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with good auguries,
from John H.

The Closure of Herodotus' *Histories*

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1. Introduction

The question whether the *Histories*, as we have it, ends at the point where Herodotus intended it to end has been debated for more than a century, and even now there seems to be no firm consensus as to the answer. Although over the past few decades the majority of students seem to have inclined to the affirmative for various reasons, a respected authority on Herodotus could still conclude, in 1985, that "there is in fact no proper ending to the work, and though I have accepted the capture of Sestos as a logically reasonable endpoint, other material could well have followed and some kind of 'epic' conclusion might well have been expected."¹ The present article reconsiders the question in the hope that, at least, a greater measure of certainty is attainable than that.

On one factor in the problem only there seems to be general agreement, and this may be discussed fairly briefly: *As a historical narrative of the wars between the Greeks and Persians, the Histories is clearly unfinished.* Many scholars, especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, observed (perfectly correctly) that as a matter of history those wars did not end with the capture of Sestos; and from this they concluded that Herodotus did not live, or perhaps did not care, to complete his project.² The conclusion seemed to be reinforced by the observation of Lipsius that the last sentence in Herodotus' actual narrative of the war (9. 121), "and during this year

¹ K. H. Waters, *Herodotus the Historian* (Norman 1985) 114. The continuing uncertainty on the subject may be illustrated by two quite recent opinions. David Asheri in his general introduction to *Erodoto: le Storie I* (Milan 1988) xx-xxi, holds that at 9. 122, Herodotus' work "termina o, meglio, si interrompe. Manca almeno un epilogo"; John Gould, *Herodotus* (New York 1989) 18, remarks that Herodotus' "choice of an ending has surprised and disconcerted some modern readers, and the assumption that he meant to continue has provided a convenient explanation. But the sense of incongruity is more likely due to our lack of sensitivity to Herodotus' own criteria for determining the proper shape of a narrative."

² The most influential proponent of this view was no doubt Felix Jacoby, in his justly famed article "Herodotus" (*RE Suppl.* 2, Stuttgart 1913), esp. cols. 372-79; the same passage contains a survey of the earlier literature on the question.

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nothing happened any more beyond these things,"³ belongs to a group of *transition-formulae* that occur fairly frequently within the *Histories*; could there be clearer proof that Herodotus had somehow been prevented from completing his intended narrative? Only in 1924 was confidence in this conclusion weakened by the observation of H. Fränkel⁴ that this ending of the *Histories* conformed to the widespread archaic literary practice (exemplified above all in the Homeric and Hesiodic epics) of leaving the narrative open-ended, for a continuator to pick up on at some future time. In that case the last words in 9. 121 are no proof that the work is unfinished; rather they may be a deliberate invitation to someone else (a someone who in the event turned out to be Thucydides) to carry on the story from that point. But Fränkel's observation of course leaves untouched the simple fact that, for whatever reason, Herodotus' work does not complete the narrative of the Persian wars.

On the other hand, during the past five or six decades a number of observations have accumulated to suggest that the ending of the *Histories* presents a paradox: *While the book is open-ended as a strictly historical narrative, as a work of archaic art it is perfectly and unambiguously closed.* Sections 2 and 3 of this article will review the final chapters of the *Histories* (9. 108–22) in the light of those observations,⁵ adding one or two more that seem to tend toward the same conclusion. In brief, we shall find that these chapters are carefully—some might even be tempted to say, artificially—designed to recall the entire course and tendency of Herodotus' great story, with special emphasis on its opening movements, and on the beginning of its climax, Xerxes' expedition of 480/79. The method used is, in a word, repetition: repetition of themes, situations, characters and even turns of phrase, in such a way that the hearer is reminded, by parallel or contrast, of those significant moments earlier in the work. What rhetorical term we apply to this method, once identified, is perhaps in the last resort a matter of indifference. For convenience, and for want of a more precise word, it will hereafter be referred to as *ring-composition*. Not all will agree with this extended definition of that term,⁶ but no more applicable one seems to exist, and a certain degree of justification for it may be found in earlier usage.

³ J. H. Lipsius, "Der Schluss des Herodoteischen Werkes," *Leipziger Studien zur classischen Philologie* 20 (1902) 195–202.

