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HERODOTUS' LITERARY AND HISTORICAL METHOD: ARION'S STORY (1.23–24)

VIVIENNE GRAY



HERODOTUS' STORY OF HOW the talented and original musical performer and conductor Arion of Methymna was rescued from the sea and carried to dry land by a dolphin is of great interest because of the literary and historical methods he uses.¹ The story arises out of the siege of Miletus and is connected with it through Periander (1.20, 1.24.1, 7), but different readings have been presented in order to make a better connection with the immediate or wider context.² Questions have also been raised about the authenticity of Herodotus' inquiry and his own belief in the miracle.³ His normal inquiry (*historia*) involves *akoe* (what he heard), *opsis* (what he saw), and *gnome* (his judgment).⁴ He tells Arion's story mainly on the authority of the traditions of the Corinthians and Lesbians, whose agreement on it frames the story.⁵ He supplements this *akoe* with

¹ Long 1987, 51–60, has a general bibliography; also Munson 1986.

² Munson 1986, 95: "it has nothing to do with Lydians or Milesians, protagonists of the narrative from which it originates; it does not define in any way Periander, to whose mention it is attached, but whose role it keeps to a minimum." But Shwabl (1969, 259–61) saw a close analogy between the story of Arion and the story of Alyattes of Lydia, which precedes it, and related Periander's appearance to a wider analogy between the kings of Lydia and tyrants of Corinth. Cobet (1972, 146–50) pressed a different analogy between the two stories, of hope disappointed. Wood (1972, 23ff., in passing), saw Arion's story as a prefiguration of Croesus' amazing salvation by Apollo, as well as an illustration of the "magnificence" of Periander. Flory (1978) found analogies for "Arion's leap" as a gesture of human resilience. Munson (1986, 98) found the story "analogous to the work as a whole," with dualities of civilization/savagery, violence/virtue. Erbse (1992, 156) saw it as another story illustrating Herodotus' favorite concept of "balance."

³ Fehling 1989 (1971), Gould 1989, Erbse 1991 and 1992, and Fowler 1996 offer a range of views. Thomas 1996 calls for more interest in the nature of the oral traditions that Herodotus used and the ways in which he adapted them.

⁴ Hdt. 2.99.1.

⁵ "[T]he Corinthians say and the Lesbians agree with them," 1.23.1; "the Corinthians and the Lesbians together say this," 24.8; See Evans 1991, 109–13, on interlocking traditions; Immerwahr 1966, 12, 52–58; Long 1987, 16–17, on frames; and more recently Munson 1993.

apparent *opsis*, in the form of a “material proof”: the dedication “of Arion” on a statue of a man on a dolphin, at Taenarum, to which his sources said the dolphin carried him. The genitive case of the dedication suggests that Arion dedicated it and inscribed it with his name.⁶ And Herodotus’ description of the statue as “bronze, not big” suggests that he saw it. But he does not add his own *gnome* of belief, or disbelief, in the miracle.

I would like to offer a new reading of Arion’s story that combines insights into Herodotus’ presentation of it and its context with some comments on Herodotus’ own beliefs and his use of the oral traditions available to him.

THE STORY

The story goes that Arion had been spending most of his time at the court of Periander. Periander plays an important role in the story: his experience of Arion’s miracle is the focus from beginning to end. The traditions that Herodotus cites present the story as a “very great wonder” (θῶμα μέγιστον) that “occurred to Periander in his lifetime” (1.23.1). They give an account of how it happened, and say that Arion gave an account to Periander, presumably in the same form (1.24.6). Periander experiences “disbelief” as a result of the “wonder” but conducts an “inquiry” that shows it to be true.⁷

Arion decides to go west to acquire his fortune. He hires a Corinthian ship to take him back to Corinth, but the crew plots to rob him and make him kill himself, giving him a choice that seems to be no choice (ἐξ ἀπορίην): to kill himself on board and be buried, or to jump overboard (and not be buried). Arion promises to kill himself, but first secures the crew’s permission to give a last performance, which he does in full dress, of “the shrill/rising tune” (νόμον τὸν ὄρθιον).⁸ He then makes what appears to be the worse choice and jumps overboard, whereupon a dolphin rescues him and carries him safely to Taenarum.

⁶ 1.51.3 deals with a forged claim, using the genitive to imply ownership (τῷ χρυσέῳ ἐπιγέγραπται Λακεδαιμονίων φαμένων εἶναι ἀνάθημα, οὐκ ὀρθῶς λέγοντες); see also 1.14.2, and 4.15: “a statue with the name of Aristaeas of Proconnesus.”

⁷ Fowler (1996, 80) notes that Periander is an inquirer, but he does not focus on Arion’s story.

⁸ The *nomos orthios* was a hymn to the gods sung to the kithara: Ps. Plut. On Music 1133B–C. Barker (1984, 249–55) argues that *nomoi* were classified variously by rhythm or pitch or cult and notes, and (38), that Terpander’s *orthios nomos* began with praise of Apollo.

