Herodotus (and Protagoras) on the Foresight of the Divine (3.107-110)*

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ABSTRACT: This paper aims to highlight what is specific to Herodotus' narratology in his description of what happens to the winged snakes of Arabia (3.107–110). The ring composition allows him to build a crescendo of horror and θῶμα thanks to examples of the animal balance of species (hares, lionesses and vipers). It weaves together different authorial voices with his own voice in order to deliver a lesson about the foresight of the divine (so that humanity is not wiped out) in his own vocabulary of revenge. A close reading of a passage in Plato's *Protagoras*, where Protagoras describes the animal balance of species in his famous myth using the same rare vocabulary, suggests Plato is creating an intertextual play against this very passage, aiming to assert what divine foresight about mankind really is.

KEYWORDS: winged snakes, hares, lionesses, vipers, superfetation, revenge, divine foresight, likelihood, balance of species, Plato, Protagoras.

In a famous passage from Book 3, Herodotus employs a luxury of horrific details to investigate the incense of Arabia, which is guarded by very dangerous winged snakes. His information about this distant country comes essentially from accounts he has heard, which he relates to what he already knows about superfetation (of the hare) versus single births (of the lioness) and about the balance of species that has been secured, according to him, by divine foresight: timid, edible animals (like hares) have many offspring, whereas savage, troublesome animals (like lionesses) have few. The same is true for winged serpents (and vipers): the only reason why serpents do not become so numerous as to make the earth unlivable for humans is that the female winged serpent kills the male during copulation and the offspring in turn destroy the mother's womb in the moment of birth.

This paper would first like to show the argumentative impact of the ring composition in the passage. Two textual problems, related to the variety of authorial voices, will also be addressed. I shall then study the opposition between hares and lionesses, with reference to the Hippocratic Corpus and Aristotle.[1] In the case of vipers and winged serpents, Herodotus builds a brilliant crescendo of horror and θῶμα, of offences and revenge involving sexuality and death. It has been observed that the natural order thus created by divine foresight shares some similarities with the first part of Protagoras' myth in Plato's *Protagoras*, when Epimetheus ensures the survival of animals on earth by giving each type of beast the qualities it needs (including superfetation or single births, 320d8–21b7). This

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[1] Cf. Thomas 2000: 139–50.

observation even led W. Nestle to reconstruct, with other testimonies, a school of Ionian sophists.[2] I shall suggest here that Plato implicitly plays on Herodotus' text.[3]