⁴ Hermann Fränkel, "Eine Stilleigenheit der frühgriechischen Literatur," first published in 1924, reprinted in his *Wege und Formen frühgriechischen Denkens*, ed. 2 (Munich 1960) 40–96; the remark referred to is found on p. 85.

⁵ The individual contributions of the various scholars concerned will be acknowledged, so far as is practicable, as the discussion reaches the relevant passages in Herodotus. Here, however, a special acknowledgement is due to the concise but richly suggestive discussions of the closure of the *Histories* by Henry R. Immerwahr, *Form and Thought in Herodotus* (Cleveland 1966) 8–9, 43 and 144–47.

⁶ Immerwahr (previous note) 54, n. 3, would confine the term primarily to verbal repetitions, and would distinguish it sharply from "circular" or (after John L. Myres, *Herodotus, the Father of History* [Oxford 1953]) "pedimental" composition. But there is

W. A. van Otterlo thus defines ring-composition: "The theme set up at the beginning of a given section is followed by a longer or shorter discussion relating to it; and is then repeated at the end, in such a way that the entire section is framed by statements of like content and more or less similar wording. Thus it is closed off as a unified structure, clearly marked off from the context."⁷ Van Otterlo, though not the first scholar to observe the phenomenon,⁸ was the first to treat it in depth and also, it seems, to bring the term "ring-composition" into general currency. But his studies, so far as they related to Herodotus, were concerned with ring-composition as a device for defining units within the work, from the paragraph, through the longer digressions, to the *logoi*. He does not seem to have entertained the possibility that it might be employed to define the beginning and end of a poem or narrative—to mark off the entire work, as it were, from its context in *life*. That possibility was, indeed, acknowledged by Beck in her careful dissertation on ring-composition in Herodotus, but in one passage only;⁹ for the topic (unfortunately for the rest of us) did not fall within the intended scope of her book.

Finally, in section 4, it will very briefly be suggested that the closure of the *Histories* is by no means unique in Greek literature. Other archaic large-scale compositions, notably the *Iliad*, seem to present a similar paradox: an open-ended narrative, an unmistakable artistic closure by means of ring-composition in the wider sense here adopted.

2. The Closure of the *Histories* as a Whole

Most readers approaching the *Histories* for the first time must experience a growing bewilderment once they have passed from its magnificent opening sentence into the surreal world of the Mythological Proem. They may momentarily recover their faith in the enterprise as they contemplate the vast historical perspectives opened up in 1. 5. 3–7. 4; but the part-bawdy, part-tragic tale of Gyges and Kandaules immediately follows that solemn

some precedent, as will shortly be seen, for the use of "ring-composition" to denote thematic as well as verbal repetition; and neither "circular" nor "pedimental," at least as Immerwahr uses these terms, seems to apply quite so aptly to the phenomena discussed in this article.

⁷ W. A. van Otterlo, "Untersuchungen über Begriff, Anwendung und Entstehung der griechischen Ringkomposition," *Mededelingen der Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen*, Afd. Letterkunde, N. R. 7 no. 3 (1944) 131–76; the passage here quoted occurs on pp. 131–32.

⁸ See his article (previous note) 131–32 for earlier writers on the subject; they include H. Fränkel (above, note 4), and Max Pohlenz, in his *Herodot: der erste Geschichtsschreiber des Abendlandes* (Leipzig 1937).

⁹ Ingrid Beck, *Die Ringkomposition bei Herodot und ihre Bedeutung für die Beweistechnik* (Hildesheim 1971) 84, where she speaks of "die grossen gedanklichen Ringkompositionen, die das übergreifende Einheit des Werks umspannen," and adduces, after Lesky, the episode of the Wisdom of Cyrus (9. 122).

moment. And so their perplexity continues, perhaps even as far as the opening of the Persian *logos* in 1. 95.

Similar surprises, and similar modulations in tone and theme, await those readers who persevere to the end of Herodotus' narrative. Those chapters (9. 108–22) that succeed the account of the Mykale battle and its aftermath contain three striking, and at first sight rather bizarre, episodes that have this in common: Each recalls a crucial passage, and with it a crucial theme, from the three major opening movements of the *Histories*. These episodes are the sexual infatuation of Xerxes, the crucifixion of Artayktes, and the advice of Cyrus the Great to the Persians.