Herodotus does not explain Arion's choice or directly connect his performance with his rescue, but Arion's religious dedication (ἀνάθημα) at Taenarum implies that Arion, at least, believed that the dolphin came as a divine agent (1.24.8). Poseidon had a very famous shrine at Taenarum and was thought to save men from disaster at sea by sending his dolphin to assist them.⁹ Similar patterns of action in other stories strengthen the hypothesis that Arion has appealed to some divine force to rescue him.¹⁰ Croesus, for example, secures his divine salvation by shouting out to the god Apollo, appealing to him to stand by and deliver him from death if ever he has given him any gift that pleased him (1.87.1). Arion sings (ἀείσσει) instead of shouting, but a song from the world's best *kitharode* (1.23) is bound very much to please the god to whom it is addressed.¹¹ The Magi sacrifice and sing (καταείδοντες) to the god of the wind and sacrifice to Thetis and the Nereids of the sea in order to quell a storm that is threatening them and prevent further harm to the Persian fleet (7.191). The Greeks credit the storm to "savior Poseidon" (7.192).

Similar patterns illuminate the second of Arion's actions, when he casts himself (ῥίψαι . . . ἐωυτόν) into the sea. Xerxes, for example, enacts a ritual performance at the Hellespont to protect himself against harm, pouring libations from a golden bowl into the sea, praying to the sun, and casting the bowl and other offerings into the sea. In his account of the incident, Herodotus is unsure whether Xerxes was dedicating his actions to the sun or placating the sea, which he had just lashed, but allows for the latter (7.54). Arion leaps overboard (ἐκπηδᾶν) just as Xerxes' Persians leap overboard (ἐκπηδᾶν) during another storm, thereby securing the salvation of their king (8.118).¹² In another story, Polycrates sails out to sea (πέλαγος) in order to ward off the envy of the gods, particularly perhaps those of the sea that surrounds his island, and in sight of those on board casts (ῥίπτει) his ring into it (3.41). Arion trusts in divine power to save him, and he is vindicated. He has no chance of surviving if he stays on board the ship; in the sea, he has some. He throws himself into the sea as others throw in their more concrete dedications, hoping that

⁹ Taenarum's sanctuary of Poseidon was famous in Herodotus' time: Thuc. 1.128.1 and 133; 7.19.4. West IEG 1. Archilochus fr. 192 describes the dolphin's rescue of Koiranos from disaster at sea and fr. 9 links the threat of drowning with lack of proper burial, as in Arion's story. Bowra 1963 shows that the later tradition saw Arion's savior as Poseidon.

¹⁰ Herodotus works in patterns. Aly (1969 [1921]) was a pioneer in the identification of patterns in the traditional tale. See Propp 1968 for their classification and Kazazis 1978 for their application to Herodotus. See also Gray 1996, 1997.

¹¹ Songs of course please the gods: e.g., *Il.* 1.472–73.

¹² Flory 1978 offers Prexaspes' leap as an analogy for Arion's: 3.74–75. But the analogies of experiences at sea seem more compelling.

his life will be returned to him. So in order to secure his escape he asks the crew to let him give this performance—as heroes engineer escapes in other such stories.¹³ The crew think they will just have the pleasure of listening to the world’s best singer, but he is ensuring that he will live to see them back in Corinth. An *orthios nomos* such as the one Arion performs could honor Apollo, because he is the patron of the kithara that is used to accompany it. But the principal god of the open sea (πέλαγος, 1.23.2) into which Arion jumped was Poseidon, and Arion might more naturally have had this god in mind. It is entirely appropriate that Arion, who began his journey at Taras, a place named for the son of Poseidon, should then land at Poseidon’s sanctuary on Taenarum. As Poseidon’s agent, the dolphin would naturally bring him to this sanctuary, and Arion followed the usual procedures of the Greeks in his dedication, thanking Poseidon for salvation from the sea.

Herodotus is fond of crises of long anticipation and brief denouement—as, for example, in his delayed revelation that Harpagus was feasting on the cooked parts of his own son (1.119). Arion’s long anticipation of rescue leads to a denouement that is similarly dismissed in only a few words: “they say the dolphin picked him up and carried him to Taenarum” (1.24.6). But it is also possible that Herodotus is avoiding explicit description of the miraculous part of the story. He is also allusive, rather than explicit, about the reasons for Arion’s salvation. The reasons for this will be discussed below in reference to his beliefs.

The second crisis of the tale occurs when Arion tells Periander “all the detail of what happened.”¹⁴ Periander detains Arion “out of disbelief” (Περίανδρον δὲ ὑπὸ ἀπιστίας Ἀρίονα μὲν ἐν φυλακῇ ἔχειν οὐδαμῆ μετέντα, 1.24.7), then “inquires” (ἰστορέεσθαι) of the crew, when they dock, whether they had a tale to tell. They do indeed: that they left Arion safe and sound in Taras and doing well. But Arion at this point appears as he was when he left their ship (he has held on to his professional gear throughout the journey back).¹⁵ The crew are “thunderstruck” (ἐκπλα-

¹³ Compare the escape of Hegesistratus from certain death: 9.37.

