcome situations: ‘Who are you and whence do you come?’, I examined how he handles epic language and traditional stories and merges them with the historical narrative. The non-mythical contexts in which this formula is embedded indicate that it has a special significance.⁸⁰ These passages, moreover, show us the historian at work, adapting and integrating traditional stories and epic formulas into the historical narrative, and even creating (or repeating) less familiar variations, building on the stories of other nations and interlacing names and details he picked from different sources to mold his own narrative.⁸¹

⁷⁷ The Pythius episode may have reached Herodotus already as a mixture of history and legend. Lewis (1998) argues that Herodotus based the story on the Phrygian form of the myth but gave it a Greek form. Macan (1895), ad 7.27, How and Wells (1928), ad loc., and Lewis (1998), 186, detect in the name Pythius or Pythes possible evidence of Croesus’s relations with Delphi. For Herodotus’s ‘shift of emphasis’ in the Pythius story to moral disapproval see Thomas (2012), 252.

⁷⁸ See Fisher (1992), 359–60, who analyzes three ‘models of divine reaction to human prosperity, wrongdoings or mistakes.’ Cf. Harrison (2002), 105, 108, 171, and 238.

⁷⁹ See Immerwahr (1966), 154–61; Marincola (2018), 4. Fisher (1992), 358–9 correctly emphasizes that in the Croesus-Atys-Adrastus episode the king is not guilty of *hybris*, but his expansionistic desire, leading to hybrisic acts, is presented as common to all Eastern kings (359).

⁸⁰ Likewise, Herodotus’s use of the ‘razor’s edge’ metaphor (6.11.1–2), evidently in imitation of Homer (*Il.* 10.173–4), attracts attention to the critical situation in both cases; see Boedeker (2002), 101–2, and Pelling (2006), 80–1. Note also the word ἄφλαστον, used only in Homer, *Il.* 15.717 and in Herodotus 6.114, and Flower’s comment (1998), 376 n. 52, that Homeric touches in Herodotus lend a heroic aura to the narrated events and that Herodotus’s audience ‘would have been attuned to this literary device’.

⁸¹ See Luraghi (2013), 108–10.

Nonetheless, these passages also diverge in significant ways from the epic. First, the gestures and other physical features of the stock situation—as seen, for example, in *Od.* 1.102–43—are absent from Herodotus’s text. Herodotus mentions actual entertainment only in 1.34–45 (Croesus and Adrastus). This can be explained by the second difference: Herodotus often disconnects the *hokothen*-formula from its original use, thus giving it a new context in a new genre: in the Helen Logos it has ironic connotations, because Proteus—and Herodotus’s audience—are well aware of how Alexander violated the rules of hospitality, so the formulaic question highlights his deception. Moreover, no *xenia*-relationship is created between Proteus, the host, and Alexander, the guest. The Minyae come as a group and their wish to receive protection and political integration is signaled by their sitting far from the city and kindling fire. The formulaic question is addressed to them *before* they are given hospitality and by proxy. This story also shows the breach of *xenia*, since shortly after the Minyae were accepted by the Spartans, they acted insolently and did other impious deeds (4.146.1: ἐξύβρισαν ... καὶ ἄλλα ποιέοντες οὐκ ὄσια). In Pythius’s story too, the situation is reversed: It is the visitor, the king, who asks for the identity of the host, and the relationship created eventually has disastrous ramifications. It is only in the Croesus story that the formula is used in a real hospitality scene, but this hospitality too is revealed to be ruinous. Indeed, in *all* four cases, hospitality has an unfortunate outcome, even if not immediately. Thus Herodotus imitates and connects himself to Homer, by using the epic ritualistic act and its traditional outcome but also by giving the hospitality scenes a twisted, often contrary, implications—again with Homeric precedence, that of the Cyclops and Circe in *Odyssey* 9.252 and 10.325 respectively.⁸²

This device is clearly demonstrated in the repetition of the formulaic question in Croesus’s story, first in indirect, then in direct speech. Herodotus uses the *hokothen*-question mostly in indirect speech, which helps to distance the story from its original mythical background and make it part of the historical, detached narrative.⁸³ In contrast, the direct (and more elaborate) question that immediately follows Croesus’s reported question makes the story more vivid, as if abruptly raising the curtain on a typical Homeric scene.⁸⁴ Furthermore, as noted above, the repeated question also has a Homeric echo in Nestor’s repeated question in the *Odyssey*, 3.69–71. We may also say that Herodotus repeats the question in order to endow his narrative with the authority of a narrator of the remote past events, which had been, and to some extent still was, the prerogative of Homer.