The Xerxes episode (9. 108–13) is clearly designed as a pendant to, and a reminder of, the episode that opens the Lydian *logos*: Gyges and Kandaules (1. 8–13). The correspondences in location, characterization and, not least, phraseology seem unmistakable. Herodotus takes care to point out that Xerxes' infatuation began at Sardis, that is at the scene of the Gyges–Kandaules episode and indeed of most of the Lydian *logos*; this initial focus on Sardis is all the more striking since the major developments in the story actually occur after the court has moved on to Sousa (9. 108, end).¹⁰ Both episodes concern the immoderate sexual conduct of an Eastern monarch and its fearsome consequences; and both are narrated with a certain ironic humor. Finally, as if Herodotus wished to make the parallelism clear beyond any doubt, they have in common a number of verbal similarities, for instance:

(1) The opening of each episode: 1. 8. 1 οὗτος δὴ ὦν ὁ Κανδαύλης ἠράσθη τῆς ἑωυτοῦ γυναικός: compare 9. 108. 1 τότε δὴ ἐν τῆσι Σάρδισι ἐὼν ἦρα τῆς Μασίστεω γυναικός.

(2) 1. 8. 2 χρῆν γὰρ Κανδαύλη γενέσθαι κακῶς: compare 9. 109. 2, of Artaynte, τῆ δέ, κακῶς γὰρ ἔδεε πανοικίη γενέσθαι κ. τ. λ.

(3) 1. 8. 3, Gyges to Kandaules, δέσποτα, τίνα λέγεις λόγον οὐκ ὑγίεια, κελεύων με δέσποιναν τὴν ἐμὴν θεήσασθαι γυμνήν: compare 9. 111. 3, Masistes to Xerxes, ὦ δέσποτα, τίνα μοι λόγον λέγεις ἄχρηστον, κελεύων με γυναῖκα . . . μετέντα θυγατέρα τὴν σὴν γῆμαι;

(4) 1. 10. 2, of the injured wife of Kandaules, μαθοῦσα δὲ τὸ ποιηθὲν ἐκ τοῦ ἀνδρός, κ. τ. λ.: compare 9. 110. 1, of the angry wife of Xerxes, μαθοῦσα δὲ τὸ ποιούμενον, κ. τ. λ.

(5) 1. 11. 3 ὁ δὲ Γύγης τέως μὲν ἀπεθώμαζε τὰ λεγόμενα κ. τ. λ.: compare 9. 111. 3 ὁ δὲ Μασίστης ἀποθωμάσας τὰ λεγόμενα κ. τ. λ.

¹⁰ It has actually been questioned whether Xerxes was in Sardis at the time of the battle of Mykale, and not rather in upper Asia, coping with the Babylonian revolt; see R. W. Macan, *Herodotus: the Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Books* (London 1908), note on 9. 108. Professional ancient historians will be better able than the present writer to judge this matter; if Macan is by any chance right, the implications for Herodotus' methods are both interesting and disturbing.

(these happen to be the only two instances in Herodotus of the collocation ἀποθωμάζειν τὰ λεγόμενα).¹¹

The second episode that concerns us, the crucifixion of Artayktes (9. 116–20), carries us back to the Mythological Prologue of 1. 1. 1–5. 2, and specifically to Herodotus' account of the Trojan War and of the eternal division between Europe and Asia.¹² When the Athenians arrive before Sestos, one of the Persians occupying the city is Artayktes, a man notorious for his wickedness. Herodotus describes at some length how he had seized, despoiled and defiled the shrine of the hero Protesilaos at nearby Elaious, and the deception by which he had earlier persuaded Xerxes into granting him possession of that shrine. "Sire," he had said (9. 116. 3), "at that place is the house of a Greek who made an armed expedition (*strateusamenos*) against your country and was slain, thus receiving his just deserts. Grant me this man's house, that every man may learn not to make an armed expedition against your country." Artayktes well knew that with these words he would obtain his request from the unsuspecting Xerxes; for he had chosen them (says Herodotus) in the knowledge that "the Persians hold all of Asia to be the property of themselves and of their reigning king." In the sequel, the Athenians occupy Sestos and capture the fleeing Artayktes. While one of his guards is cooking some dried fish, a prodigy occurs: The fish begin to wriggle about as if not dried, but newly caught. Artayktes interprets this as a token of Protesilaos' divinely granted power, even in death, to punish the wrongdoer, and offers to make lavish reparations to the hero and to the Athenians. The Athenian general Xanthippos, however, will have none of it. The Athenians take Artayktes "to the headland to which Xerxes had joined the bridge by which he crossed, or, some say, to the hill above the city of Madytos" (9. 120. 4), and there nail him to a plank and stone his son before his eyes. They then sail for home (9. 121), carrying their plunder with them, most notably the cables of Xerxes' bridge, which they have found stored up in Sestos, and which they will dedicate in the sanctuaries of the gods. The episode—and Herodotus' entire narrative—ends with the famous sentence quoted earlier: "And during this year nothing happened any more beyond these things."