¹⁴ Erbse (1992, 154) notes the two foci of the story but not their connection.

¹⁵ Herodotus repeatedly mentions his gear. Repetitions are part of his style (Long 1986) and often significant. The emphasis has been thought to indicate the origins of the tale in a performance (Erbse 1992, 153–56; see also Bowra 1963), or to show him as a poet “armed for danger” and saved through the grace of Apollo (Munson 1986, 99). Costume does equal identity (7.15.3), but Poseidon seems to be the god who saves him. Flory 1978, 413f. sees his robing as proof of his calmness in danger, but this does not explain the continued emphasis once the danger is past: 1.24.6–7. Perhaps it shows how completely the god answered his prayer, returning Arion to Corinth intact, like Polycrates’ ring, only on

γέντας), “refuted” (ἐλεγχομένου), and no longer able to deny (ἀρνέεσθαι) Arion’s story. Periander concludes that his disbelief in the miracle is unwarranted. Herodotus’ account does not elaborate on the punishment that Periander could have imposed on Arion had he been found guilty of lying, because it is focused on the intellectual rather than the legal implications of the inquiry. It is no simple story of crime and punishment.

Periander’s inquiry, like the story of the miracle, follows a stereotyped pattern. Astyages, for example, in his search for the culprit who let his grandson live, subjects a herdsman to torture and hears an account that he believes (torture being a generally accepted instrument for screwing out the truth). He summons the real guilty party, Harpagus, as a second witness. Harpagus decides not to lie but to tell the truth because he sees the herdsman at the court and fears refutation (ἵνα μὴ ἐλεγχόμενος ἀλίσκεται, 1.117). In this instance of the pattern, Harpagus is to the Corinthian crew as the herdsman is to Arion. In another, more transparent example of the pattern, the Persian forces, when they hear a messenger’s account of the flight of the Greek fleet from Artemisium (8.23.1), detain the messenger (ἐν φυλακῇ) and send men in ships to confirm (or refute) his story. A third instance is the Tegean metalworker who wondered at the size of the coffin in which the bones of Orestes lay; doubting that a man could be so large, he resolved his “disbelief” by opening the coffin (1.68.2–3).

Periander’s inquiry mirrors Herodotus’ own. Periander has *akoe* of the miracle presented to him and experiences *gnome* (disbelief). He then seeks and receives *akoe* denying the miracle; but the *opsis* of Arion, right there in Corinth, obliges him to admit that the *akoe* that Arion was in Taras was untrue. Herodotus also inquires into the “wonder.” Perhaps for him too, disbelief was his first reaction in the face of what appeared to surpass belief. But inquiry confirms belief, as it does for Periander. Periander solicits and finds an agreement between contemporary eye-witnesses; Herodotus has the agreement of the contemporary traditions of the Lesbians and Corinthians, which go back to the eye-witnesses Periander cross-examined. Herodotus generally places great importance on contemporary autopsy. He quotes the contemporary witness of Archilochus to verify the tradition about Gyges (1.12.2), and has Gyges’

the back of a fish rather than in its belly. It could also be a sign of the wealth that the crew had tried to possess. There is a similar emphasis on Helen’s treasure in her story (2.114.2, 115.1, 115.6, 118.3, 119.2), but that contributes more obviously to a story in which men could seek to possess or recover her for her wealth.

remark in his story that eyes are more reliable than ears (1.8.2), confirming the superiority of autopsy. So when Herodotus says that Periander experienced Arion's miracle "in his lifetime," he is underlining that contemporary witness (1.24.1). Periander's inquiry, within the story and endorsed by independent sources, proves the miracle without the need for further comment, particularly when reinforced by the material proof. This explains Herodotus' apparent lack of *gnome*.

Periander's inquiry also mirrors Herodotus' in its use of material proof: just as the physical presence of Arion in Corinth corroborates his story, so the account of the Corinthians and Lesbians is endorsed by the dedication on the statue. It comes at the end to shock the audience into final belief because it is contemporary with their times, as the present tense ἔστι shows.¹⁶ Arion's appearance at his "trial" in Corinth is one kind of material proof, a living mirror image of his statue, a prize exhibit. It also confirms belief; the crews are literally "shocked" (ἐκπλαγέντας) into admitting the truth.

