

The use(s) of inscriptions in Herodotus' Histories

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Abstract

This article revisits a major topic in Herodotean scholarship: Herodotus' use of inscriptions—a significant group of textual sources in his *Histories*. The analysis centres on his decidedly varied application of epigraphic records. It shows how the Herodotean narrator sometimes looks to draw out the limitations of certain inscribed materials as accurate records of the past, which thus serve as a foil for his own commemorative writing. But the discussion also investigates ways in which inscriptions serve other, more positive ends in Herodotus' narrative, not least by functioning as a further form of proof and validation for some of his more controversial ideas, or by serving to underline a theme that recurs elsewhere in his text.

The use(s) of inscriptions in Herodotus' Histories

Φοίνικες δ' εὔρον γράμματ' ἀλεξίλογα.

— Critias¹

Documentary evidence is of great value to ancient historians, sometimes providing vital information on a topic for which they have little or no external data, while sometimes allowing them to uncover instances of rhetoric or invention in the literary record. Historians must of course balance this with the knowledge that even the most sober of documents might be inaccurate, fragmentary or concerned to serve its own rhetorical purposes.² In a passage that reveals a great deal concerning his methodology, Plutarch alludes to this paradox:

τοὺς μὲν οὖν χρόνους ἐξακριβῶσαι χαλεπὸν ἐστὶ, καὶ μάλιστα τοὺς ἐκ τῶν Ὀλυμπιονικῶν ἀναγομένους, ὧν τὴν ἀναγραφὴν ὀψέ φασιν Ἰππίαν ἐκδοῦναι τὸν Ἡλεῖον, ἀπ' οὐδενὸς ὀρμώμενον ἀναγκαίου πρὸς πίστιν.

It is difficult, however, to pinpoint chronology, and particularly that which is based on the names of victors in the Olympic games, the list of which is said to have been disseminated much later by Hippias of Elis, he who had no entirely trustworthy source for his work. (Plut. *Num.* 1.4)³

According to Plutarch, then, interpreting more ancient periods is an especially difficult process, not only due to the chronological inaccuracies of certain lists, but also because of the unreliable accounts of earlier researchers like Hippias of Elis, who quite fails to convince Plutarch that his source material is watertight. While there is no comparable discussion of

evidence in Herodotus, such concerns are detectable, as we shall see, in his use of inscriptions—albeit in a less crystalline form than Plutarch’s explicit observations here.

The origin of epigraphy as a study is a topic that continues to provoke scholarly debate.⁴ In a recent article, Frances Pownall has argued that, contrary to the prevailing view that Aristotle was the first to make extensive use of inscriptions as historical documents, Theopompus of Chios had already identified this potential in his critique of inscribed, Athenian imperial records.⁵ One of the principal purposes of this paper will be to show that Herodotus foreshadows the kind of sophisticated epigraphic methodologies employed by later fourth-century BCE writers such as Theopompus and Aristotle, even if he cannot be held to have followed these later authors’ methods through with the same consistency or comprehensiveness (partially since his interest in epigraphic materials, as I will argue, is rather more diffuse).⁶

The largely implicit yet significant influence of Herodotus’ prose predecessors’ works on his text stands in rather stark contrast to the much more open, and fairly substantial, discourse he develops in relation to numerous inscribed monuments, dedications and other physical materials.⁷ The contexts in which one might have encountered publicly displayed inscriptions in the classical Greek world were manifold, and the range of inscribed records was no less impressive. The *Histories* offer a clear insight into the Greeks’ epigraphic habit, with reference made to various types of inscribed items—including pyramids, tombs, engraved *agalmata*, votives, and a range of other memorials.⁸ In addition to this, Herodotus is unusual amongst the Greek historians for his inclusion of various epigrams, all inscribed in verse; and these epigrammatic inscriptions, alongside other epigraphic materials, notably votive offerings and monuments, are not just restricted to the earlier books, where Herodotus

is typically more willing to divulge the provenance of his information, but also feature in some battle narratives in later books.

While it is evidently the case that Herodotus cites an impressive range of inscriptions, scholars remain in disagreement as to how they function in his text. In one recent reading, Robin Osborne has argued for a relatively unreflective application of inscriptions in Herodotus, who apparently displays no interest in those inscriptions that do not come armed with an arresting story.⁹ Certainly, some of Herodotus' appeals to inscriptions could be seen to function in this manner (see the discussion on 2.125 below). But such a position does not sit well with the knowledge that Herodotus nevertheless makes regular appeals to inscribed documents—far more so than other types of written materials that he undoubtedly made use of—, or indeed with the reality that for Herodotus, as I hope to show, an inscription—which he usually treats in its contextual situation—can authenticate, or even lend unique authority to, a particular *logos*.

In exploring the topic of Herodotus' 'epigraphical interests' afresh,¹⁰ this paper analyses only *explicit* references to epigraphic records in the *Histories*, drawing out some of the chief ways in which Herodotus prioritises particular issues relating to inscriptional texts, though it is undoubtedly the case that other epigraphic materials—not least Persian royal inscriptions—lie behind various Herodotean *logoi*.¹¹ It begins with a brief introduction to the different types of inscriptions which appear in the *Histories*, and explores further the problems encountered when applying too rigid an analysis—particularly one which views Herodotus as if he were a twenty-first-century epigraphist. The second section explores the few valuable inscriptions included in Book One, focusing particularly on how Herodotus makes use of historiography's discursive capacities in order to explore the difficulties in

ascertaining the truth behind epigraphic sources, materials which sometimes conceal crucial information from their readers through their selective, abbreviated or even deceitful written messages. The third section looks at the ways that Herodotus primarily uses inscribed materials in Book Two's *Aigyptios logos* to reinforce his view of the Egyptians' extended history in comparison to the Greeks'. The final part turns to Herodotus' use of inscribed epigrams, items that he uses for a variety of purposes, from deriving important historical information to buttressing individual theses. This will lead to the conclusion that a far more nuanced approach towards citing inscriptions prevails in the *Histories*—both as valuable pieces of evidence, and as ornamental items. Nevertheless, for all their potential value as historical testimonia, Herodotus' work suggests that one might also have to grapple with certain subjectivities and ambiguities that underlie some of the inscribed writings that his text allows to speak perpetually.

An Inventory of Inscriptions Cited

The inclusion of twenty-four separate inscriptions in the *Histories*—fourteen of which Herodotus quotes verbatim—certainly suggests that he valued such records as apposite to his historical inquiries.¹² But the problems that surround his rather uneven use of documentary evidence should deter readers from drawing any premature conclusions. For example, why is it that an author, who, in a highly affecting passage, artfully incorporates a triad of commemorative inscriptions specifically set up for those who fought and died at Thermopylae within his text, should elsewhere neglect to record—or even mention—the existence of numerous other written dedications to those who fought in the other Greco-Persian War battles? And given Herodotus' penchant for explicit reference to autopsy—a hermeneutical-rhetorical tool that serves to lend proof to a particular narrative,¹³ why does he not provide references to direct observation of inscribed records more consistently? These

problems, and others,¹⁴ thus complicate any investigation of Herodotus' methodological approach towards documentary evidence; and just as with his use of other written materials, it is clear that establishing rigid, definite conclusions cannot possibly accommodate Herodotus' diverse, sometimes elusive approach.

Of the inscriptions which Herodotus clearly alludes to, there is an almost equal split between Greek and non-Greek: twelve are written in a Greek script, eleven in a foreign script, and one is bilingual, written on separate marble pillars in Greek and Assyrian letters.¹⁵ This rightly makes many less than comfortable, especially given the wealth of inscribed materials in the Greek world—many of which would have proved relevant to his study.¹⁶ It is worth bearing in mind, however, that no known author preceding Herodotus seems to have made such close appeals to inscriptions, although a well-known testimonium by Dionysius of Halicarnassus relates that early prose writers, some of whom predate Herodotus (notably Hecataeus of Miletus), made concerted use of epichoric sources, 'including written materials either in sanctuaries or in public places' (εἶ τ' ἐν ἱεροῖς εἶ τ' ἐν βεβήλοις ἀποκείμεναι γραφαί, *De Thucydide* 5). The nature of these written records cannot be determined, but it is certainly possible that prose authors working prior to Herodotus were already beginning to mine inscriptions for historical information.¹⁷ Surely, then, this (very likely) unparalleled level of interaction with epigraphic materials—not entirely unexpected given Herodotus' proclivity for originality—should prepare us for an approach that does not entirely satisfy the highly specialised use of epigraphic corpora in modern academia.

As suggested already, Herodotus' contribution to epigraphic scholarship has not satisfied all his readers; in a much-cited article on Herodotus' epigraphic sources, Stephanie West writes:

The confident assurance of his historical reconstructions is bluff; though we may admire his fertility in speculation, he has quite failed to consider whether the conclusions which he draws from the epigraphic data represent the only, or the most probable, way of accounting for the facts.¹⁸

West thus views a significant proportion of Herodotus' observations about epigraphic records as being at best perfunctory, and at worst, deeply troubling.¹⁹ Clearly affected by Detlev Fehling's earlier criticisms of Herodotus' historical method,²⁰ West imagines an author who typically dismisses epigraphic data in favour of oral traditions, and who ultimately fails to comprehend fully the evidential value of inscribed materials as historical data. In some senses, it is unsurprising that West should have uncovered so many anomalies;²¹ even the most casual reading of the *Histories* would show that Herodotus' use of inscribed records fails to conform to the rigorous methods of the contemporary study of epigraphy. But while West has elucidated several problems and inconsistencies in Herodotus' approach to one of his many source materials, it is important to remember that the paucity of extant epigraphic records cited by Herodotus (a mere three out of the twenty-four survive today) makes it impossible to offer a judicious assessment of his conclusions against the cold hard facts. Although not entirely avoiding the question of Herodotus' reliability and accuracy, this paper is primarily focused on exploring the types of epigraphic data that Herodotus alludes to within his *ιστορίας ἀπόδειξις*, rather than assessing his commitment to a quasi-modern form of epigraphic citation. In so doing, it seeks to develop the important conclusions of John Moles, and more recently, Jonas Grethlein, who have illustrated some of the ways in which Herodotus engages with epigraphic records in order to highlight the credibility of historiography as a commemorative medium.²² It does so by examining further some of the ways that Herodotus establishes an authoritative persona

through a critical engagement with inscribed records, although it demonstrates how Herodotus' allusions to inscriptions often serve other, less polemical ends, which equally lend his work an authoritative voice.

False or Misleading Inscribed Writings

Herodotus' first allusion to an inscribed item occurs at Delphi in Book One's Croesus *logos*. Amongst the multitudinous items Croesus is said to have dedicated to the Delphic oracle, Herodotus states that he offered 117 ingots of gold, from which was cast a lion, originally weighing 570 pounds (1.50).²³ Further on in this extended inventory of dedications, Herodotus lists two *perirrhantēria* ("lustral water vessels")—one golden, the other silver—but, intriguingly, he adds that the golden *perirrhantērion* was falsely inscribed "from the Lacedaemonians" (1.51.3, he does not quote the inscription itself).²⁴ This, Herodotus supposes, is the work of a certain Delphian, whose name "I will not record" (οὐκ ἐπιμνήσομαι, 1.51.4; cf. 2.123.3; 4.43.7),²⁵ since he was intent on flattering the Lacedaemonians.²⁶ Following on from this is a passage that readers have rarely paid much attention to, in which he refers to further, minor dedications by Croesus, "that are not signed" (οὐκ ἐπίσημα).²⁷ This particular choice of phraseology suggests that some of Croesus' dedications were, in comparison, signed—an additional, if largely forgettable feature maybe, but one that might be understood by the reader as an indication of Herodotus' first-hand knowledge, based on exhaustive personal research.²⁸

Though not especially key to the overall development of the narrative, this unambiguous assertion by the narrator of the *perirrhantērion*'s bogus epitaph clearly reminds Herodotus' readers that he is a critical researcher, not easily deceived by false assertions. And it is significant that he should adopt such a definite position regarding his first explicit allusion

to a piece of inscribed evidence, particularly given his reticence elsewhere in assuming such a dogmatic tone.²⁹ The effect will no doubt have felt even more conspicuous for his immediate audience, for whom writing was far less ubiquitous than it is today.