Moreover, except in the case of the Minyae, who are accepted by the Spartans, all the “hosts” are non-Greek, who know and practice Greek customs and rituals.⁸⁵ This accords with Herodotus’s ascription of the knowledge of Greek myths to non-Greeks (the Persians in 1.1–4, the Phoenicians in 1.5, and the Egyptian priests in 2.113–19), and

⁸² See Vandiver (2012).

⁸³ Cf. Waters (1985), 69; Bers (1997), 220; de Jong (2004), 109.

⁸⁴ Waters (1985), 69 argues that by combining direct and indirect speech Herodotus seeks variety, but he discusses cases where the variety takes the form of questions and replies, not as in *Hdt.* 1.35.

⁸⁵ Even in the case of the Spartans, it may be noted that Herodotus considers them as not really Greeks; see e.g. 6.53–60, esp. 58–60.

his attribution of much of the Greeks' religious practices to the Egyptians. And it is the Egyptian king who acts according to the Greek moral principles of guest-host relationships and cautions against transgressing the boundaries between the human and divine spheres.⁸⁶

In addition, because of the contexts in which it is used, the formulaic question also attracts attention to key moments in the narrative:⁸⁷ the coming of a guest who will be the killer of his host's son, thus embodying divine retribution; the coming of a violator of *xenia*, who will be the cause of a great war; the coming of suppliants who will join in the foundation an important city; and a meeting with a *xenos* who is wronged by his *xenos* and connects the narrative to the *archē* of all wrongs.

The particular way in which Herodotus handles his material and maneuvers between the mythical and the more historical building blocks of his narrative adds yet another dimension. As argued by Stadter in his discussion of Herodotus's Helen Logos (2004, 38), 'the epic past gives depth and meaning to the events of recent historical time.'⁸⁸ By using the epic language, Herodotus links the historical narrative to a mythical or traditional background even in non-epic or non-mythic scenes. The stories of Croesus, Helen, the Minyae, and Pythius become part of the wider context of the *Histories*, of the relations between the Persian, Lydian, Egyptian, and Greek histories.⁸⁹ The long history of the formula discussed in this paper (see n. 27, above) corroborates my conclusions and points to the question's unmistakable epic echo.⁹⁰ As Marincola (2006), 14, notes in discussing examples of Homeric echoes (Hdt. 8.68.1 ~ *Il.* 1.297 and Hdt. 3.14.10 ~ *Il.* 22.60):

Herodotus' original audience would not have failed to hear Homeric echoes ... It is more difficult, of course, to know how one should interpret such echoes, though they certainly seem to invest the scenes in which they appear with solemnity or at the very least suggest a sense of something extraordinary or noteworthy.

Tel Aviv University

⁸⁶ See Havelock (1963), 76: 'the epic idiom becomes a preservative at once of familiar and proper customs and of acceptable and worthy habits and attitudes.'

⁸⁷ See Baragwanath and de Bakker (2012), 43–4.

⁸⁸ See also Stadter (2004), 42–3; Dover (1997), 95, 109; Pelling (1999), 344; Baragwanath and de Bakker (2012), 44. In the spirit of the reader-response theory (see Baragwanath 2008) we may add that the Herodotus's endeavor to describe a great war and his use of epic language create in his readers' minds expectations and associations with Homer. See also Boedeker (2002), 104, on the Homeric-sounding speeches in Herodotus; and (2011), 139, where she suggests that 'intertextual resonance may enrich, or even undercut, the surface meaning of the prose account.'

⁸⁹ Cf. Boedeker (2002), 116; Pelling (2006), 77–81.

⁹⁰ Likewise, the phrases 'The lady doth protest too much, methinks' and 'To be or not to be', which entered quotidian parlance, are recognized as Shakespearean even by those who do not know their Shakespeare. On literary quotations and allusions, see, e.g., Irwin (2001), 296; Quassdorf (2008), and (2012); and O'Gorman (2005), on citations in Seneca.

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