THE CONTEXT

The story of Arion's divine salvation arises directly out of the siege of Miletus. Periander is not the only connection between the two events. Herodotus also presents the siege exclusively in terms of the divine salvation of Alyattes, the Lydian king who was conducting it, thereby making it an analogy for Arion's salvation.¹⁷ Alyattes is saved not from piracy and a watery grave, but from disease (1.19–22). He becomes ill (ἐνόσησε, 1.19.2) because he has accidentally burned down the temple of Athena (1.19.1). As his illness progresses (μακροτέρης δέ οἱ γινομένης τῆς νόσου) he inquires of the Delphic oracle (περὶ τῆς νόσου). The oracle advises him that he will get no cure until he rebuilds the temple. He seeks a truce to allow him time to do this, but Thrasybulus, the ruler of Miletus, forewarned about the oracle by Periander, contrives to give him the false

¹⁶ This material proof qualifies as another of Herodotus' effective authorial intrusions (Fowler 1996, 76). He repeatedly uses ἔστι ("there exists") for the material proofs of the origin of the Scyths (4.12.1). His *opsis* of the remains of the flying snakes warrants his belief in the interlocking traditions that accompany them (2.75), and the temple of Athena the Stranger in the precinct of Proteus "exists" as another supplement to the tradition that Helen had been in Egypt (2.112.2).

¹⁷ Schwabl (1969, 259–60) identifies the analogy between Arion and Alyattes, but sees the main connexion as "the wonder of Apollo" and does not examine in detail the rest of Arion's story or the manipulation of Alyattes' chronology (see below).

impression that Miletus, even in the twelfth year of the siege, has abundant supplies and is not in need of a truce. Alyattes gives up the siege in order to build two temples instead of one, and he then recovers from his illness (ἀπότος τε ἐκ τῆς νόσου ἀνέστη, 1.22.4).

Herodotus adopts a sequential structure for his work, and Arion's story marks a pause (as Herodotus' stories often do) after the end of this siege.¹⁸ But Herodotus usually completes the previous story before letting it give rise to the next; in this case it could be argued that he has postponed a significant detail: Alyattes' dedication of a krater and stand at Delphi, as thanks for his release from the illness that made him end the siege (1.25.2). The effect of the postponement is to make Alyattes' dedication follow Arion's. The juxtaposition of the dedications, which close their respective stories, is reinforced by their contrasting characters. Arion's statue is "not big," is made of bronze, and located far away at Taenarum (1.24.8); Alyattes' krater is "big," made of silver, and located at the much more prestigious Delphi; the iron stand is the work of an artist quite as famous in his craft as Arion was (1.25.2). Herodotus' manipulation of his usual pause technique also emphasizes the analogy between Alyattes' miraculous escape from illness (1.22.4) and Arion's miraculous escape from death. The analogy proves that people rely on the gods to protect them when threatened by accident and disease, or piracy and death.

Herodotus has also manipulated the events of Alyattes' career in order to bring his salvation into juxtaposition with Arion's and to make the analogy between the two stories herald the entry of Croesus into history (1.26.1). This allows him to begin Croesus' story with the theme of divine salvation that will also end it (1.87). Herodotus focuses on Alyattes' five-year siege of Miletus, which he inherited from his father as the first act of his rule (1.18.2), concentrating on the last year, which produced Alyattes' salvation (1.19–22). He tells the story of Alyattes' siege and salvation after completing Arion's story, then notes that Alyattes died (μετέπειτα) "in the fullness of time" after ruling fifty-seven years (1.25.1). In this one sentence he telescopes all of Alyattes' subsequent career (though he has mentioned earlier the military operations that Alyattes conducted in the later part of his reign, 1.16.2). This manipulation of Alyattes' career allows him to introduce Croesus within a few sentences of the end of Arion's salvation story and immediately after a reference to Alyattes' own. The effect is to bring into juxtaposition three

¹⁸ Immerwahr (1966, 59–62) establishes Herodotus' sequential habit, in which one story arises from the one immediately preceding, and his pause placement.

beneficiaries of divine salvation. Alyattes is called here “the second of his house” to dedicate an offering at Delphi. Croesus is the third, and his dedications both court (1.50–52) and, like Arion’s and Alyattes’, thank (1.92) the god who saves him.

The other link between the two stories is Periander. Herodotus frequently generates stories about individuals who have been mentioned in the previous narrative. It would be a weak link indeed if the story was not actually about him, but because Arion’s story is cast from the beginning in terms of Periander’s wonder and Periander’s inquiry into the miracle, it is in fact a strong link.

Periander’s inquiry mirrors the inquiry of Herodotus in both stories. Periander has “found out” about Alyattes’ oracle and “related” it to Thrasybulus (πυθόμενον . . . κατειπεῖν, 1.20), making him “knowledgeable in advance” (προειδώς and σαφέως προπεπυσμένος, 1.21.1). This enables Thrasybulus to deceive Alyattes. Herodotus “knows” (οἶδα), as Periander does, having “heard” (ἀκούσας) from the Delphians about the oracle. The Milesians give him the supplementary fact that Periander forewarned Thrasybulus about it (1.20). He “finds out,” in Periander’s words (πυθάνομαι), that Alyattes gave up the war as a result of Thrasybulus’ use of his information (1.22.2).