So the *ersatz* status of the very first inscribed item to appear in the *Histories*—itself embedded within a narrative which many have read as being paradigmatic for the rest of Herodotus' work,³⁰ serves as a clear indicator of his willing engagement with—and inclusion of—inscribed materials, as well as his *unwillingness* to accept uncritically all that is stated by this broad group of texts. It serves as a decisive statement for the role of the narrator in the *Histories*, who, against several certain readings of his historical method,³¹ by no means passively records all that he discovered through his inquiries. In this way, the passage signals a thoroughly competitive edge to the *Histories* inasmuch that Herodotus' discursive engagement with the misleading inscribed object begins to enable the narrator to reveal the ways in which his own written commemorative account differs from, and surpasses in accuracy, the epigraphic medium. For this lapidary inscription, which (Herodotus asserts) speaks falsely, stands in clear contrast to his own exacting account of the *perirrhantērion* and its true status.

The two other inscriptions reported in Book One are both tomb engravings: the first for the Lydian king Alyattes (1.93.3),³² and the other for Nitocris of Babylon (1.187).³³ Herodotus' account of Alyattes' tomb very much picks up on the hyper-critical perspective he adopts with the seemingly Lacedaemonian dedication that he (successfully) uncovers as a forgery. He describes the tomb as a structure of enormous size, inferior only to the monuments of Egypt and Babylon (1.93.2).³⁴ Numerous labourers contributed to its construction, and in order to commemorate this, they erected stone pillars above the burial mound, detailing the

specific contributions of each group of workers. The measurements on these pillars, Herodotus surmises, show that the “courtesans” (παιδισκέων) made the greatest contribution—an unsurprising detail, however, given that “all the daughters of the common people of Lydia adopt the role of a prostitute” (τοῦ γὰρ δὴ Λυδῶν δήμου αἱ θυγατέρες πορνεύονται πᾶσαι, 1.93.4). Herodotus here seems to be once again rallying against the expectations of his audience(s), for whom the arcane and luxurious Oriental monarchies are demystified, or even undermined.³⁵ And just as Herodotus implies personal observation of the Croesan *perirrhantērion*, it is noteworthy that he should finish his description of Alyattes’ tomb by incorporating its dimensions, as well as a geographical oddity, namely that the tomb is positioned close to a large stretch of water named Lake Gygæa.³⁶ These ekphrastic remarks serve not only as an elegant finish to his description of the tomb, but also help to reassure the audience that the narrator can personally vouch for the authenticity of the material he is recounting. Indeed, some readers might even interpret these remarks on the tomb’s location and dimensions as proof of personal autopsy.³⁷

The second inscribed tomb that Herodotus describes has been of special interest to a number of scholars, particularly due to its playful application of writing.³⁸ This tomb is for the Babylonian queen Nitocris,³⁹ who, after having her sepulchre erected in the upper parts of one of the gates into the city, has the following message inscribed upon it:

Τῶν τις ἐμεῦ ὕστερον γινομένων Βαβυλῶνος βασιλέων ἦν σπανίση χρημάτων,
ἀνοίξας τὸν τάφον λαβέτω ὀκόσα βούλεται χρήματα· μὴ μέντοι γε μὴ σπανίσας γε
ἄλλως ἀνοίξῃ· οὐ γὰρ ἄμεινον.

If there be somebody amongst my successors on the throne of Babylon who is in need of treasure, let him open my tomb, and take as much as he chooses; not, however, unless he be truly in want; for it will not be for his good. (1.187.2)

Herodotus then reports that the tomb was left untouched until the Persian king Darius came to Babylon, and, after being appalled by the now-defunct status of this gate and by the wasted booty buried within, ordered it to be opened, only to discover a second written message, stating: “If you were sated with what things you have, and were not greedy for more, you would not be opening the coffins of corpses” (Εἰ μὴ ἄπληστός τε ἕας χρημάτων καὶ αἰσχροκερδῆς, οὐκ ἂν νεκρῶν θήκας ἀνέφραξες).⁴⁰ Herodotus finally concludes this remarkable passage “such, then, is said to be the nature of this queen” (αὕτη μὲν νυν ἡ βασίλεια τοιαύτη τις λέγεται γενέσθαι, 1.187.5).

While Nitocris cannot be easily related back to any reliably documented—and therefore certainly historical—individual, Herodotus’ account of her use of the inscribed word in fact complements the earlier passages discussed above. As when Herodotus shows that the true significance of the golden *perirrhantērion* cannot be identified by a cursory reading of the inscribed message attached to the vessel, so too the true contents and meaning of Nitocris’ tomb cannot be discerned from the tempting, yet misleading inscription borne upon it. And just as Herodotus’ audience may well be shocked to learn that Lydian courtesans were chiefly responsible for the erection of Alyattes’ impressive tomb—so clearly evinced by his extended reflection on this phenomenon, here it is implied too that Herodotus’ audience might find it hard to believe that such a queen could have existed, hence the narrator’s reserved qualifications which bookend the excursus. As Emily Baragwanath notes, Nitocris’ use of writing contradicts Deborah Steiner’s views on the inherently tyrannical nature of

writing in Herodotus, the inscription instead assuming a “subversive and rebellious” mode,⁴¹ in which the tyrannical behaviour of the Persian king is anticipated and mocked by the percipient Babylonian. The whole Nitocris *logos* draws a clear contrast between Herodotus’ subtle reading of an inscription’s true significance—which he then shares with present and future readers—, and the acquisitive Darius’ ultimately foolish reading of the same inscription, which leads to zero financial gain. This focus on reading inscriptions well calls to mind Herodotus’ sophisticated use of oracular texts,⁴² and thus serves as a compelling metaphor for the role of the Herodotean narrator, who (unlike Darius here) is not so easily fooled by arcane inscribed messages.

From these three inscriptions that feature in Book One, there is a clear motif that is common to all of them, namely, the very elusiveness of the written word in an epigraphic context; and Herodotus ensures from the outset that his audience recognise this quality, as it can result in mis-readings—or worse still, as in the case of Darius, who did not appreciate the meaning of the initial inscription found on Nitocris’ tomb, moral and ethical transgressions. But it is equally striking that Herodotus should opt for these epigraphic moments in his text to reassure his readers that he is capable of unearthing any incongruities and complexities which are, to him and his audience, a salient characteristic of writing.⁴³ In this way, Herodotus’ inclusion, and treatment of, inscriptional materials in the opening book of his work serves an important, rhetorical function, aiding the narrator in his quest to espouse an accurate and authoritative voice, whilst underlining the *Histories*’ ability to produce a more lasting and truthful record of events than epigraphic records.

It is clear from these early references to inscribed materials that historical information might well be gleaned from the (potentially misleading or incomplete) information that they

provide. Though much of the material that Herodotus gleans from these written records is of only marginal importance within the overarching narrative of how Greeks and non-Greeks came to fight one another—a question which Herodotus’ digressive account never loses sight of—, it is nonetheless clear that individual points concerning historical individuals, and their motivations, do benefit from his employment of epigraphic phenomena.

Commemorative Inscriptions in Book Two

Beyond the first book of the *Histories*, there are a further nineteen passages which incorporate an inscribed item. A significant proportion of the non-Greek inscriptions that Herodotus explicitly quotes are Egyptian (five out of eleven)—hardly surprising given the special attention he devotes to the region of Egypt, which he repeatedly associates with writing and record-keeping (2.77.1, 82.2, 100.1). All these inscriptions occur in the second, historically minded half of his Egyptian *logos*, some of them shortly following on from his famous pronouncement on the provenance of his Egyptian material (2.99.1).

The first two Egyptian inscriptions occur in some of the most challenging passages in Herodotus’ entire text, proving immensely difficult to reconcile with surviving materials and other, native traditions. Both passages are embedded within an extended *logos* that delves into the spectacular career of the previously undocumented Egyptian king, Sesostris, whom Herodotus dates two generations before the Trojan War to the time of the pharaoh Proteus.⁴⁴ While Herodotus’ Sesostris is seemingly unhistorical, Alan Lloyd notes that he is demonstrably based on genuine historical personages, chiefly Senusret I and Senusret III from the Twelfth Dynasty (c. 2000-1780), who in fact ruled some four hundred years prior to the date of Herodotus’ Sesostris.⁴⁵

To begin his Sesostrian *logos*, Herodotus reiterates that his information derives from the Egyptian priests,⁴⁶ who read aloud “from a papyrus roll” (ἐκ βύβλου) the names of 330 monarchs, of which only eighteen Ethiopian and not Egyptian (2.100.1). A little further on Herodotus states most of these rulers left no memorial for the priests to display (τῶν δὲ ἄλλων βασιλέων οὐ γὰρ ἔλεγον οὐδεμίαν ἔργων ἀπόδεξιν κατ’ οὐδὲν εἶναι λαμπρότητος, 2.101.1),⁴⁷ justifying his decision to focus rather on the prolifically successful Sesostris for the next ten chapters.⁴⁸ Subduing nations as far afield as the Arabian Gulf, Herodotus’ Sesostris ostensibly raised an army, which subjugated every nation on its path back to Egypt (2.102). In recognition of those of his opponents who fought valiantly, Herodotus reports that Sesostris would then raise a pillar inscribed with his name and country, along with a brief account of the strength of his own victorious armed forces. Those who he believed had fallen too easily, however, were ridiculed: not only would he erect the same inscribed pillars, but he would supplement them with an image of “female genitalia” (αἰδοῖα γυναικός, 2.102.5), intended as a clear marker of their inferiority in battle.⁴⁹

Herodotus continues by elaborating on Sesostris’ impressive military achievements in Scythia and Thrace—the total extent of Sesostris’ conquests, he supposes, “for in their country the pillars are seen to be standing, but beyond this they are no longer found” (ἐν μὲν γὰρ τῇ τούτων χώρῃ φαίνονται σταθεῖσαι αἱ στήλαι, τὸ δὲ προσωτέρω τούτων οὐκέτι, 2.103.1).⁵⁰ Then, after a digression on the origins of the Colchians (2.104-5), Herodotus returns to the topic of Sesostris’ campaigns and the stelae he erected in various places (2.106-110). He expatiates on his knowledge of Sesostris’ exploitation of public writing, appealing to his own personal autopsy of some of these records, which, from the extent of Sesostris’ campaigns, would naturally have made a significant imprint on the physical landscape. I

record the passage in full, since it reveals a great deal in terms of Herodotus' historical method:

τὰς δὲ στήλας τὰς ἴστας κατὰ τὰς χώρας ὁ Αἰγύπτου βασιλεὺς Σέσωστρις, αἱ μὲν πλεῦνες οὐκέτι φαίνονται περιεοῦσαι, ἐν δὲ τῇ Παλαιστίνῃ Συρίῃ αὐτὸς ὄρων εἴδουσα καὶ τὰ γράμματα τὰ εἰρημένα ἐνεόντα καὶ γυναικὸς αἰδοῖα. εἰσὶ δὲ καὶ περὶ Ἰωνίην δύο τύποι ἐν πέτρῃσι ἐγκεκολαμμένοι τούτου τοῦ ἀνδρός, τῇ τε ἐκ τῆς Ἐφεσείης ἐς Φώκαιαν ἔρχονται καὶ τῇ ἐκ Σαρδίων ἐς Σμύρνην. ἑκατέρωθι δὲ ἀνὴρ ἐγγέλυται μέγαθος πέμπτης σπιθαμῆς, τῇ μὲν δεξιῇ χειρὶ ἔχων αἰχμὴν τῇ δὲ ἀριστερῇ τόξα, καὶ τὴν ἄλλην σκευὴν ὡσαύτως· καὶ γὰρ Αἰγυπτίην καὶ Αἰθιοπίδα ἔχει· ἐκ δὲ τοῦ ὤμου ἐς τὸν ἕτερον ὄμον διὰ τῶν στηθέων γράμματα ἰρὰ Αἰγύπτια διήκει ἐγκεκολαμμένα, λέγοντα τάδε· ἐγὼ τήνδε τὴν χώραν ὡμοῖσι τοῖσι ἐμοῖσι ἐκτησάμην. ὅστις δὲ καὶ ὀκόθεν ἐστὶ, ἐνθαῦτα μὲν οὐ δηλοῖ, ἐτέρωθι δὲ δεδήλωκε. τὰ δὲ καὶ μετεξέτεροι τῶν θεησαμένων Μέμνονος εἰκόνα εἰκάζουσι μιν εἶναι, πολλὸν τῆς ἀληθείης ἀπολελειμμένοι.