This episode at Sestos effectively closes both a greater and a lesser circle. The lesser, which embraces the story of Xerxes' expedition into Europe in Books 7–9, will be discussed shortly; for the present we shall concentrate on the greater, which spans the entire *Histories*. The anecdote of

¹¹ E. Wolff, "Das Weib des Masistes," *Hermes* 92 (1964) 51–58 (reprinted in W. Marg, *Herodotus*, ed. 2 [Darmstadt 1965] 668–78), has provided a comprehensive study of the resemblances between the two episodes in situation, content, tone and wording. On p. 56 he enumerates a number of verbal correspondences, including the second example in the above list.

¹² This has been observed by more students of Herodotus than can be conveniently enumerated; examples are Pohlenz (above, note 8) 163–64, and Immerwahr (above, note 5) 146.

Artayktes and Protesilaos recalls, verbally as well as thematically, the passage in 1. 4. 1–5. 1 in which Herodotus speaks of the Trojan War and of its consequences for the future relations between Europe and Asia—consequences with which, in some sense, the world still has to live. By undertaking that war, say the Persians, the Greeks put themselves mightily in the wrong, “for they began making an armed expedition (*strateuesthai*) against Asia before they, the Persians, did so against Europe . . . From this point on, they say, they have ever thought the Greek nation to be their foe. For the Persians claim Asia and the non-Greek nations that reside within it for their own, while they consider Europe and the Greek nation to be things apart. That is how the Persians say it happened; they find that the beginning (*archē*) of their enmity against the Greeks came about through the taking of Troy.”

The Artayktes episode not merely recalls this entire passage, and the momentous issues that it evokes; it also brings us back to the very first hostile act of the Trojan War, when a Greek warrior first set foot on Asian earth. Herodotus had no need to remind his contemporaries who Protesilaos was, and not all modern commentators have thought fit to supply Herodotus’ omission. This hero, of course, was known to the Greek artists of the fifth century, as he had been known to Homer, for one circumstance above all: he was the earliest casualty in the Trojan War, having been slain by a Dardanian “as he jumped from his ship, by far the first of the Achaeans” (*Iliad* 2. 702).¹³

The Xerxes episode and the crucifixion of Artayktes recall respectively the Lydian *logos* and the Mythological Prologue, both of which, though their thematic importance is incalculable, are still only distantly connected with the overriding theme of the *Histories*: the rise and disgrace of the Persian power. The last of our three episodes, the Wisdom of Cyrus (9. 122), brings us back to the opening of that great story.¹⁴ At 1. 95. 1, having formally taken leave of his Lydian *logos*, Herodotus announces: “And from here our *logos* goes on to enquire who this Cyrus was who destroyed the realm of Croesus, and in what way the Persians gained the hegemony (*hēgēsanto*) of Asia”—a promise which he methodically fulfills in the remaining chapters of what we now know as Book One. 9. 122 in fact recalls what manner of man Cyrus was—the wise leader, the founder and upholder of Persian freedom—and reveals him at the height of his success,

¹³ Most of the commentaries on Herodotus since that of Heinrich Stein (first ed., Berlin 1856) have of course duly quoted the *Iliad* passage in their notes on 9. 116. But the implications, in the Herodotean context, of the fact that Protesilaos was *the first Greek to attack Trojan soil* are not always explored in the secondary literature as they seem to deserve. Pohlenz, for example, does not consider them at all, Immerwahr only briefly (p. 146).