Alyattes is a contrast to those who do such “finding out.” His herald might not be expected to inquire into what he “saw” (ιδών, *opsis*), but Alyattes entertained the reasonable expectation that in the twelfth year of the siege the Milesians would be starving and could be expected to wonder when he “heard” (ἤκουε, *akoe*) the opposite of what he believed to be the case (τοὺς ἐναντίους λόγους ἢ ὡς αὐτὸς κατεδόκει, 1.22.3). He had the *opsis* of the messenger, his own *akoe*, the *gnome* that something is contrary to expectation; but *historia* is lacking.

By contrast, Herodotus credits Periander with intelligence in all his appearances. Periander “inquires” into the reason for his younger son’s sudden hostility (3.48–51). He has two witnesses before him, as in Arion’s story. When his younger son will not give him an account either false or true (ιστορέοντί τε λόγον οὐδένα ἐδίδου, 3.50.3), he persists in inquiring of his elder son, who is simply forgetful, and so uncovers the truth (ιστόρει τὸν πρεσβύτερον . . . ἐλιπάρεε τε ιστορέων, 3.51.1). In a subsequent appearance (5.92), he sends a messenger to the tyrant Thrasybulus in order to “find out” the best policies for Corinth. There is no formal inquiry, but he sees through what the messenger reports as the “wondrous” appearance of Thrasybulus, who had led the man through his fields lopping the heads off the tallest plants (ζ–η· ἐπυθάνετο . . . πρόθυμος πυθάνεσθαι . . . θαμάζειν . . . τά περ . . . ὀπώπεε, 5.92). In the immediately

following story Periander is involved in deciphering a message from his dead wife, again seeing through puzzling appearances and ferreting out truths.

It seems then that the story of Arion's miraculous escape from death is very closely connected, by analogy, with Alyattes' miraculous escape from illness. The meaning is clear: people are subject to disease and death and are reliant on the gods for rescue. The intelligence of Periander is a further connection between the two stories: Periander works with Thrasybulus in real life as Herodotus works with his audience in literature, finding out and revealing knowledge; Periander works with his witnesses as Herodotus works with his sources to establish the truth of an apparent miracle. Alyattes, by contrast, does not enquire or learn anything. The implication of these interwoven stories is that in order to know the truth in life or in literature people should not dismiss the apparently unbelievable, nor should they accept it without inquiry.¹⁹ This parallel between life and literature is in fact already present in Herodotus' use of "display" in the proem, in reference to his text and the deeds it narrates.²⁰

BELIEFS AND PROOFS

Herodotus is a fairly opinionated historian, and his lack of *gnome* about Arion's story has made it seem that he disbelieves it. His view that he has a duty to report traditions but not to believe them could be applied to this story (7.152.3). His second-hand manner of presentation could confirm that he is distancing himself from a miracle that was at odds with reason.²¹ But, as Fowler argues (against Fehling's belief that his sources were deliberate fictions), Herodotus did not always follow the lines of

¹⁹ Schwabl 1969, 260–61 explains Periander's role in the narrative in terms of an analogy between the histories of the kings of Lydia and the tyrants of Corinth, but this goes well beyond the narrative under examination here; the history of the Cypselids is not complete until later in the work (3.48–53, 5.92). This wider analogy in any case does not explain Periander's role as inquirer in the stories of Alyattes and Arion. That is more appropriately related to the inquiring role of the historian himself.

²⁰ Herodotus calls his work "a display of his inquiry": ἰστορίας ἀπόδειξις which is designed to prevent the obliteration of the glory of "great and wondrous deeds displayed by Greeks and non-Greeks alike": ἔργα μεγάλα τε καὶ θωμαστά, τὰ μὲν Ἕλλησι, τὰ δὲ βαρβάροισι ἀποδειχθέντα.

²¹ Gould 1989, 29–30; compare 49f. Lateiner (1989, 199) also endorsed distance, but claimed that Herodotus' *opsis* of the statue made him believe. Erbse 1991, 150: Herodotus' fictitious source attributions distanced him from the "unbelievable."

modern reasoning, and his concept of truth—that is, his belief—was based on the perfect accord of consentient sources.²²

Herodotus was capable of rational disbelief in some matters. He makes a personal judgment (*gnome*) rejecting what do appear to be consentient traditions about the superhuman underwater journey of Scyllias the diver (8.8). This is apparently based on a modern style of reasoning. He says that he cannot say “exactly” how Scyllias made his journey, but “wonders” whether the “things said” are true; some things that “are said” of Scyllias “look like lies,” while other things are true;²³ but his own “opinion” is to be “displayed” (ἀποδεδέχθω): that Scyllias made the journey in a boat. What Fowler calls Herodotus’ “conceptual filters” have shifted in this instance: the historian’s disbelief arises from his computation that a swim of eighty stades was simply impossible.