As to the pillars which King Sesostris of Egypt erected in these places, they no longer appear to be there, but I myself saw them in Palestinian Syria with the letters I mentioned and the female genitalia. Also in Ionia, there are two figures of Sesostris carved upon the rocks, one on the route from Ephesus to Phocaea and the other from Sardis to Smyrna. In each place a man is carved, four cubits and a span high, with a spear in his right hand, a bow in his left, and other equipment similar to this—for it is in fact both Egyptian and Ethiopian. From one shoulder right across his breast to the other shoulder sacred Egyptian letters have been carved; they say the following: 'I took this land with the power of my shoulders'. It is not indicated here who he is and what

country he is from, but he has shown this elsewhere. Some people who have seen these carvings reckon that the figure is Memnon, *but in so doing they depart considerably from the truth.* (2.106)⁵¹

Herodotus thus legitimates the story recounted by the priests through reference to his own personal observation (ἐν δὲ τῇ Παλαιστίνῃ Συρίῃ αὐτὸς ὄρων εἰούσας), scrupulously noting details such as the location of the inscribed objects and their dimensions. The hieroglyphic inscriptions incorporated within these carved images of Sesostris enable him to affirm the true extent of Sesostris' power, and in the process of doing so, to reject a separate tradition, which (erroneously) ascribes the carved figures to the Egyptian figure Memnon. In terms of his methodology, Herodotus here places considerable emphasis on these inscribed Sesostrian stelae, which he himself has inspected, as they form an especially compelling proof of his more general belief that (i) Sesostris' career has been considerably more prodigious than the vast majority of Egypt's rulers, and (ii) the Egyptians' achievements are unmatched by the rest of mankind—even imperialist Persians like Darius.⁵² This last point is spelt out at the end of the excursus, where Herodotus reports that king Darius looked to set up a statue of himself in front of several statues set up by Sesostris outside the Temple of Hephaestus (Ptah); the Egyptian priest refused to allow it, however, on the grounds that Darius failed to subdue as many nations as Sesostris had, notably the Scythians (2.110.2-3).⁵³ Clearly, as this striking postscript on Darius' failed attempt to set up an object in his image shows, Herodotus' Sesostrian inscriptions cannot be detached from the physical monuments that they are inscribed on; nevertheless, these inscriptions occupy a privileged place in the overall Sesostris *logos*, providing an effective proof of the gloriousness of the Egyptian king's rule.

The next inscription he quotes comes from the pyramid of the Pharaoh Cheops (Khufu of the Fourth Dynasty, 2.124-5). Herodotus advances an intricate picture of Cheops' monumental structure, including a full report on the method employed in its construction.⁵⁴ Following this, no doubt in part to re-emphasise the spectacle that was this pyramid, Herodotus reports that "there are Egyptian letters engraved on this pyramid" (γραμματῶν Αἰγυπτίων ἐν τῇ πυραμίδι), detailing how much was consumed in radishes, onions and garlic by the workers,⁵⁵ before adding that "the interpreter who translated the writings to me said that 1600 talents of silver was paid" (καὶ ὡς ἐμὲ εὖ μεμνησθαι τὰ ὁ ἐρμηνεύς μοι ἐπιλεγόμενος τὰ γράμματα ἔφη, ἑξακόσια καὶ χίλια τάλαντα ἀργυρίου τετελέσθαι. 2.125.6).⁵⁶ He later concludes this passage by contemplating the money spent on the labourers' bread and clothing, as well as the vast time it would have taken to construct the underground section of the pyramid. Though no comparative evidence supports that somebody could have read an inscription directly inscribed on a pyramid to Herodotus, as he so distinctly claims, it does not therefore mean that Herodotus fabricated this inscription. It is not so far-fetched to suppose that Herodotus simply misremembered the precise location of the inscription. Besides, although the content of the engraving is equally unlikely as Herodotus reports it, it is certainly possible, as How and Wells suggested, that it could have more simply been a mistranslation of hieroglyphs, possibly by an unreliable guide who Herodotus put too much trust in.⁵⁷ And in spite of these complications, what emerges from this passage is Herodotus' distinct and memorable inclusion of an inscribed record in order to bolster the overall monumental impression he wishes to espouse. By drawing upon an obscure epigraphic detail, he is able to inflate the size of the workforce to gigantic proportions, and, in doing so, to strengthen the reader's impression of Cheops' permanent achievement, which yet again feeds into his wider views on the impressive history of the Egyptian nation.⁵⁸

A few chapters later, Herodotus refers to a second pyramid inscription, this time of the Pharaoh Asychis. According to Herodotus, Asychis wished to excel all Pharaohs before him by constructing a pyramid out of bricks, inscribing the following message on it:

μή με κατονοσθῆς πρὸς τὰς λιθίνας πυραμίδας· προέχω γὰρ αὐτέων τοσοῦτον ὅσον ὁ Ζεὺς τῶν ἄλλων θεῶν. κοντῶ γὰρ ὑποτύπτοντες ἐς λίμνην, ὃ τι πρόσσχοιτο τοῦ πηλοῦ τῶ κοντῶ, τοῦτο συλλέγοντες πλίνθους εἴρυσαν καί με τρόπῳ τοιοῦτῳ ἐξεποίησαν.

Do not think me less than pyramids of stone; for I surpass them as much as Zeus does the other gods; for they stuck a pole down into a marsh and collected what mud clung to the pole, made bricks of it, and in this manner built me. (2.136.4)

Clearly evoking the familiar Greek practice of inscribing an epitaph in the first person, this inscription, as Steiner argues, fundamentally differs from its Hellenic counterpart, in as much as it fails to include the names of the architect and occupant of the spectacular tomb.⁵⁹ In ignoring such details, the engraving renders the individual Asychis himself obsolete, as he is silenced by the dominant voice of the behemoth structure which houses his corpse.

But regardless of the unlikelihood that such an epitaph could have been inscribed in the non-Greek world, it does not automatically follow that this most un-Egyptian record is largely meaningless in Herodotus' text. On the contrary, by quietly subverting an increasingly typical form of written commemoration in the Greek world, and then attaching it to a monumentalised, Eastern monarch, Herodotus not only recapitulates the writer-tyrant motif which recurs throughout the *Histories*,⁶⁰ but, less obviously, he also challenges his

audience's preconceptions, as Greek and non-Greek forms of commemoration are more closely aligned than some might have presumed. Asychis' tomb, then, provides another striking example whereby the narrator carefully alludes to an inscription in order to guide—and even manipulate—his audience's view of the people behind the historical events that he presents.

Like the Sesostris inscriptions, these two passages show once again how Herodotus seeks to develop this central narrative of the enduring history of the Egyptians by coalescing the spoken accounts of the Egyptian priests (which, he repeatedly emphasises, are in no small way derived from written records) with the many monuments and—if available—inscriptions, which he might have encountered through autopsy. And while these Egyptian inscriptions often present considerable difficulties and inconcinnities, it should not be underestimated how important Herodotus deems the use of writing for the Egyptians, a nation that he recognises as having used more than one script (ἰρὰ and δημοτικὰ, 2.36.4).⁶¹

Probably the most difficult or incongruous of all Herodotus' inscriptions is the final one quoted in the *Histories*. The engraver is none other than the Athenian general Themistocles, who is attempting to gain the full support of the unstable Ionians, as they have failed to offer absolute loyalty towards the Greeks against their Persian aggressors. Themistocles, we are told, carves a lengthy exhortation onto a rock face, which Herodotus then proceeds to quote in full.

Ἄνδρες Ἴωνες, οὐ ποίετε δίκαια ἐπὶ τοὺς πατέρας στρατευόμενοι καὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα καταδουλούμενοι. ἀλλὰ μάλιστα μὲν πρὸς ἡμέων γίνεσθε· εἰ δὲ ὑμῖν ἐστὶ τοῦτο μὴ δυνατόν ποιῆσαι, ὑμεῖς δὲ ἔτι καὶ νῦν ἐκ τοῦ μέσου ἡμῖν ἔξεσθε καὶ αὐτοὶ καὶ τῶν

Καρῶν δέεσθε τὰ αὐτὰ ὑμῖν ποιέειν· εἰ δὲ μηδέτερον τούτων οἶόν τε γίνεσθαι, ἀλλ' ὑπ' ἀναγκαίης μέζονος κατέζευχθε ἢ ὥστε ἀπίστασθαι, ὑμεῖς δὲ ἐν τῷ ἔργῳ, ἐπεὰν συμμίσγωμεν, ἐθελοκακέετε μεμνημένοι ὅτι ἀπ' ἡμέων γεγόνατε καὶ ὅτι ἀρχῆθεν ἢ ἔχθρη πρὸς τὸν βάρβαρον ἀπ' ὑμέων ἡμῖν γέγονε.

Men of Ionia, you do wrongly to fight against the land of your fathers and enslave Greece. It would best for you to join us, but if that should be impossible for you to do, then at least now absent yourselves from the war, and ask the Carians to do the same as you. If neither of these things is to happen, for you are bound together by such necessity, so that you cannot rebel, play the coward whenever you are led into battle. Remember that you are our sons and that our quarrel with the barbarian was initially of your making. (8.22.1-2)

The message he inscribes is substantial in length and tone, more reminiscent of an oral address than a typical Greek prose inscription,⁶² hence leading many to deduce that Herodotus cannot possibly be reporting the message exactly as he read it, if he had in fact read it at all.⁶³ While it remains improbable that Themistocles could have inscribed the exact message that is reported back to us, it cannot be ruled out that some sort of engraving was made, the content of which Herodotus must have then acquired from one of his informants.⁶⁴ Here we have the clearest instance of an inscription which has not been subjected to Herodotus' preferred method of personal autopsy; for whilst the text is reported back to the reader as it was apparently written (τάδε ἔλεγε ... ταῦτα ἔγραψε surely rules out the possibility that Herodotus is merely providing the gist of the Themistoclean message), it must be kept in mind that it is done without the same kind of personal assurances that Herodotus offers with other inscriptions (cf. 2.106.1; 5.59). Moreover, as Deborah Boedeker

notes, the inscription forces an important strategic and moral issue: “with Themistocles’ inscription, Herodotus expresses what he believes must have been at stake in the confrontation between mainland Greeks and the Greeks in Xerxes’ armada”.⁶⁵ The point here is that like various speeches (e.g. Dionysius of Phocaea’s speech to the Ionians before the Battle of Lade),⁶⁶ the inscription serves to make important points developed over a larger section of his narrative, namely: Themistocles as Odyssean trickster;⁶⁷ Greek disunity; real (or paranoid) fear of Medism; and the crucial role of Athens in the war. This passage therefore illustrates the complex patterns that govern the whole of the *Histories* inasmuch that it indicates the different modes by which Herodotus cites and understands inscriptions. There is little here of the forensic approach that can be seen with his description of the Sesostrian stelae (see also the discussion below on the Cadmeian inscriptions); instead, Themistocles’ rock carving is an important lapidary utterance that captures the fissiparous nature of the Greek alliance and serves as a decisive historical moment in the Greeks’ overcoming, against all odds, the threat of Xerxes’ army. As such it shows how Herodotus’ allusions to epigraphic records serve a wide range of literary purposes that cannot be reduced to a single purpose.