¹⁴ For this view compare Myres (above, note 6) 299; Immerwahr (above, note 5) 146; and N. Ayo, “Prolog and Epilog. Mythological History in Herodotus,” *Ramus* 13 (1984) 39–42.

when he has become the ruler of Asia. The anecdote is hooked on to the Artayktes episode in a characteristically Herodotean way. It was an ancestor of this very Artayktes (says Herodotus), one Artembares, who was struck by a brilliant idea, which the Persians communicated to Cyrus in these words: "Since Zeus grants hegemony (*hegemoniēn*) to the Persians and, among individuals, to you, Cyrus, after your conquest of Astyages [cf. 1. 127–30]—come, seeing that we possess a land that is little, and rugged at that, let us leave it and obtain another that is better . . . For just when, we ask you, will there be a finer opportunity than at a time when we rule many men and all of Asia?"

The prime function of 9. 122 thus seems to be to echo the opening of the Persian *logos*, and to recall the splendor of the Persian empire in its early years. At the same time, however, it recapitulates two major themes that pervade the *Histories* from beginning to end. To continue with Herodotus' account: When Cyrus had listened to Artembares' scheme, he firmly rejected it. If the Persians really must migrate, he said, they had better make up their minds to become the ruled instead of the rulers, for soft lands were apt to give birth to soft men. On this the Persians acknowledged the wisdom of Cyrus and retired from his presence. "They chose to rule while occupying a barren land rather than, while sowing the plain, to be others' slaves." That sentence, the last in the *Histories*, is here translated as literally as possible (even at the cost of a certain inelegance in the English style), in order to bring out the studied chiasmus, *rule, barren land: plain, slaves*, and as a reminder that Herodotus' final word is *douleuein* "to be slaves." In that way, with quite extraordinary emphasis, the close of the Cyrus episode recalls the antithesis between freedom and slavery that is a leitmotiv of the entire *Histories*.¹⁵ Simultaneously it re-states the association of freedom and valor with hard living in a rugged landscape, a theme that is found early in the *Histories* (see Sandanis' advice to Croesus in 1. 71), but reaches its fullest significance in the course of Xerxes' expedition; above all in Demaratos' remarks to the King on the poverty and *arete* of Greece (7. 121).¹⁶

At this point we may pause briefly to consider the combined effect of the three episodes in 9. 108–22 that we have been discussing. Even from what has been said so far, it may appear that they constitute a kind of triple ring-composition, recalling as they do three momentous passages from the outset of the entire *Histories*. By archaic compositional conventions, Herodotus could hardly have sent a clearer signal that the work had now

¹⁵ The theme enters with the Lydian *logos*: Before the rule of Croesus all the Greeks were free (1. 6. 3), but Croesus enslaved them (1. 27. 4). Probably the most emphatic presentation of the antithesis occurs precisely in the opening chapter of the Persian *logos* (1. 95. 2): The Medes, "having gone into battle for *freedom* against the Assyrians, acted like brave men and, repelling *slavery*, became *free*."

¹⁶ Compare Macan (above, note 10), note on 9. 122; Pohlenz (above, note 8) 163–64; Gould (above, note 1) 59–60.

reached its designed end. And one further point is worth stressing in this context: *Of the three elements in that ring-compositional closure, two are overtly and inseparably linked to the capture of Sestos.* Artayktes' crime, and his execution, took place in the neighborhood of Sestos, and it is Artayktes' forefather Artembares who provides the transition to the final ring-compositional element, the Wisdom of Cyrus. In other words, the artistic closure of the *Histories*, and the choice of stopping-point for the historical narrative of the Graeco-Persian wars, are mutually dependent. It seems scarcely possible, in the light of that, to argue that Herodotus intended to pursue the narrative to the capture of Byzantium,¹⁷ or the foundation of the naval league,¹⁸ or even far beyond, but for some reason broke off at the capture of Sestos. If he did so intend, why is the historical event at Sestos so crucial to the literary closural technique that he has adopted?