But Herodotus has a very different attitude to stories of divine salvation or retribution, such as Alyattes’ cure or Arion’s rescue. These were supernatural occurrences, not superhuman feats. His treatment of these indicates that he is receptive to them, though he strongly prefers not to give an opinion about them or to describe the gods in action. He is diffident even about divine interventions that he does personally endorse. This could be a rhetorical stance or due to religious scruple or to lack of confidence in his audience’s belief.²⁴ So, even though a natural explanation was to hand, he accepts the tradition of the men of Potidaea that the high tide that drowned the Persians was punishment for their earlier desecration of Poseidon’s local shrine, but he remains himself less than dogmatic (“they seem to me at least to have the reason right,” 8.129). He also gives an opinion that is not overtly based on traditions (while still implying diffidence in his remark “if there is a need to have an opinion about divine matters”) that Demeter kept Persians out of her sanctuary at Plataea because they burnt her shrine at Eleusis (9.65). He may be employing a similar caution when he makes a paratactic rather than a subordinate connection between Alyattes’ recovery from illness and his dedication of the two temples: he says simply that Alyattes built the temples and then recovered (1.22.4). When Apollo sends the rain-storm to douse the flames that threaten Croesus, Herodotus attributes the account to the Lydians without personal comment (1.87.1). He is

²² Fowler 1996, 82.

²³ Similar phrases are found in Hesiod *Theog.* 27–28, Homer *Od.* 19.203.

²⁴ Compare his view at 7.139.1 that his endorsement of the Athenians will offend most men.

“unable to say” whether the Athenian were right when they said that their prayers to Boreas to punish the Persians produced the storm—but he tells the story and notes that they set up an altar to this god as if the storm had been brought about by divine intervention (7.189).

These examples strongly resemble Herodotus' treatment of Arion's salvation. He relates the traditions about it but gives no opinion on it; he suggests Poseidon's role rather than having him emerge from the waves. Herodotus' caution could imply that he did not believe the story, but the parallels suggest that he distances himself not from believing but from expressing an opinion about divine matters. He would offer Arion's dedication in the same spirit as he notes the Athenians' altar to Boreas—as proof of Arion's belief that Poseidon saved him—though privately, he might fully believe as well.

Herodotus also addresses the question of belief or disbelief indirectly and tactfully, through the mirror of Periander. It is he who boldly conducts the inquiry into the allegedly divine salvation that Herodotus preferred not to conduct himself. Herodotus' first reaction could have mirrored Periander's initial presumably rational disbelief (*apistia*)—though he does not presume to imagine what was in Periander's mind. Such disbelief could also be the first reaction to the story of some of the audience. But Periander disarms his own disbelief, and any other disbelief that may exist in the author or the audience, in order to create belief through the kinds of proofs that elsewhere carry weight with Herodotus. Periander's ultimately consentient witnesses mirror the consentient sources that Herodotus often cites. Herodotus elsewhere depicts disputes between two parties in which the appearance of one forces an admission of the truth from the other, through *elenchus* or the threat of it (1.117, 2.115). In his own inquiry he confronts two *logoi*, to vindicate the one through refutation of a detail in the other. For example, he accepts that Xerxes returned to Asia by land because the alternative version (that he went by sea) contained an unbelievable account of his behavior on board ship (8.119). Fowler points to Herodotus' “principle of falsifiability” (2.23): that for a proposition to be capable of being judged true, it must be both refutable and verifiable. Socrates accepted that the oracle spoke the entire truth when it said he was the wisest of men, when he could find no refutation of that statement.²⁵ The principle behind Arion's story is that a proposition can be taken as entirely true if any detail of an opposing proposition can be refuted. So the crew accepts

²⁵ Fowler 1996, 79.

Arion's story as a whole when his appearance proves that their statement of his whereabouts is false. Yet his divine salvation was a proposition quite beyond their ken. The same principle is found in Herodotus' own method of inquiry in 8.119.

Herodotus seems to have thought that any record of an inquiry that was conducted by those contemporary with the events being investigated and that involved eye-witnesses was firm proof. He believed that Helen was in Egypt during the war for Troy at least in part because the Egyptian priests told him that this had been established through "inquiries" made at the time of the war with Helen's husband, Menelaus, an eye-witness (2.118.1, 119.3). Yet Herodotus refused to confirm or deny the traditions of the Persians about the origins of the conflict between east and west, including the role of Helen in them. He did not demur just because the events belonged to a legendary period. His refusal follows on his account of the disagreement of the Phoenician tradition about Io (1.5.1–3).²⁶ The disagreement made the tradition problematic, and this was exacerbated by the lack of any record of contemporary inquiry.

Periander's inquiry and proofs must then have dispelled any disbelief that Herodotus or his audience may have experienced. Herodotus in particular would be rejecting his own research method otherwise. His second-hand manner of presentation is in line with his usual reticence about divine salvation, but Periander's inquiry confirms that there was a divine intervention, and the seriousness of his analogy requires it. For Herodotus to prove true what defied rational belief without his needing to express a personal opinion is also an impressive display of what his method can achieve.