Epigrammatic inscriptions in the *Histories*

Herodotus appears as the first amongst our extant authors to cite explicitly an inscribed epigram (or even to use the term ἐπίγραμμα), quoting eight discrete epigrams.⁶⁸ This bias towards epigrammatic inscriptions is in itself a peculiar feature of Herodotus’ work, particularly given that epigrams accounted for only a small proportion of the inscribed records that were found in fifth-century Greek *poleis*. As Niall Livingstone and Gideon Nisbet have noted, however, inscribed epigrams are exceptional in their frequent emphasis on the formation of an individual voice—one that proudly asserts the epigram’s ability to

recount *logoi*.⁶⁹ Perhaps Herodotus, who never declares a preference for written over oral testimonies, was more persuaded by the vibrant narratives offered in many inscribed epigrams; indeed, he cites a number of striking epigrammatic verses, which possess a clear authorial voice. Whatever is to be made of this Herodotean quirk, then, it can be said from the outset that his willing inclusion of several epigrams undoubtedly contributed to the development of the genre—even if it would truly emerge as a serious literary form rather later, during the hellenistic period.⁷⁰

The first epigram he quotes is a self-commemorative poem commissioned by Mandrocles of Samos,⁷¹ who sets up a painting with adjoining inscription in the temple of Hera (ταῦτα γραψάμενος ἀνέθηκε ἐς τὸ Ἡραῖον, ἐπιγράψας τάδε, 4.88.1), after being handsomely rewarded by Darius for building a bridge over the Bosphorus (4.87-89).⁷² The epigram runs:

Βόσπορον ἰχθυόεντα γεφυρώσας ἀνέθηκε
Μανδροκλέης Ἡρῆ μνημόσυνον σχεδίας,
αὐτῷ μὲν στέφανον περιθείς, Σαμίοισι δὲ κῦδος,
Δαρείου βασιλέος ἐκτελέσας κατὰ νοῦν.

Having bridged the fish-abundant Bosphorus,
Mandrocles dedicated the record of his floating bridge to Hera,
Having won a crown for himself—and kudos for the Samians,
In fulfilling the wishes of King Darius. (4.88.2)⁷³

So in a passage that follows on directly from Darius' own erection of two pillars, detailing the size of the various peoples who accompanied him (4.87.1),⁷⁴ Mandrocles too

“commissions” (γραψάμενος) an inscription,⁷⁵ set alongside the painting of his bridging of the Bosphorus. Here Herodotus states that “now this is how the engineer created a memorial of the bridge” (ταῦτα μὲν νῦν τοῦ ζεύξαντος τὴν γέφυραν μνημόσυνα ἐγένετο, 4.89.1), clearly acknowledging that this, though by no means the only way in which one could have done so, was a legitimate way for Mandrocles to commemorate his achievement.

With no obvious reason to suspect Herodotus of foul play here, scholarship has had rather little to say about this inscription. But Herodotus in fact attaches considerable weight to this passage; certainly, the painting and inscription offer a striking visual and written record respectively of the significant moment when the hegemonic Persian king Darius first stepped into Europe. Herodotus clearly signposts this moment as an important one in his narrative, since immediately following on from this he boldly states that “Darius crossed over into Europe” (Δαρεῖος ... διέβαινε ἐς τὴν Εὐρώπην, 4.89.1). In other words, the epigram temporarily slows down the narrative, and encourages the reader to reflect on the significant moment when Darius precipitated an intercontinental war.⁷⁶

Another striking feature of the epigram is the way in which its meaning is radically transformed. While originally a celebratory text, commemorating the achievements of the Samian architect, Herodotus’ account alters future readings of the inscription, as it is now a melancholic image of the Persian onslaught, eliciting a much more sober response in its Herodotean context. In this way, the Mandroclean inscription is emblematic of the Persians’ transgression in Herodotus’ text, and illustrates once again the extent to which Herodotus shapes inscriptional items in his text, so that they contribute substantively to his narrative. And like elsewhere, Herodotus notes with some precision the location of the inscription, implying personal authority: “The place where king Darius bridged the Bosphorus, according

to my calculations, is midway between Byzantium and the temple at the mouth of the sea” (τοῦ δὲ Βοσπόρου ὁ χάρος τὸν ἔζευξε βασιλεὺς Δαρεῖος, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκέειν συμβαλλομένῳ, μέσον ἐστὶ Βυζαντίου τε καὶ τοῦ ἐπὶ στόματι ἱεροῦ, 4.87.2). Such a nuanced application of this inscription not only shapes the reader’s understanding of the events narrated, but also facilitates an appreciation of this text in its physical-material context: the image of Darius crossing the Bosphorus is filtered through the image of Herodotus’ text surveying Mandrocles’ dedicatory painting and its accompanying epigram.

Herodotus’ account of the Athenians’ defeat of the Boiotians and the Chalcidians in 506 (5.72-78) houses the only other instance of allusion to a single epigrammatic inscription in the *Histories*. This epigram is rather unusual inasmuch that it is one of only three inscriptions cited by Herodotus that remains extant—albeit in a highly fragmentary form, allowing for at least some close comparison between Herodotus’ version and the original document.⁷⁷ (Such an exercise is unfortunately complicated, however, by certain factors: the incompleteness of the extant inscription, with variant readings based on two stones, and the fact that Herodotus almost certainly relied on a later, re-inscribed rendering of the original sixth-century engraving⁷⁸—a version which did not entirely replicate the precise order and wording of the original inscription.⁷⁹)

This passage relates the Fourth Dorian Invasion of Attica in 506—the first having occurred in the distant past, the second and third in 511 and 510 BCE respectively.⁸⁰ After recalling the recently exiled Cleisthenes back to Athens, the Athenians seek an alliance with the Persians, fearing the enmity of the Spartan king Cleomenes. Enraged by their actions, the king mobilises various groups from the Peloponnese, ready to attack the Athenians. However, realising the injustice of their machinations, Herodotus informs us that the

Corinthians decide to set off back home, quickly followed by the Spartans, and then all the remaining allies (5.76). Determined to exact some sort of revenge, the Athenians simultaneously fight against Chalcis and Boiotia on the very same day, victorious in both battles (5.77.2). So the subsequent defeat of the Chalcidians and Boiotians represents the inaugural military victory of the newly democratic Athenian state—a momentous triumph for the freedom-loving Athenians (as fashioned by Herodotus at 5.78, though see n. 83 below).

In order to commemorate this defeat, the Athenians make three distinct memorials.⁸¹ First, they hang the chains originally used for the Chalcidian and Boiotian prisoners on the Acropolis; secondly, they set aside a tenth of the enemies' ransom and have a four-horse bronze chariot constructed, positioning it prominently in the entrance of the Propylaia on the Athenian Acropolis; and finally, they commission the following epigram, which is inscribed on the chariot:

ἔνθεα Βοιωτῶν καὶ Χαλκιδέων δαμάσαντες
παῖδες Ἀθηναίων ἔργμασιν ἐν πολέμου
δεσμῶ ἐν ἀγλυόεντι σιδηρέῳ ἔσβεσαν ὕβριν·
τῶν ἵππους δεκάτην Παλλάδι τάσδ' ἔθεσαν.

Conquering the strength of the Boiotians and the Chalcidians,
The sons of Athene fought hard in battle,
They quenched their pride with the dark oppression of iron,
Offering a tenth to Pallas by means of these horses [the chariot]. (5.77.4)⁸²

These epigrammatic verses clearly remember the Athenians' victory over their two foes, yet they also serve to focus the attention of Herodotus' readers, preparing them for the following chapter, in which the narrator speaks overtly on the merits of the Athenians' political position (5.78).⁸³ It is worthy of note too, that while Herodotus once again falls short of citing his own autopsy, his preceding remark that the chains could still be seen in his own time, hanging next to the inscription (αἶ περ ἔτι καὶ ἐς ἐμὲ ἦσαν περιεοῦσαι, κρεμάμεναι ἐκ τειχέων <τῶν> περιπεφλευσμένων πυρὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ Μήδου, 5.77.3) surely acts as a qualifying statement, adding a sense of verifiability, and hence, personal authority to the account. And the very fact that he does not cite the older form of this epigram, evidence that it had not been committed to some sort of oral tradition, further suggests that it must have been personal autopsy that lies behind Herodotus' quotation.⁸⁴ These factors, combined with the fact that his version conforms almost exactly to the separate, epigraphic evidence only further dispels the Fehling view that he invented his sources wholesale, but rather encourages us as readers to try and make sense of those passages in the *Histories* which are more problematical, due to the lack of verifiable evidence or the seemingly implausible nature of a particular account.

A little prior to this Atheno-centric excursus, which culminates in the narrator reflecting on the virtues of democracy (that is, *isēgoriē* ["equality of speech"] and *eleutheriē* ["liberty"]), Herodotus displays the fruits of his investigations into the history of the Greek language (5.57-61), offering his own explanation as to its origins.⁸⁵ This is a passage that has long been one of the most contentious and widely debated from the *Histories*,⁸⁶ not least because Herodotus dates the formation of the Greek script to multiple generations before the Trojan War, a thesis which finds little support in more recent researches into the genesis of the Greek alphabet.⁸⁷ At the heart of Herodotus' etymological *logos* is a triad of epigrams, each

building on and supporting Herodotus' central proposition (5.57), namely that the Gephyraioi (who, he argues, were Phoenician, not Eritrean)⁸⁸ were amongst the original Phoenicians that accompanied Cadmus to Boiotia, and that, amongst many other things, they introduced the alphabet to the Greeks, who then adapted this script to suit their own spoken language.⁸⁹ He asserts that it was the Ionian neighbours of the émigré Phoenicians who adopted the language (5.58.1-2), changing the shape of a few letters, but still “they call them Phoenician, which is only right, since it was the Phoenicians who brought [their script] to Greece” (ὥσπερ καὶ τὸ δίκαιον ἔφερε ἔσαγαγόντων Φοινίκων ἐς τὴν Ἑλλάδα, Φοινικία κεκληῖσθαι, 5.58.2).

Not content with just citing these cultural linkages between Phoenicians and Greeks as adequate corroboration of his central theory, Herodotus unveils other, supplementary proofs. He states that “I have seen some of these Cadmeian writings” (εἶδον δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς Καδμήια γράμματα),⁹⁰ engraved on three dedicatory tripods in the sanctuary of Apollo at Thebes.⁹¹ The first of these is inscribed: “Amphitryon dedicated me from the spoils of Teleboai” (Ἀμφιτρύων μ' ἀνέθηκεν ἐὼν ἀπὸ Τηλεβοάων, 5.59). This is the first self-reflective epigram that Herodotus cites, actively drawing the reader closer to the object that is being dedicated. The next verse, which Herodotus meticulously quotes in hexameters (ἑξαμέτρῳ τόνῳ, 5.60), also speaks in the first person:

Σκαῖος πυγμαχέων με ἐκηβόλῳ Ἀπόλλωνι⁹²

νικήσας ἀνέθηκε τεῖν περικαλλὲς ἄγαλμα.

Scaius, the victorious boxer, dedicated me to you,

Far-shooting Apollo, to be a beautiful *agalma* for your temple. (5.60)⁹³

Following this, Herodotus records the lines of the third inscribed tripod (once again noting that it is a hexametric verse),⁹⁴ which runs:

Λαοδάμας τρίποδ' αὐτὸν εὐσκόπῳ Ἀπόλλωνι
μουναρχέων ἀνέθηκε τεῖν περικαλλές ἄγαλμα.