3. The Closure of *Histories* 7–9

Many scholars have noticed how certain elements in the closing chapters of the *Histories* recall the opening of the story of Xerxes' expedition, as it is told in Books 7–9. The Artayktes episode offers the clearest instances; by several overt allusions this is linked to the passage in 7. 33–34 which occurs at the point in the narrative where Xerxes has reached Sardis with his land force, and is preparing to march to Abydos. Meanwhile, Herodotus says, his emissaries "were working to bridge the Hellespont from Asia into Europe. Now in the Hellespontine Chersonese between Sestos and Madytos, there is a rugged promontory that juts into the sea opposite Abydos. It was here that, not long after this, when Xanthippos son of Ariphron was general of the Athenians, they captured a Persian, Artayktes, governor of Sestos, and nailed him alive to a plank; this man used to bring women to Protesilaos' shrine at Elaious, and there perform wicked actions. Now it was to this promontory that those whose charge it was built the bridge, starting from Abydos." It will be noted how this preliminary information about Artayktes is neatly dovetailed (of course by ring-composition, the framing element being the promontory opposite Abydos) into the account of the building of the bridge. In 9. 116–20 that information is repeated, with considerable expansions (the relevant passages have already been quoted in Section 2). Thus the story of Artayktes closes, as it opened, at or near the point where the fateful bridge touched European soil.¹⁹ The cycle of Xerxes' expedition, like the greater cycle of the ancient

¹⁷ So, tentatively, Pohlenz (above, note 8) 176.

¹⁸ So, "fast zweifellos," Jacoby (above, note 2) col. 376 (after Wilamowitz and others, there cited).

¹⁹ This point has most recently been made by Gould (above, note 1) 58–59. On p. 59 he adds the interesting suggestion that Artayktes' execution at the point where Xerxes' bridge touched Europe may echo a theme announced in the Gyges–Kandaules episode (1. 11. 5),

enmity between Asia and Europe originating in the Trojan War, is closed by this execution. And it is surely no accident that the very last incident in Herodotus' historical narrative, immediately following that execution, is the removal of the bridge-cables to Greece.²⁰

Likewise, but less overtly, the Xerxes episode of 9. 108–13 seems also to recapitulate the story of the expedition of 480/79. That story opened with Xerxes at the height of his power and splendor: His speech in the Persian council (7. 8), the march of his army out of Sardis (7. 40–41), and his crossing of the Hellespontine bridge (7. 54–56) are among the most spectacular visions of royal pomp in all Herodotus. But having vanished from the stage after his retreat from Salamis, Xerxes is suddenly propelled back into the spotlight in 9. 108–13 in the role of a shabby, stupid and cruel sexual intriguer. The contrast between the Xerxes revealed at the beginning of the expedition and the Xerxes revealed at its end may well remind us of the contrast between the opening chorus of Aeschylus' *Persians* (65–92), where the magnificent and all-powerful king drives his chariot irresistibly toward Greece, and the epilogue (908–1077), where that same king appears before our eyes defeated and in rags. In both the tragedy and the history the entire story of personal and national humiliation is thus summed up and concluded.

It is possible also to discern an echo of the opening of Xerxes' expedition in the episode of the Wisdom of Cyrus. Lesky has seen a direct link between 7. 8 α 1 (Xerxes' speech proposing the expedition) and 9. 122. 2, noting that in both passages the word *hēgemoniē* (which Lesky takes to be a "Stichwort") occurs fairly prominently.²¹

At this point we may conclude our survey of the ring-compositional elements in the closing chapters of the *Histories*. In sum, it seems fairly clear that this elaborate system of echoes and repetitions must be designed to close simultaneously the greater story contained in the *Histories* as a whole, and the lesser, but culminating, narrative of Books 7–9. Even if there existed no parallel for such a closure of an entire large-scale composition, this conclusion would seem likely in itself, and it might seem to gain further support from the practice, widespread throughout archaic literature, of closing off units (sometimes very extensive ones) *within* a work by means

where the Queen tells Gyges: "Your attack [on Kandaules] shall be from the same place from which he showed me naked."

²⁰ Compare, among others, Myres (above, note 6) 299; Immerwahr (above, note 5) 43 and 146.