Herodotus' reticence extends to his material proof. He knew that ordinary dedications could be forged (1.50.3), but he makes no such comment on Arion's or Alyattes' dedications. He simply notes that they set up their dedications for divine salvation, as he did with the Athenians setting up their altar to the north wind (7.189.3). It was not his habit to be opinionated about such things.

THE TRADITIONS

Fehling argues that Herodotus concocted the phenomenon of interlocking sources in this and other stories in order to perpetuate the fiction that

²⁶ Compare, e.g., Fowler 1996, 83.

he is a historian; Fehling also questions the material proof.²⁷ The recognition that Arion's story is made up of two patterned parts, and that it contains an internal inquiry that resembles Herodotus' own, could be read by Fehling as further proof of his hypothesis, because it intensifies the patterning that he found suspect. Fowler agrees that Herodotus' dove-tailing of his sources is suspect, but unconscious. Perhaps he would also say this of the internal inquiry.²⁸

There has been a call for more complete understanding of oral traditions such as this one on Arion and their adaptation into literature.²⁹ Certainly, there is a need here to find the context for the oral traditions behind Arion's story. The lives of famous poets such as Arion lend themselves to miracles. Archilochus is a case in point. The inscription of Mnesiepes ("Remembrancer of Words") on a monument to the poet begins with an account of how Archilochus miraculously received his poetic gift from the Muses and goes on to say that he was persecuted for the introduction of Bacchic worship to Paros. The inscription is third century B.C., but there is no need to insist that these stories, or stories like them, were not current earlier.³⁰ Herodotus' fifth-century account of Arion is indeed an account of the miraculous adventures of a very famous poet. It emphasizes Arion's prominence as *kitharode* and describes his ground-breaking contribution to the dithyramb in a sequence of three grand participles (ἔόντα κιθαρωδῶν τῶν τότε ἔόντων οὐδενὸς δεύτερον, καὶ διθύραμβον πρῶτον ἀνθρώπων τῶν ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν ποιήσαντά τε καὶ ὀνομάσαντα καὶ διδάξαντα ἐν Κορίνθῳ, 1.23). It would be pleasing to think that Arion really was saved from disaster at sea near Taenarum (a dangerous stretch of sea even in modern times) and that poetry (his own or a contemporary's) commemorated the event and turned it into a legend. Arion's contemporary Archilochus wrote poems on the drowning of his own brother-in-law and for the rescue of Koiranos by Poseidon's dolphin. Piracy was rampant in those early times.³¹ It is certainly credible that the Corinthians and the Lesbians told such stories, invented or

²⁷ Fehling 1989, 21–24.

²⁸ Fowler 1996, 80–83, 86: Herodotus genuinely drew attention to the problem of sources and how to establish the truth of reports of early times. "Inquiry" was still his contribution and his discussion of evidence was a unique element in his voiceprint.

²⁹ Thomas 1996, 176.

³⁰ Burnett (1983, 16–27) describes the inscription on the monument. Lefkowitz (1981, 31) notes that the inscription has as much interest in the poet's adventures as in his poetry; she also suggests a continuous tradition.

³¹ West EIG 1, Archilochus 8–13, 192. Thuc. 1.4–5 for piracy, citing the poets.

otherwise, about their famous poet, as Herodotus' attribution suggests. Archilochus' monument shows that the people of his birthplace had a vested interest in preserving the honor of their poet and celebrating it through story. The Corinthians and Lesbians had communities with similar vested interest in Arion and his legend. Lesbos and Corinth were his birthplace and his workplace respectively, and Poseidon was the special god of the Isthmus. The Corinthians also had a vested interest in Periander, and the Lesbians had no reason to reject association with such an international figure; he was one of the Seven Sages of Greece and, as tyrant of Corinth, a suitable arbiter of affairs national and international. Those connected with Taenarum had a vested interest in promoting the dedication and his landing on their shores, though Herodotus preferred the solid evidence of *opsis* to *akoe*.³² The bronze statue is unlikely to have existed in Arion's time, but it could have replaced an original or been set up or added to or taken over by those who wished to maintain the legend and declare their own importance in it. The statue in Poseidon's precinct could even have been of Poseidon or Taras rather than Arion. Herodotus calls it a "human being" (ἄνθρωπος), but the distinction between men and gods in art is often unclear. Aelian's discovery of an epigram on the statue, and possibly a hymn as well, suggest that a cult had grown up around it, as one did for Archilochus.³³

The traditions to which Herodotus refers are therefore likely to have existed. The question is whether they gave Herodotus the whole story in its current form. It is not improbable that two different sets of traditions—the Corinthians and Lesbians for Arion's escape from death, and the Delphians and Milesians for Alyattes' escape from illness—illustrated the theme of divine salvation in two unconnected stories. Divine salvation is a common preoccupation of Greek literature, and that very commonness would enhance the likelihood that those oral traditions would be available to Herodotus for final glossing. Herodotus had only to juxtapose them to create the analogy. The oral traditions would certainly also follow the stereotyped patterns I have identified in the stories.