Laodamas himself dedicated this tripod to you,
Clear-sighted Apollo, to be a beautiful *agalma* for your temple.⁹⁵ (5.61.1)

While only the first of these two additional verses speaks in the first person, both epigrams are consistent in their specific address to you, compelling you the reader temporarily to play the role of Apollo.⁹⁶

Stephanie West has identified various puzzling features in this passage, and cites Herodotus' quotation of these epigrams as a clear instance of his failure to live up to the role of epigraphist.⁹⁷ While many of West's manifold concerns are difficult to shake off, particularly Herodotus' belief that there was a distinct relationship between the early Boiotian and Ionic scripts,⁹⁸ it is not my intention here to offer an *apologia* for Herodotus, or even to attempt some sort of textual reconstruction which better fits current scholarly views on the development of the early Greek alphabet. I do, however, wish to make two vital points. First, Herodotus is almost certainly touching upon a controversial issue in tackling the history of the Greek alphabet, as can be inferred by his remarks on "letters, which, as it seems to me, did not exist among the Greeks previously" (γράμματα, οὐκ ἔόντα πρὶν Ἑλλησι ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκέειν, 5.58.1).⁹⁹ In order to consolidate his own contribution to this debate, which had

already been broached by the Milesian writers Dionysius, Anaximander and Hecataeus, not to mention by his younger contemporary Critias, the Presocratic author cited at the head of this paper, Herodotus displays the full range of his inquisitorial powers, referring to various aspects of contemporary Ionian literary culture that support his belief that the Greek script is derived from the Phoenicians. But, not satisfied with just this, he extends this with evidence adduced from personal autopsy of the Phoenician-derived writings (cf. 2.44, where he states that he had been in Phoenicia), ultimately drawing on these three inscribed epigrams as further testimony that the Greek script is profoundly indebted to Cadmus. By the end of this excursus, the reader is overwhelmed with various types of proof. In this way, the example of the Cadmeian writings is another case where Herodotus can be seen to construct an elaborate historical argument—in this case, concerning the true origins of the Greek alphabet—partly by appealing to epigraphical sources.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, it is here more than anywhere else in his text that Herodotus *most explicitly* encourages his readers to view inscriptions as a substantive feature of the historian’s toolbox, with the potential to function as persuasive, historical evidence.¹⁰¹

Secondly, it is striking that Herodotus seeks to offer an historical—as opposed to mythical—account regarding the roots of the Greek written language. While patently unaware of other early scripts like Linear B, and their own potentially substantial influence on the Phoenician language, Herodotus is determined to uncover a verifiable explanation, which avoids ascribing this significant technological change to a mythical figure such as a Palamades,¹⁰² Orpheus, etc., as other authors had done before him.¹⁰³ Moreover, one notes that Herodotus introduces these paleo-Hellenic inscriptions in a relatively uncontroversial manner, suggesting that he and his audience were relatively comfortable with the notion that the Greek alphabet had a substantial history—a notion that may of course bespeak the Greeks’

collective amnesia about the precise origins of their language. As Rosalind Thomas puts it, his use of these inscriptions is “less a sign of naive credulity than an interesting attempt to illuminate really distant periods from which—unlike the recent past—little oral tradition survived”.¹⁰⁴ Herodotus’ excursus on the Greek alphabet thus stands as a sincere excursion into the Greeks’ more extended past, and illustrates an acute awareness that inscriptions can provide valuable documentary evidence.

The final passage under consideration similarly includes three dedicatory epigrams—inscriptions that this time function as commemorative tokens for those Greeks who heroically died at Thermopylae.¹⁰⁵ Amongst the tributes paid to those who fought, Herodotus lists both oral and written “memorials” (μνημόσυνα). There is a lithic lion which celebrates Leonidas (7.225.2), symbolic in its echoing of his name and immense valour; a series of spoken “sayings” by the Spartan Dieneces (7.226), who, after being told that the gargantuan enemy will block out the sun with their arrows, merely quipped that this was good news, as the battle would be fought in the shade; and lastly (7.228), a series of inscribed epigrams, paying tribute to those who died during the battle and those who died before Leonidas dismissed the others.¹⁰⁶

The first, dedicated to those who fought and died at Thermopylae, reads:

μυριάσιν ποτὲ τῆδε τριηκοσίαις ἐμάχοντο

ἐκ Πελοποννάσου χιλιάδες τέτορες.

Here three thousand from the Peloponnese

Once fought three million.

Next, a Spartan–centric one:

ὦ ξεῖν', ἀγγέλλειν Λακεδαιμονίοις ὅτι τῆδε
κείμεθα τοῖς κείνων ῥήμασι πειθόμενοι.

O Stranger! Announce to the Lacedaemonians that
We lie in this spot, obeying their commands.

The third, dedicated to the Spartan seer Megistias, and reported to be commissioned by his guest-friend Simonides (in contrast to the first two, commissioned by the Amphictyones):¹⁰⁷

μνήμα τόδε κλειτοῖο Μεγιστία, ὃν ποτε Μῆδοι
Σπερχειὸν ποταμὸν κτεῖναν ἀμειψάμενοι,
μάντιος, ὃς τότε Κῆρας ἐπερχομένας¹⁰⁸ σάφα εἰδὼς
οὐκ ἔτλη Σπάρτης ἡγεμόνα προλιπεῖν.

Here lies the memorial of the celebrated Megistias,
Who fell when the Persians crossed the Spercheius River;
A seer, who clearly envisaged his own fate,
Yet could not bear to leave the Spartan leader.

This second triptych of epigrams in Herodotus is especially evocative for the reader, not only because of its emotional restraint, almost entirely refusing to elaborate on the outcome of the soldiers' defiant heroism, but also in its steady progression from the general to the specific.

Starting with the four thousand Peloponnesians, the final epigram represents Simonides' (self-composed?) epitaph for Megistias.¹⁰⁹ Although not to the same extent as the Cadmeian inscriptions, problems persist with the first of these lines. Herodotus has already informed the reader previously to this passage that both the Spartans and the Thespians fought at Thermopylae (7.226.1), yet the first inscription does not refer to the Thespians.¹¹⁰ Moreover, it is noticeable that the narrator has painstakingly incorporated these particular epitaphic verses into his text, ultimately forming a neat triad, as Herodotus does in his exegesis on the three inscribed tripods that he saw at the temple of Apollo in Thebes. Such decorous selectivity pushes the reader to question why the Herodotean narrator opted for these particular lines, and whether he (purposefully) ignored other possible commemorative inscriptions at Thermopylae—some of which are quoted by later authors.¹¹¹

Regardless of the difficulties surrounding Herodotus' patently selective citation of inscribed objects in this passage,¹¹² the narrator clearly aims to bestow a great deal of historical-cultural significance upon his chosen epigrams. His reference to the third, Simonidean epigram—a statement that can only elevate the status of the *μνημα*—well illustrates Herodotus' intention of capturing the reader's attention and adding weight to the epigraphic lines he dutifully records.¹¹³ For whilst it remains the case that Herodotus and his contemporaries would have encountered epic and lyric poetry chiefly within a performative context, such as at a public festival or an élite *symposion*,¹¹⁴ this reference to Simonides in connection with the Megistias epigram demonstrates that he was equally aware—and made use of—inscribed poetry.¹¹⁵ This seemingly trivial anecdote in fact conveys a serious point to his reader: epigrams are desirable items, so much so that even a poet as celebrated as Simonides contributed to this relatively undistinguished genre.¹¹⁶ The ultimate effect this has on Herodotus' Thermopylae *logos* is all the more striking; while each individual epigram

is relatively uncomplicated stylistically speaking, the combined effect of the three epigrams together is more substantial.

Even from this rather limited number of epigrams that Herodotus openly integrates within his text (though this may, of course, account for only some of the total epigrams he in fact discovered whilst conducting his inquiries),¹¹⁷ one can point yet again towards a much more integrative, if inconsistent, use of inscriptions in his work than many have allowed. The epigrammatic triptychs which furnish his Cadmeian and Thermopylae *logoi* both take privileged positions—the former as conclusive evidence of the Greek language’s Phoenician origins, the latter as a lasting memorial for those Greeks who fought and died at Thermopylae. Used in an altogether different way, the Athenian epigram at 5.77, honouring the then nascent democracy, serves a more overtly political point in Herodotus’ text, as it illustrates a significant victory for the Athenian democracy to the Herodotean reader, and complicates Herodotus’ brief excursus on the virtues of democracy in the succeeding chapter.

Herodotus Epigraphist

The *Histories* provide substantial evidence for the breadth of inscribed records found across the Greek and non-Greek world; and far from treating inscriptions in isolation, Herodotus routinely situates this wide and diverse group of written sources within their specific physical and cultural landscapes. Many different people in Herodotus—both individuals and communities—erect inscriptions, albeit for radically different ends. Hegemonic figures such as Sesostris and Darius use inscriptions to mark out the lands of those peoples that they have subjugated; these inscriptions are used to set up physical boundaries between the free and non-free. One further instance of this which I have not discussed is that of Croesus, who sets

up a stele at the border between Phrygia and Lydia that “demarcates the boundaries with inscribed letters” (καταμηνύει διὰ γραμμάτων τοὺς οὖρους, 7.30.2).¹¹⁸ But despite these rather unsettling examples which support Steiner’s view that writing is concomitant with Oriental despotism in the *Histories*,¹¹⁹ for Herodotus the (written) inscription is, in fact, not always indicative of a malevolent or despotic force. Various Greek *poleis* utilise epigraphy for more commemorative purposes, often to promote the honour of a group endeavour (6.114.3, 7.228, 8.82.1, cf. 9.81.1), or to commemorate an outstanding individual (Megistias, 7.228.3), or, as in the case of Themistocles, to spur others into taking a desired course of actions (8.22).

Beyond this, there are other, more integrative ways in which Herodotus deploys inscriptions, since they also provide him the opportunity to establish new ways of settling controversial issues or trouncing the theories of his predecessors.¹²⁰ His account on the Phoenician-derived Greek alphabet is distinct in its departure from mythological explanations, instead focusing on the humans who were responsible for its inception and development. It is in part the antique inscriptions that he credits having seen in Thebes that enable Herodotus to construct this abbreviated history of writing, and to persuade his audience of its Cadmeian origins. Earlier in Book Two, Herodotus looks to validate the Egyptian priests’ account that Sesostris in fact conquered more lands than any leader by appealing to the Sesostrian monuments—some of which were inscribed. As Herodotus re-contextualises the inscription within his inquiry, he often grants it a greater agency, as it proves key to explaining a particular event or idea, transcending its original setting.

Regardless of the significant scholarly cautions that have been levelled against Herodotus, his understanding of inscriptions is clearly more theorised and sophisticated than has been

appreciated in the bulk of modern scholarship.¹²¹ For Herodotus, inscribed materials can appear as decorous and ornamental, and sometimes they appear to work under this guise in his text; but their power cannot be explained in purely aesthetic terms, as Herodotus is equally interested in the profound and challenging messages that the inscriptions he records often convey. Several of the passages discussed have illuminated the ways that the narrator relates his discovery of rather inscrutable epigraphic materials, and then looks to shape how audiences read such items. For as the cases of Nitocris' tomb and the Crosean *perirrhantērion* in Book One show, Herodotus' epigraphic allusions sometimes reflect on the very limitations of inscriptions, which contain fabricated or misleading messages, thus throwing into sharp relief the authority of his own work, which self-consciously presents readers with a discursive, critical reading of the past. And, finally, it is striking just how often Herodotus' epigraphical allusions are inextricably bound up with the rhetoric of autopsy: his inscriptional references frequently work in tandem with narratorial interjections or detailed contextual information that emphasises first-hand experience, thus authenticating a particular *logos*.