²¹ Albin Lesky, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*, ed. 3 (Bern and Munich 1971) 348; ed. 2 (Bern 1963) 296; for an elaboration of his view, cf. Beck (above, note 9) 84. The present writer, for his part, hesitates to lay too much stress on the suggestion. The two Herodotean passages concerned do not seem to be very closely related; and the instances of *ἡγεῖσθαι*, *ἡγεμονίη* in Herodotus with reference to the rule of Persia are by no means confined to those passages (see J. Enoch Powell, *A Lexicon to Herodotus* [Cambridge 1938] *s. vv.*).

of ring-composition. But there do in fact exist archaic parallels to the ending of the *Histories*; they will be sketched in the following section.

4. The Closure of the *Iliad*

τῆ δὲ δωδεκάτῃ πολεμίζομεν, εἴ περ ἀνάγκη: *Iliad* 24. 667 (Priam's last words to Achilles).

καὶ κατὰ τὸ ἔτος τοῦτο οὐδὲν ἔτι πλέον τούτων ἐγένετο: *Histories* 9. 121 (the final words in the narrative of the Persian Wars).

As Fränkel observed, the narratives both of the *Iliad* and of the *Histories* ~~are open-ended in the sense that a continuator might (and in fact did) pick up the stories of the Trojan and the Persian wars respectively where each had left off.~~ The above quotations, in which the incompleteness of the accounts of the respective wars is not merely acknowledged but almost (one might say) advertised, should be enough to illustrate the point. As Fränkel also indicated, this feature is actually shared by most of the other archaic hexameter poems of which we have any knowledge.²²

Yet the surprising, and perhaps too little noticed, fact is that some of these archaic poems are also closed, artistically, by some form of ring-composition. The *Theogony* and the *Odyssey*, at least in the states in which we have them (and in which Herodotus probably had them also), are closed after a fashion by verbal repetitions of thematically loaded lines: *Theogony* 1022 Μοῦσαι Ὀλυμπιάδες, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο (= 966, 52, 25); *Odyssey* 24. 548 Μέντορι εἰδομένη ἡμὲν δέμας ἠδὲ καὶ αὐδὴν (= 24. 503, 22. 206, 2. 401).²³ But neither of these ring-compositional closures can compare with that of the *Iliad* either in scale or in sophistication. In his edition of *Iliad* 24, C. W. MacLeod has put together the evidence that supports this statement, with admirable care and insight.²⁴ Since his book is readily accessible, it seems unnecessary to repeat all his discussion in detail, but here—with a couple of additions and a minor correction—are his chief results. Book 24 recalls the opening of the *Iliad* (Book 1 and the first incident of Book 2), and the Embassy of Book 9, both in situations and in phraseology. The main resemblances between it and the opening of the *Iliad* are as follows.

²² For Fränkel's observation compare above, note 4; compare also B. A. van Groningen, *La Composition littéraire archaïque grecque: Procédés et Réalisations* (Amsterdam 1958) 70–72.

²³ It will be noted that the ring-compositional closure of the *Odyssey*, in particular, resembles those of the *Histories* and of the *Iliad* in that it recalls both the opening movement of the narrative and a supreme crisis in it. *Od.* 24. 503 and 548 (themselves constituting a ring-compositional frame for Athena's final epiphany) recall the goddess's guiding role in the Telemachy and in the Slaying of the Suitors.

²⁴ C. W. Macleod, *Homer, Iliad XXIV* (Cambridge 1982), Introduction, esp. 32–35. An earlier discussion of the question, not (as it happens) referred to in MacLeod, seems to deserve mention: C. H. Whitman, *Homer and the Homeric Tradition* (repr. New York 1965), esp. 259–60.