Periander's inquiry is a particular problem because of its distinctively Herodotean features. Yet there is a case to be made that it is congruent with the traditions. Periander follows the model of the Homeric

³² Paus. 3.25.7 also saw the dedication in later times.

³³ Aelian, *On Animals* 12.45 on the epigram and the dithyrambic hymn that he attributes to Arion (but which Bowra 1963 believes is c. 400 B.C.); the hymn indicates, interestingly, that Arion did not cast himself overboard but was pushed by the crew.

histor in arbitrating between two sets of witnesses with opposing testimonies.³⁴ Homer was the common inheritance of the Greeks and would influence oral traditions as much as literary ones. Herodotus or his sources could therefore have presented Periander as such a *histor*. It is unclear whether his “Corinthians and Lesbians” are whole communities or parts of them. Those who appear in Arion’s story might be educated men like Mnesiepes the Remembrancer on Paros. They would be most familiar with the technical details of Arion’s contribution to the performing arts and the *orthios nomos*, the classification of which seems to have been a scholarly development of the late fifth century.³⁵ Such communities as they developed into the Sophistic age could have credited Periander with proof-based inquiry and could have established in the course of their narratives the truth of the events they related.³⁶

Neither Herodotus’ nor Periander’s proofs capture the messy realities of actual historical inquiry. Each has only two sets of witnesses, both eventually in agreement about the facts. Elenchus of one detail of one version produces immediate acceptance of the complete truth of the other. No questions are asked about the material proof. In an actual inquiry there would be more complication.³⁷ Yet it is the business of artistic representation, oral or literate, to structure real experience in the direction of comprehensible simplicity and economy. The story would lose its punch if Herodotus or his sources had described a drawn-out examination of Arion and the Corinthian crew, or of traditions from Taenarum.

The contribution that Herodotus may have made to the evolution of Arion’s story, as well as the contribution of his sources, should certainly be judged in the light of the nature of oral traditions, which change stories in order to reflect their evolving cultures.³⁸ If Herodotus has put more of himself into Periander’s inquiry than he should, or into any other part of the story, he would be doing no more than using the licences and practices of his traditions. He is also subject to the ordinary

³⁴ For the *histor*, see, e.g., Evans 1991, 121; Connor 1993; *Il.* 18.501.

³⁵ Barker 1984, 249–55.

³⁶ Compare Psammetichus’ Egyptian experiment, which captures the intellectual sophistication of Ionian science: 2.2.

³⁷ An investigator in real life (or at least in modern life) would not accept Arion’s whole account in every detail even if the crew no longer denied it. The dolphin was not the only possibility. He might have clung to a piece of driftwood or been picked up by another boat after he leaped into the sea.

³⁸ Thomas 1996, 178.

subjectivities of the oral historian in acquiring and transferring information from his traditions to his text. His assertion that his traditions agreed on the story in every detail needs to be evaluated in this light. If he has deliberately created the whole story and invented his traditions, then we would have to agree with Fehling that he is a historical fraud—albeit a considerable literary artist. We could say in mitigation that he invented in order to project a surpassing truth about the human condition through the analogies of Alyattes and Arion. But on balance there is sufficient reason to accept his word—that he told the story on the authority of his traditions—while recognizing that he did not give a simple verbatim report.

CONCLUSION

Arion's story marks a pause in the larger narrative, and his miraculous escape from death introduces an analogy for Alyattes' miraculous escape from illness. His story carries out the program of the proem because it contains two "displays of inquiry," one internal and one external, into an "astonishing occurrence."³⁹ It is to that extent an object lesson in intellectual inquiry in its own right.⁴⁰ But inquiry had a larger purpose, which was to demonstrate the truth about the human condition that was conveyed in the analogy: that people are subject to accident and disease (Alyattes, smitten with illness for only accidentally burning down Athena's temple, 1.19.1) and to danger and death at the hands of others (Arion), and can escape only through winning the grace and favor of the gods. This large and generous theme, echoed in Solon's comment that "man is a walking disaster" and in his advice to "look to the end," is applicable to the whole expanse of human achievement in the *Histories*. Croesus secures divine salvation as Alyattes and Arion did, but others are not saved from disasters—among them Periander, who lives out a miserable old age alone (3.53), for all his intelligence and power and lineage (1.23.1). Arion's leap is in fact a leap of faith, and addresses the relations between humans and the gods that determine their fate.

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³⁹ The proem announces an ιστορίης ἀπόδεξις to preserve the glory of ἔργα μεγάλα τε καὶ θωμαστά. See note 20.

⁴⁰ Fowler 1996, 81, quoting Fehling 1989, 121, on the suggestion that many passages in the work offer "object lessons" in the nature of evidence.

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