Such a diverse application of inscriptions of course reinforces the salient point that Herodotus' work is not that of a modern historian. Yet in Herodotus' self-conscious emphasis on his encountering, interpreting and deploying all manner of epigraphical items, the historian further accentuates the significant role that different forms of written sources played in the creation of his historical narrative.

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¹ ‘The Phoenicians discovered letters, the safeguard of speech’, DK 88 B 2.10.

² Luraghi 2001: 9.

³ Cf. Ephorus, *FGrHist* 70 F9. For this passage and Plutarch’s generally limited application of first-hand research, reliant rather on earlier sources, see Higbie 1999: 43-6. Of course, Plutarch famously uses epigrams to criticise what he considers an unfair treatment of the Corinthians in Herodotus, see *De mal. Herod.* 39, 42.

⁴ For a general survey of the Greek historians and their (infrequent) use of inscriptions, see Finley 1983: 205-8; Marincola 1997: 103-5; Higbie 1999: 54-65; Sickinger 1999: 176-82; Petrovic 2007a: 49-57. On other literary evidence suggesting expectation of some epigraphic literacy by the fifth century, see Day 2010: 59-63.

⁵ Pownall 2008: 119-2; cf. Habicht (1961), a seminal work that argues for the spurious nature of fourth-century documents which pertain to the period of the Greco-Persian Wars (I am grateful to one of the anonymous readers for this reference). For the view that Aristotle was the first to make extensive use of inscriptions ‘for historical information and argument’, see Thomas 1989: 90-1; Higbie 1999: 65-78.

⁶ Two of the Theopompan fragments point towards a comparative critique of inscriptions, suggesting a somewhat familiar relationship with public documents in his work; cf. Pownall 2008: 121-2.

⁷ For Herodotus’ use of inscriptions, see principally Volkmann 1954; West 1985, 1992; Pritchett 1985: 163-76, 1993: 144-91; Fehling 1989: 146-56; Fabiani 2003; cf. also Raubitschek 1961; Dillery 1992; Higbie 1999: 56-9; Osborne 2002: 510-3; Petrovic 2007a: 50-3, 55-7; Livingstone and Nisbet 2010: 30-9, 46-7; Kosmetatou 2013. The use of inscriptions is also part and parcel of a much wider appeal to monuments and other objects in Herodotus, see further Dewald 1993; Hedrick 1993, 2002: 22-3; Bassi 2016: 106-43.

⁸ For the vast quantities of inscriptions by the end of the fifth century BCE, see (for Athens) Thomas 1989: 34-94; cf. the broader discussion in Harris 1989: 65-114 on the spread of literacy in the classical period (noting the large quantity of Athenian inscriptions at pp. 74-5).

⁹ Osborne 2002: 512 (“if there is no story attached by his informants to an inscribed object there is no sign that Herodotus will be interested in it”). Cf. Thomas 1989: 90; Liddel and Low 2013: 14 (“in Herodotus’ work, inscriptions adorn or accompany narratives, rather than initiating them”).

¹⁰ Here I nod to Stephanie West’s seminal 1985 article, which I discuss further below.

¹¹ For possible knowledge of Persian inscriptions in Herodotus (particularly—though by no means exclusively—at 3.89-97, 5.52-3, 7.61-98), see Tozzi 1975; Lewis 1985: 116-17; Moggi 2005: 203-4; Harrison 2015; (more sceptically) Murray 2001: 36; West 2007, 2011.

¹² Cf. the useful discussion in Fabiani 2003: 163-7, who well notes that monarchs erect all non-Greek inscriptions, whereas the bulk of the Greek inscriptions are erected by a collective group (p. 166). This number compares rather favourably to later Greek historians, who include far fewer epigraphic documents. For inscriptions in Thucydides, see Lane Fox 2010; cf. Hornblower 1987: 88-92; Higbie 1999: 59-62; Smarczyk 2006; Hornblower 2008: 446-8; cf. Higbie 1999: 62-5, for fourth-century historians (principally Theopompus of Chios and Philochorus of Athens).

¹³ For a comprehensive survey of Herodotus' use of autopsy, see Schepens 1980: 33-93. Herodotus only explicitly appeals to personal observation for a select few of the inscriptions that he records (cf. 2.106, 5.59-60), although I discuss throughout this paper other cases where Herodotus' use of *ekphrasis* or inclusion of contextual details implicitly suggests that he has seen an inscription for himself.

¹⁴ Note especially the Themistoclean inscription at 8.22 (discussed below), an impossibly verbose inscription, which scholars do not accept as a literal transcription of the original(?) record.

¹⁵ Greek inscriptions: 1.51.3-4; 4.88; 5.59, 60, 61, 77.4; 6.14.3; 7.228.1-2, 228.2, 228.3-4; 8.22.1-2, 82.1 (cf.9.81.1). Non-Greek inscriptions: 1.93.3, 187.1-2, 187.5; 2.102.4-5 (cf. 2.103.1 and 106.1), 106.3-4, 125.6, 136.3-4, 141.6; 3.88.3; 4.91; 7.30.2. Bilingual inscription: 4.87.

¹⁶ So West 1985: 302.

¹⁷ The highly fragmentary nature of earlier prose writers' works makes it difficult to say anything more conclusive here. For Herodotus' engagement with the Milesian Hecataeus, Dillery 2018 is now essential.

¹⁸ West 1985: 303.

¹⁹ For a thorough repudiation of West's criticisms, see Pritchett 1993: 144-187.

²⁰ Fehling 1989: 133-140.

²¹ West is troubled especially by his less-than-accurate description of the serpent column (8.82.1 and 9.81.1). See, however, Pritchett 1993: 147-8, who convincingly argues against West's 'picayune' objections.

²² Moles 1999. Grethlein 2013: 187-90 explores further Herodotus' juxtaposition of his work with inscriptions through an analysis of Darius' flawed attempts at memorialisation in the *Histories*.

²³ Cf. also 1.92.1. On the Croesan dedications, see Parke 1984: 209-32; cf. Kosmetatou 2013, who suggests that inventory lists lie behind Herodotus' account of Croesus' dedications. For an illuminating parallel in

which a monument is dedicated by one individual, but inscribed by another with a different nationality, see Pritchett 1993: 145-6. For the lively interest in inscriptions attached to dedications that went back to legendary persons, see Hedrick 2002: 22-3; Day 2010: 64, n. 151.

²⁴ Kirk 2018: 34-5 examines the awkward syntax of this passage, in which the subject of the participle φάμενον (“saying”) is somewhat nebulous. As Kirk well notes, Herodotus “never once uses the noun ἐπιγραφή to describe writing on surfaces” (p. 33), even though he of course cites numerous inscriptions.

²⁵ All citations of Herodotus are from the Oxford Classical Text edition of Wilson; all translations are my own.

²⁶ Although impossible to say why Herodotus should here admit that he knows something, but will omit it from his text, it is surely possible that he did so in order to reassure his audience of his own abilities as a researcher, and, simultaneously, to avoid offending the Delphians. For similar statements elsewhere in the *Histories*, see 1.95; 2.123; 3.65; 4.43. Incidentally, the corresponding reassurance “but the boy through whose hand the water runs is a genuine Lacedaemonian gift” (ἀλλ’ ὁ μὲν παῖς, δι’ οὗ τῆς χειρὸς ῥέει τὸ ὕδωρ, Λακεδαιμονίων ἐστί, 1.51.4) serves both to appease the Spartans and to strengthen the audience’s overall impression of his own familiarity with the Delphic treasures, How and Wells 1923: 1.74.

²⁷ So How and Wells 1923: ad loc.: “without an inscription”, Legrand 1932: ad loc.: “pas de marques”, Asheri 2007a: ad loc.: “without inscriptions”, *contra* Stein 1881-1896: “indistinguishable”, Powell 1938: s.v. ἐπίσημος; “[not] remarkable”.

²⁸ Similarly How and Wells 1923: 1.75. The golden tripod at Delphi (i.e. the Serpent Column), which details all those who opposed the Persians mentioned at 8.82.1 and 9.81.1 presents a similar case of implied autopsy (cf. Macan 1908: 764); for Herodotus relates in the latter passage that the tripod “stands on the brazen three-headed serpent, which sits very close to the altar”, before describing additional treasures and their dimensions. The inclusion of specific contextual information implies empirical research and develops Herodotus’ authoritative persona, as well as reinforcing Herodotus’ methodological preference for *opsis* over *akoē*. As will become clear, implicit or explicit autopsy unites many of Herodotus’ epigraphical allusions.

²⁹ Cf. 2.123.1; 7.152.3. West 1985 has little to say on this inscription, but note How and Wells 1923: 1.75: “it is interesting to see H. exercising his critical faculty on the Temple records”; cf. too Fabiani 2003: 168.

³⁰ Kindt 2006; Pelling 2006; (with the Cyrus *logos*) Sewell-Rutter 2007: 12.

³¹ E.g., *FGE* 233: “[on Hdt. 7.228] Herodotus *has naively reported what he was told* [my italics], not noticing that this inscription is not what he says it is, an epitaph ... It was not Herodotus’ custom to read and copy inscriptions, and it is not known whether he ever saw the actual epigrams at Thermopylae. If he did see them,

it appears improbable that he made copies of them for use in his *History*". It goes without saying that this study finds no support for such a naïve Herodotus.

³² For a possible poetic inspiration behind Herodotus' interest in Alyattes' tomb, see Hipponax 42 W² (line 2: ἰθὺ διὰ Λυδῶν παρὰ τὸν Ἀττάλειον τύμβον).

³³ West's near-total avoidance of these two inscriptions in her important discussion is unfortunate, particularly given the strong links, both in terms of theme and content, which they establish with other inscriptions he records. On Nitocris' inscription, see Dillery 1992.

³⁴ For the archaeological evidence for Alyattes' *sēma*, see Asheri 2007a: ad. 93.2, with further bibliography.

³⁵ Herodotus incorporates stories concerning courtesans for other monuments: 2.126 (Cheops' daughter), 134 (Rhodopis). Asheri 2007a: ad loc. remarks on the amusing effects of this statement for a Greek audience.

³⁶ Cf. *Il.* 20.392.

³⁷ Cf. Clarke 2018: 145.

³⁸ So Steiner 1994: 136-42. Baragwanath 2008: 62-4 offers an altogether different reading, focusing in the main on how Nitocris is mentally attuned to the future and hence able to read human motivations. Cf. Payen 1997: 66-9, who reads aietic conventions in the shaping of this story.

³⁹ No oriental text refers to a royal figure with this name, but for some alternative possibilities as to what might have directed Herodotus' version, see Dillery 1992: 30-1; Pritchett 1993: 172-3; Asheri 2007a: 204. Strabo also refers to the tomb (13.4.7), noting that some called it a "monument of prostitution" (πόρνης μνημα).

⁴⁰ Gammie 1986: 182 reads this focus on Darius' greed as the central point of the *logos*. Cf. Dillery 1992, who argues that the entire anecdote has a characteristically Greek colouring, noting verbal similarities with Greek oracles; similarly, Asheri 2007a: 205 (following Dillery) cites a similar passage concerning Xerxes opening the tomb of Belus, only to discover an inscribed stele stating: "For the individual who opens the monument and does not fill the sarcophagus things will not get better" (τῷ ἀνοίξαντι τὸ μνημα καὶ μὴ ἀναπληρώσαντι τὴν πέλον οὐκ ἔστιν ἄμεινον, Ael. *VH* 13.3).

⁴¹ Baragwanath 2008: 63.

⁴² Kindt 2006.

⁴³ Cf. the famous criticisms of writing in Plato: *Phdr.* 274b-8e; *Prt.* 329a; *Sph.* 231d-3b. For the tyranny of writing in modern scholarship, see Derrida 1967; Steiner 1994.

⁴⁴ For a thoroughly sceptical review of the Sesostris inscriptions, see West 1985: 297-302, in which she advances many of the concerns raised by Fehling 1989: 15-17, 98-101; cf. Sayce 1883: 179; Armayor 1985:

53-74. See also West 1992, offering a more forgiving interpretation of Herodotus' account. For a more general overview of Herodotus' account on Sesostris, see Lloyd 1988: 16-18.