The episode of the old man who enters the Greek camp to supplicate Agamemnon for the ransom of his daughter, and is rudely refused, is balanced and contrasted with the episode of Priam's supplication to Achilles for the ransom of his son's body, and Achilles' acceptance of his prayer. The divine colloquies at the end of Book 1 and the beginning of Book 24, and especially the roles of Thetis and Hera in them, are similarly balanced and contrasted; as are (as has long been noticed) the time-lapses of nine and eleven days that occur in each book.²⁵ And as Agamemnon is lured to destruction by a deceitful dream from Zeus at the beginning of Book 2, so Priam is sent safely on his way by a true messenger from Zeus in 24. Furthermore, the parallelisms in situation between Books 1 and 24 are emphasized by the repetitions of certain lines and phrases that occur only in those two books: for example ἦμος δ' ἠριγένεια φάνη ῥοδοδάκτυλος ἠώς (1. 477 = 24. 788); and ὣς ἔφατ', ἔδεισεν δ' ὁ γέρον καὶ ἐπίθετο μύθῳ (1. 33 = 24. 571).²⁶

The parallels between *Iliad* 24 and 9, as described by MacLeod, are less striking, but still substantial. In both books Achilles is surprised in his lodging by a night visitor or visitors, begging him to relent from his anger; and he entertains them with a meal. Near the end of each episode Achilles offers a bed to an old man or old men (Phoenix; Priam and Idaios). And in each Achilles, at our final glimpse of him, is peacefully asleep with his concubine (9. 663–65 and 24. 675–76; the first lines of each passage are identical); in 24, as MacLeod observes, “the concubine is Briseis, whose loss caused all the trouble.”

By those means the last book of the *Iliad* lays to rest the poem's great theme of Achilles' wrath and, simultaneously, calls to mind its first beginning and a crucial moment in its progress. The end is bonded into the beginning, the circle is complete. In the *Histories* too, and through similar repetitions of situation and of phrase, the closing chapters contrive at once both to finish the tale and to recall its beginning and a major episode. In each case it is difficult to escape the inference that the ending we have is the ending designed. One may here add that the “some kind of ‘epic’ conclusion” to the *Histories* that was desiderated by Waters²⁷ seems, in fact, to be literally there in place—even if it is not the precise kind of conclusion that any reader later than the late fifth century might reasonably have expected, whether to an epic or to any other narrative.

²⁵ MacLeod (above, note 24), 32.

²⁶ MacLeod (above, note 24) gives five other pairs of responding passages from 1 and 24. In each of these examples, as in the second of those just quoted, the wording in the context of 24 pointedly emphasizes the parallels and contrasts between Priam's supplication of Achilles and Chryses' supplication of Agamemnon. As has been seen in Section 2 of this article, Herodotus' Xerxes episode (9. 108–13) similarly reinforces the situational parallel with the Gyges–Kandaules episode by means of verbal echoes.

²⁷ Above, note 1.

Finally, we may add two further apparent points of resemblance between the two great works. Neither of them properly falls even within the extended definition of ring-composition that has been adopted in the present article, but they are perhaps striking enough to be worth consideration in this context. Near or at the ends of both the *Iliad* and the *Histories* ~~some major characters from the defeated side are brought back for a last-moment appearance~~, as if, once more, to remind us in person of the course and the issues of the entire work. We have already seen how Xerxes, the moving spirit of 7–9, and Cyrus, the hero of the Persian *logos*, are thus recalled to the stage in Herodotus. Similarly the last episode of the *Iliad*, the mourning and funeral for Hector, lines up not merely Priam but also Andromache, Hecuba and Helen, to make, as it were, their final bows, and at the same time vividly to recall some of the most moving scenes in the epic, from Book 3 to Book 22.

The inclusion of Helen as the last of the three women-mourners serves not only to recall the course of the epic but also to recall one of the ~~antecedents~~ to the narrative contained in it; this is the woman whose folly sparked the entire war. And here we come to a second possible point of resemblance to the Herodotean closure. Helen's reappearance is not, in fact, the only passage in 24 that carries us back to the remote beginnings of the Trojan saga. There are two others, both alluding to events not mentioned elsewhere in the *Iliad*: lines 28–30, on the Judgment of Paris, and lines 62–63, on the feast at the wedding of Peleus and Thetis—that fatal union of mortal and immortal from which Achilles sprang. Would it be too fanciful to compare these evocations to Herodotus' evocation, in the Artayktes episode, of the first combat in the Trojan War, the war which to the Persian sages was the ultimate cause of the events described in the body of the *Histories*? If that comparison is allowed, then in both the Homeric and the Herodotean finales we may discern a bold extension of the ring-compositional technique that has been discussed in this article: a closure emphasized not just by a return to the opening of the narrative, but by a return to the archē of the entire chain of events that led up to that narrative.

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