⁴⁵ Lloyd 2007: 313; cf. Török 2014: 65.

⁴⁶ Herodotus derives a great deal of information from the Egyptian priests, Lloyd 2007: 230-1. At various points he mentions priests at Thebes, Memphis and Heliopolis (the latter, he states, are said to be the most knowledgeable of all Egyptians, 2.3).

⁴⁷ Note the verbal correspondences here with the proem: the priests cannot speak of a memorable *apodexis* or *ergon* for nearly all Egyptian kings; thus, the majority of Egyptian kings' deeds go *aklea* in Herodotus.

⁴⁸ See Dillery 2015: 206 for the likely origins of the priests' account of Sesostris' deeds.

⁴⁹ For the *realia* behind this passage, see West 1992: 118 with further bibliography at n. 9. Cf. 2.141.6, where the Egyptian king Sethos also erects a statue after defeating the Arabians and Assyrians (with the aid of field mice). Herodotus records that the statue shows the king holding a field mouse, as well as a reverent inscription to the gods. For good discussions on the Egyptian origins of this object, see Lloyd 1988: 104-5; Pritchett 1993: 115-6.

⁵⁰ Cf. Asheri 1990: "It is easy to realize that when he writes about Sesostris he is really thinking about Darius" (151-2).

⁵¹ Herodotus' reliefs are normally connected with the Karabel reliefs, for which see Hawkins 1998.

⁵² Cf. Bowie 2018: 60, reminding readers that Book Two passages such as this one exhibit Herodotus' proemial declaration that he will research the "great and marvellous deeds" performed by Greeks and non-Greeks alike.

⁵³ For the contemporary significance of Sesostris' inflated exploits (i.e. Egypt being occupied by Persia), see Haziza 2009: 132. Grethlein 2013: 189-90 focuses on how Darius is denied the opportunity to establish a lasting memorial of his achievements, due to his failure in Scythia; cf. Dillery 2015: 313-4.

⁵⁴ Cf. Sergueenkova 2016: 125-6.

⁵⁵ Steiner 1994: 138 argues that "the culinary detail deprives the written source of any authority it might carry", though it is not clear why this need necessarily be the case.

⁵⁶ This is the only instance in which Herodotus stresses his reliance on a native tongue to translate a foreign language, though he will have relied on translators for other parts of his narrative. For Herodotus' limited knowledge of other languages, see Harrison 1998, who emphasises the scarcity of polyglot Greeks in Herodotus' age; cf. Thordarson 1996: 52-4. For ancient Greek attitudes to foreign languages, see also Momigliano 1975: 7-8, 18-9.

⁵⁷ So How and Wells 1923: 1.229; cf. Lloyd 1988: 70-1 (“the *hermēneus* was either an extremely bad philologist or a bare-faced liar, probably the latter”); Clarke 2015: 48, remarking on the “vagaries of the human memory”. For the *hermēneus* in Egypt, cf. 2.164.1.

⁵⁸ Clarke 2015: 48-9.

⁵⁹ Steiner 1994: 137.

⁶⁰ Steiner 1994: 127-66.

⁶¹ West 1985: 297, n. 93 is not only unimpressed with the lack of interest he shows in the two scripts, but also adds that he ought to have referred to three scripts: Hieroglyphic, Hieratic and Demotic. The former criticism is somewhat unfair, however, as he mentions the two distinct scripts merely as an afterthought, in a passage concerned with the antithetical relationship between Greek and Egyptian culture, not Egyptian writing habits. The latter point, though of course correct, should not undermine Herodotus’ central recognition that Egyptians practised polygraphy.

⁶² Bowie 2007: ad loc. notes especially that the opening address ἄνδρες Ἴωνες is typical of a speech, but not of formal Greek prose inscriptions. Cf. similarly, Macan 1908: ad loc., sceptical that such an inscription could ever be carved; Steiner 1994: 153-4, noting the similarities with Leotychides’ message at 9.98.2-3.

⁶³ See West 1985: 285-7. Fabiani 2003: 165 and Bowie 2007: ad loc. note that this is the only verbatim report of a Greek prose inscription in Herodotus, but Bowie adds that it is “fairly plain that there were no such inscriptions” (though subsequently remarking that this form of communication with the Ionians is a striking conceit, “befitting the trickster Themistocles”). Cf. also Harris 1989: an instance of a “freely invented text” (80, n. 74).

⁶⁴ Fowler 2013: 643.

⁶⁵ Boedeker 2000: 101-2. Note also Fabiani 2003: 166, commenting on Themistocles’ commitment to the Hellenic cause and not personal motivations.

⁶⁶ See further Zali 2014: 257-62.

⁶⁷ Indeed, after repeating the inscription Herodotus adds that “Themistocles wrote these things, having, as it seems to me, two things together in his mind, so that either the letters might escape the notice of the king and cause the Ionians to change and come over to his side, or that having been informed on and denounced to Xerxes, the Ionians might cause him to distrust them, keeping them away from naval battles” (Θεμιστοκλέης δὲ ταῦτα ἔγραψε, δοκέειν ἐμοί, ἐπ’ ἀμφοτέρω νοέων, ἵνα ἢ λαθόντα τὰ γράμματα βασιλέα Ἴωνας ποιήσῃ μεταβαλεῖν καὶ γενέσθαι πρὸς ἐωυτῶν, ἢ ἐπεῖτε ἀνευχεθῆ καὶ διαβληθῆ πρὸς Ξέρξην, ἀπίστους ποιήσῃ τοὺς

Ἴωνας καὶ τῶν ναυμαχίῶν αὐτοῦς ἀπόσχη, 8.22.3). Cf. Baragwanath 2008: 63, noting the correspondence with 1.187.5, showing how both Darius and Xerxes are undermined by deceptive, publicly displayed writing.⁶⁸ 4.88; 5.59-61, 77; 7.228. Page nevertheless remarks on Herodotus' lack of epigrammatic references (*FGE* 192-3), an unfair comment given Herodotus' indisputably significant contribution to the early application of epigram in literary works. For ἐπίγραμμα, see 5.59, 7.228 (bis); cf. Petrovic 2007b: 77, Kirk 2018: 33.

⁶⁹ Livingstone and Nisbet 2010: 23. Bing 2002 argues against the notion that many people read these inscribed epigrams, maintaining that this is simply an assumption of modern scholarship. Livingstone and Nisbet rightly challenge Bing's hypothesis, noting that "the expectations voiced in the inscriptions themselves, and the clear assumption of ancient writers from Herodotus onward that inscribed epigrams are significant and interesting, weighs heavily on the other side" (27, n. 14). See further Day 2007: 32, n. 16.

⁷⁰ On epigrammatic innovations during the hellenistic period, see Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004; for a broader overview of epigram and its development, see Bing and Bruss 2007.

⁷¹ Whilst Herodotus makes no mention of personal observation, his noticeable affinity to all things Samian has long been recognised; cf. the Suda entry on Herodotus, which states that he migrated to Samos because of the tyrant Lygdamis. His unpredictably extensive focus on Samian affairs certainly supports the view that he spent some time there; he later refers to—but does not quote—a separate Samian inscription that lists the names of those Samians who did not flee, and joined the battle against the Phoenicians (6.14); see further Irwin 2009; Pelling 2011.

⁷² See the sceptical remarks in Fehling 1989: 137-8, 184; West 1985: 281-2 is more measured.

⁷³ = 'Simonides' IV *FGE*, though Page does not refer to any citation to establish a firm Simonidean link.

⁷⁴ Herodotus reports on Darius erecting two other inscriptions. The first (4.91) honours the river Tearus before boasting of his fine character and imperial grandeur (cf. the Achaemenid parallel cited by Corcella 2007: ad loc.); the second (3.88.3), erected at the outset of his reign, describes his acquisition of power with the support of his horse (see Pritchett 1993: 173-9). Neither inscription has been located, but both reflect knowledge of Persian royal inscriptions; cf. Asheri 2007b: ad. 3.88.3; West 1985: 296-7; and (more broadly) the bibliography listed above at n. 8. Fehling 1989: 134 does not deny the first of these inscriptions.

⁷⁵ Herodotus uses the same term at 7.228, where Simonides sets up an inscription for the seer Megistias. Here however, unlike the Simonidean commission, common sense does not dictate that Mandrocles also wrote the epigram; cf. Corcella 2007: ad loc.

⁷⁶ Cf. Xerxes' survey of his troops crossing the Hellespont at 7.44. The Herodotean theme of non-Greek rulers ominously crossing rivers of course begins with Croesus and the Halys river, 1.75.2; cf. Cyrus and the Araxes: 1.208, Xerxes and the Hellespont: 7.55. Note also Cambyses crossing the waterless desert in Arabia: 3.4. For the 'river motif', see Immerwahr 1966: 293-4, 316-7.

⁷⁷ See 'Simonides' III *FGE = IG I³ 501 A and B*. For the difficulty in delimiting the similarities and differences between the inscription(s) and the Herodotean version, see Kaczko 2009: 112-4. Such problems are certainly not to be limited to Herodotus; for example, there are also discrepancies between one of the treaties recorded by Thucydides (5.47) and the partially preserved inscribed copy of it (*IG I³ 83*) (though Hornblower 2008: ad loc. emphasises the insubstantiality of the differences).

⁷⁸ So Nisbet and Livingstone 2010: 33; cf. Petrovic 2007a: 52, who notes that no other written source cites the original version either.

⁷⁹ Nisbet and Livingstone 2010: 33-5; note especially: "this inscription thus provides a striking example of the adaptability of epigram and its capacity, even in its inscribed form, to be reused to fit new occasions and new contexts" (p. 35).

⁸⁰ Dewald 1998: 676 notes that this inventory of invasions would have had special relevance for many of Herodotus' immediate audience, given the invasions of Attica in 446, 431, 430, and 428.

⁸¹ Herodotus' inclusion of three distinct parts of the Athenians' commemorative response is far from accidental; I explore below further his propensity for citing small clusters of dedications elsewhere in the *Histories*.

⁸² This is an especially fitting epigram, acutely capturing the significance of the Athenian victory and the subsequent respect shown to their patron goddess.

⁸³ Is the reader meant to detect a note of irony here? For Herodotus extols the virtues of Athenian democracy immediately following its successful military defeat of two Greek *poleis*, whose prisoners are kept in fetters until being freed for a ransom of two minae (5.77.3). Paradoxically, then, freedom-loving democracy expresses itself through the oppression of fellow Greeks; cf. Momigliano 1984. For different levels of irony at work in Herodotus, see Rutherford 2018.

⁸⁴ Similarly, Petrovic 2007a: 52.

⁸⁵ A topic that interested many intellectual figures even before Herodotus: the scholiast on Dionysius Thrax reports a wide range of authors who theorised on the origins of the Greek alphabet, including Pythodorus, Phillis, and the Milesians Anaximander, Dionysius, and Hecataeus (*FGrHist* 1 F20); cf. also Andron (*FGrHist*

10 F9). For further discussion of Greek ideas on the introduction of the Greek alphabet, see Jeffery 1967; cf. Jacoby 1913: 439 (assuming an Ionic origin of Herodotus' account); West 1985: 294; Harrison 1998: 22 with n. 96; Almagor 2014: F1. For our own understanding of the history of the Greek alphabet, see principally Jeffery 1990; Hall 1997: 143-53; Hornblower 2013: 178; and various earlier references listed in *OCD*⁴ s.v. Alphabet, Greek.

⁸⁶ West 1985: 290-5 raises several concerns. Fehling 1989: 133-140 confidently asserts that these cannot be genuine inscriptions, tentatively suggesting that Herodotus derived his view of Cadmus from Eumelus or Stesichorus (140). Guarducci 1967 classes the inscriptions as false; similarly, Powell 1991 states that the three tripods are “forgeries, inasmuch as they pretend to be donations of the Bronze Age heroes Amphitryon, Skaios, and Laodomas” (p. 6, n. 7). But compare the more favourable suggestions in Volkmann 1954: 59-62; Day 1994: “[p]erhaps early in the sixth century, the local authorities inscribed them, probably as labels to explain an oral tradition” (40); Pritchett 1993: 116-21, who cites Pausanias' reference to an inscription of Heracles in the same temple (10.7.6), arguing that priests may have commissioned pseudo-archaic inscriptions which people commonly accepted to be historical (even if we may deem such things historical frauds); Ruijgh 1998; Higbie 1999: 59 with n. 43; and now, Papazarkadas 2014: 246-7; Thonemann 2016: 159-61.

⁸⁷ See Jeffery 1990; Luraghi 2010: 72. Powell 1991: 5-6 maintains that Phoenician writing is a clear precursor to, and influence on, the Greek alphabet.

⁸⁸ The language here is quintessentially Herodotean: he states that the Gephyraioi “according to their account, originated from Eretria. *But as I discover by way of inquiry, they were Phoenicians*” (ὡς μὲν αὐτοὶ λέγουσι, ἐγγέγονεσαν ἐξ Ἐρετρίας τὴν ἀρχὴν, ὡς δὲ ἐγὼ ἀναπυθναθόμενος εὕρισκω, ἦσαν Φοίνικες).

⁸⁹ Herodotus, of course, being essentially right. Cf. Nenci 1994: 239-40, noting that the discovery in 1963 of 32 inscribed cylinder-seals in Boiotian Thebes “confermano le notizie erodotee”.

⁹⁰ Cf. my discussion above on 2.102-10, where at 2.106 Herodotus similarly interjects with a statement of his own autopsy of inscribed objects, further confirming the central premise that Sesostrius was an exceptional pharaoh. Hornblower 2013: ad loc. notes that we have not reason to doubt the claim to autopsy here. Marincola 1997: 101, n. 190 notes that this is, in fact, the sole explicit statement of autopsy in Greece in the whole of the *Histories*, arguing that autopsy is used precisely because Herodotus is being polemical with other Greek theorists (i.e. Hecataeus and Dionysius of Miletus, *FGrHist* 1 F20 and 687 F1 respectively). While I agree that Herodotus is being polemical here, Marincola's explanation does not fully explain the problem of why

Herodotus does not refer to his own autopsy in other polemical passages in the later books; for one can hardly maintain that this is the only instance of polemic in the more Helleno-centric books.

⁹¹ For other tripods in early Greek culture, see Papalexandrou 2005: 9-64, cf. 34-7 for the Cadmeian inscriptions in Herodotus. For a comparable (archaic) epigram, which displays considerable verbal similarities to the epigrams in Hdt. 5.59-61, see *CEG* 326; cf. further discussion in Day 2010: 33-48. On the predominantly sacred context of early public writing, especially written laws, see Thomas 1995: 73.

⁹² Day 2010: 131 n. 2 cites other epigraphic (e.g. *CEG* 338) and literary (e.g. *Il.* 16.513) examples that show that this is a common formula for Apollo.

⁹³ See Day 2010: 124-9 on the problems of translating the term *agalma* as “statue”, “dedication”, etc.

⁹⁴ Such fastidiousness is a common occurrence in Herodotus’ text; cf., e.g., 1.23, where Herodotus remarks that Arion was the “first person of whom we know to compose and name the dithyramb” (διθύραμβον πρῶτον ἀνθρώπων τῶν ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν ποιήσαντά τε καὶ ὀνομάσαντα).

⁹⁵ Thonemann 2016: 160 considers this third inscription a forgery, modelled on the authentic dedicatory inscription made by Scaius.

⁹⁶ On Greek inscriptions and the silent reader, see the important study by Svenbro 1993.

⁹⁷ West 1985, note especially: “[Herodotus] has turned an ingenious but ill-founded speculation into what purports to be sober epigraphical scholarship” (294-5). Powell 1991 is less condemnatory, allowing Herodotus some margin for error: “Herodotus was wrong about Kadmos ... Herodotus’ story is a legendary account of the historical fact that the alphabet did come from Phoenicia. Because Kadmos was the famous legendary migrant from Phoenicia, it was logical to assume that he brought with him Phoenicia’s most celebrated export” (9-10).

⁹⁸ West 1985: 293.

⁹⁹ Herodotus is clearly behind Hyginus’ mythological account of first inventions, *Fab.* 277.2: “Mercury is said to have first brought the Greek letters to Egypt; from Egypt Cadmus <took them> to Greece” (Has autem Graecas Mercurius in Aegyptum primus detulisse dicitur, ex Aegypto Cadmus in Graeciam).

¹⁰⁰ A point that even West concedes (1985: 292).

¹⁰¹ Cf. Nenci 1994: ad. 59: “le tre iscrizioni greche delle quali è stato ritrovato anche il testo epigrafico provano la assoluta fedeltà erodotea all’originale”. Hornblower 2008: ad. 6.55.1 cites this excursus as the closest parallel to Thuc. 6.54-9, which, he argues, shows Thucydides consulting inscriptions in a manner akin to a modern historian.

¹⁰² For Palamedes as the inventor of the alphabet, see Hyg. *Fab.* 277.1: “But Palamedes son of Nauplius also invented eleven letters” (Palamedes autem Nauplii filius inuenit aequae litteras undecim; though Simonides and Epicharmus of Sicily are also credited with inventing four and two letters respectively). Cf. the pervasive focus on writing in Euripides’ *Palamedes*, for which see Torrance 2010: 219-22.

¹⁰³ As already noted by How and Wells 1923: 2.26. Cf. Pelling 2007: 197, who makes a number of comparisons between the structure of this passage and of the *Histories* more broadly, and well remarks on the demythologised nature of this passage (“no Prometheus, no Palamedes, no Musaeus, even if there is a Cadmus ... it is all on a human level”), and the similarly “Phoenician-rich” prologue (“no metamorphosis into a bull, no Golden Fleece, no divine beauty contest”). On demythologisation in Herodotus’ opening chapters, see further West 2002: 8-15; Thomas 2000: 268.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas 1989: 90.

¹⁰⁵ Higbie 2010: 185 discusses the significance of commemorative epigrams in the decades following the Greco-Persian Wars, as they provided clear evidence of whether a city or individual really fought. Cf. also 6.14.3, where Herodotus reports that those Samians who stayed and fought at the battle of Lade in 494 were honoured with an inscription of their names and their fathers’ names, which stood on a “stele in the agora” (ἡ στήλη ἐν τῇ ἀγορῇ). Given Herodotus’ familiarity with Samos, there seems no reason to doubt that he saw this item; cf. Fabiani 2003: 172.

¹⁰⁶ = ‘Simonides’ VI, XXII *FGE*. This section of the *Histories* stands out due to being richly adorned with writing-related terms: ἐπιγέγραπται γράμματα (7.228.1); ἐπιγέγραπται (7.228.2); ἐπιγράμμασι, ἐπίγραμμα, ἐπιγράψας (7.228.4); cf. Livingstone and Nisbet 2010: 35. For these three epigrams, see Petrovic 2007b: 62-79 and the adjoining commentary at 231-5.

¹⁰⁷ Page argues that for the Simonidean ascription, “Herodotus had no source but oral tradition” (*FGE*: 196); *pace* Sider 2007: 116-7 arguing that Simonides may well have published an original collection of epitaphs, in which he and others inserted additional poems. See also Vannicelli 2007 on the co-mingling of documentary and oral sources here.

¹⁰⁸ Petrovic 2007b: 235 notes “Das Bild der kommenden Keren ist seit Homer vorhanden”, citing *Od.* 14.207-8.

¹⁰⁹ It seems clear enough that Herodotus’ references to the commissioners of each epigram is strictly concerned with their financing; there is no reason to doubt that he assumes Simonidean authorship of all three epigrams. Cf. Petrovic 2007a: 53, 2007b: 75-8; *contra FGE* 195-6, 231-4; West 1985: 287, n. 41, both adamant that the

first two epigrams are not Simonidean. Sider 2007:122-3 takes a more measured approach: “All we can say is that Simonidean authorship is consistent with what Herodotus says” (123).

¹¹⁰ How and Wells 1923: 2.230 posit that this epitaph simply refers to the 4000 Peloponnesians who fought at Thermopylae, which would then be quite accurate if one adds 1000 Perioikoi to the 3100 Peloponnesians Herodotus earlier adumbrates at 7.202. They even suggest—somewhat unbelievably—that Herodotus may have clumsily included the Thespians in this number. Page (*FGE* 232-3) is much more scathing, noting that Herodotus “has seriously misled his audience”. Contrast with this the much less naïve Herodotus in Petrovic 2007a: 57, who argues that “The obvious discrepancy between Herodotus’ report of the Greek forces preparing for the battle and the epigrams invites the reader to probe the true merits of the single *poleis* in the battle of Thermopylae”.

¹¹¹ Note especially Strabo 9.4.2, quoting an ostensibly Simonidean epitaph for the Locrians who died at Thermopylae, and notes that it was “the first of the five stelae at Thermopylae” (τῆ πρώτῃ τῶν πέντε στηλῶν τῶν περὶ Θερμοπύλας). It is worth noting, however, that the second and third epigrams, which are both quoted verbatim, present no obvious textual difficulties; indeed, Pritchett 1985: 170 notes that not even Plutarch would call them into question.

¹¹² I am not persuaded by the view of Steiner 1994: 141, who argues that Herodotus’ selectivity is evidence for “his desire to privilege verbal over written commemoration”. If he had decided *not* to cite an epigraphic document because of a preference for oral modes of communication, it seems somewhat perverse that he would do so in a passage that includes three inscribed epigrams.

¹¹³ It also has the related effect of elevating the status of inscribed epigrams; cf. Livingstone and Nisbet 2010: 46: “the proposition that Megistias’ epitaph is by Simonides ... suggests that inscribed epigrams are worth collecting ... if Simonides does it, there is no need for epigram to be a subordinated genre”.

¹¹⁴ On the *symposion* as an aristocratic institution, see Schmitt-Pantel 1990: 15.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Petrovic 2007a: 50-1, who notes that Herodotus always quotes verse inscriptions, whereas he is more likely to paraphrase a prose inscription.

¹¹⁶ This practice was by no means limited to Herodotus’ text, as the many references to inscribed verses in Plutarch’s *De malignitate Herodoti*, written in the first century CE, makes patently clear. Higbie 2010: 187, n. 9 acknowledges the *communis opinio* that the Megistias epigram (7.228) is the only certainly Simonidean epigram in the corpus; cf. Sider 2007 and Livingstone and Nisbet 2010: 45-7 for further discussion.

¹¹⁷ Aside from the additional epigrams that Pausanias saw at Thermopylae, note also the epitaphs accompanying the graves of the Plataiamachoi (Paus. 9.2.5-6). Of course, Herodotus states that he had learnt the names of the three hundred Spartiates but will not list them (7.224.1); surely his knowledge derives from the stele that Pausanias says was erected at Sparta listing the names of the fallen soldiers (Paus. 3.14.1).

¹¹⁸ Xerxes and his army pass this stele during their march to the Hellespont.

¹¹⁹ Steiner 1994: 127-85, (“[writing] rapidly gathers both sinister and pejorative associations ... designed to illustrate the despotism of the Oriental monarchs”, p. 127).

¹²⁰ Cf. Fabiani 2003: 170-1.

¹²¹ However, note the useful remarks in Fabiani 2003: 179-82, (“È per questo che di esse egli compie un utilizzo mirato e consapevole, tanto consapevole da riuscire a modulare il loro uso in base al tipo di conoscenza e di attendibilità che esse erano in grado di fornire”, p. 182).