The ring composition

> A (107.2) Τὸν μέν γε λιβανωτὸν συλλέγουσι τὴν στύρακα θυμιῶντες, τὴν ἐς Ἕλληνας Φοίνικες ἐξάγουσι· ταύτην θυμιῶντες λαμβάνουσι·
>
> B τὰ γὰρ δένδρεα ταῦτα τὰ λιβανωτοφόρα ὄφιες ὑπόπτεροι, μικροὶ τὰ μεγάθεα, ποικίλοι τὰ εἴδεα, φυλάσσουσι πλήθεϊ πολλοὶ περὶ δένδρον ἕκαστον, οὗτοι οἵ περ ἐπ' Αἴγυπτον ἐπιστρατεύονται· οὐδενὶ δὲ ἄλλῳ ἀπελαύνονται ἀπὸ τῶν δενδρέων ἢ τῆς στύρακος τῷ καπνῷ.
>
> C (108.1) Λέγουσι δὲ καὶ τόδε Ἀράβιοι, ὡς πᾶσα ἂν γῆ ἐπίμπλατο τῶν ὀφίων τούτων, εἰ μὴ γίνεσθαι κατ' αὐτοὺς οἷόν τι κατὰ τὰς ἐχίδνας ἠπιστάμην γίνεσθαι.
>
> D (108.2) Καί κως τοῦ θείου ἡ προνοίη, ὥσπερ καὶ οἰκός ἐστι, ἐοῦσα σοφή, ὅσα μὲν [γὰρ] ψυχήν τε δειλὰ καὶ ἐδώδιμα, ταῦτα μὲν πάντα πολύγονα πεποίηκε, ἵνα μὴ ἐπιλίπῃ κατεσθιόμενα, ὅσα δὲ σχέτλια καὶ ἀνιηρά, ὀλιγόγονα.
>
> E (108.3) Τοῦτο μέν, ὅτι ὁ λαγὸς ὑπὸ παντὸς θηρεύεται θηρίου καὶ ὄρνιθος καὶ ἀνθρώπου, οὕτω δή τι πολύγονόν ἐστι· ἐπικυΐσκεται μοῦνον πάντων θηρίων, καὶ τὸ μὲν δασὺ τῶν τέκνων ἐν τῇ γαστρί, τὸ δὲ ψιλόν, τὸ δὲ ἄρτι ἐν τῇσι μήτρῃσι πλάσσεται, τὸ δὲ ἀναιρέεται.
>
> E' (108.4) Τοῦτο μὲν δὴ τοιοῦτό ἐστι, ἡ δὲ δὴ λέαινα, ἐὸν ἰσχυρότατον καὶ θρασύτατον, ἅπαξ ἐν τῷ βίῳ τίκτει ἕν· τίκτουσα γὰρ συνεκβάλλει τῷ τέκνῳ τὰς μήτρας. Τὸ δὲ αἴτιον τούτου τόδε ἐστί· ἐπεὰν ὁ σκύμνος ἐν τῇ μήτρῃ ἐὼν ἄρχηται διακινεόμενος, ὁ δὲ ἔχων ὄνυχας θηρίων πολλὸν πάντων ὀξυτάτους ἀμύσσει τὰς μήτρας, αὐξόμενός τε δὴ πολλῷ μᾶλλον ἐσικνέεται καταγράφων· πέλας τε δὴ ὁ τόκος ἐστὶ καὶ τὸ παράπαν λείπεται αὐτέων ὑγιὲς οὐδέν.
>
> C' (109.1) Ὡς δὲ καὶ αἱ ἔχιδναί τε καὶ οἱ ἐν Ἀραβίοισι ὑπόπτεροι ὄφιες εἰ ἐγίνοντο ὡς ἡ φύσις αὐτοῖσι ὑπάρχει, οὐκ ἂν ἦν βιώσιμα ἀνθρώποισι· νῦν δὲ ἐπεὰν θορνύωνται κατὰ ζεύγεα καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ ᾖ ὁ ἔρσην τῇ ἐκποιήσι, ἀπιεμένου αὐτοῦ τὴν γονὴν ἡ θήλεα ἅπτεται τῆς δειρῆς καὶ ἐμφῦσα οὐκ ἀνιεῖ πρὶν ἂν διαφάγῃ. (109.2) Ὁ μὲν δὴ ἔρσην ἀποθνῄσκει τρόπῳ τῷ εἰρημένῳ, ἡ δὲ θήλεα τίσιν τοιήνδε ἀποτίνει τῷ ἔρσενι· τῷ γονέϊ τιμωρέοντα ἔτι ἐν τῇ γαστρὶ ἐόντα τὰ τέκνα διεσθίει τὴν μήτραν, διαφαγόντα δὲ τὴν νηδὺν αὐτῆς οὕτω τὴν ἔκδυσιν ποιέεται. (109.3) Οἱ δὲ ἄλλοι ὄφιες ἐόντες ἀνθρώπων οὐ δηλήμονες τίκτουσί τε ᾠὰ καὶ ἐκλέπουσι πολλόν τι χρῆμα τῶν τέκνων.
>
> Αἱ μέν νυν ἔχιδναι κατὰ πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν εἰσι,

[2] Nestle 1911: 242–66; see also Nestle 1908: 552–3 (quoted by Diels-Kranz at 80C1). The parallelism is sometimes overlooked (e.g. in Dihle 1962: 207–19).

[3] I quote A.D. Godley's Loeb Classical Library text and translation of Herodotus, with several modifications that are explained in this paper.

Β' οἱ δὲ ὑπόπτεροι ὄφιες ἀθρόοι εἰσὶ ἐν τῇ Ἀραβίῃ καὶ οὐδαμῇ ἄλλῃ· κατὰ τοῦτο δοκέουσι πολλοὶ εἶναι.

Α' (110.1) Τὸν μὲν δὴ λιβανωτὸν τοῦτον οὕτω κτῶνται Ἀράβιοι, τὴν δὲ κασίην ὧδε.

A (107.2) They gather frankincense by burning that storax which Phoenicians carry to Hellas; this they burn and so get the frankincense;

B for the spice-bearing trees are guarded by small winged snakes of varied colour, many round each tree; these are the snakes that attack Egypt. Nothing save the smoke of storax will drive them away from the trees.

C (108.1) The Arabians also say that the whole country would be full of these snakes were it not with them as I knew that it is with vipers.

D (108.2) It would seem that the divine foresight[4] being wise (as is but reasonable) has made all creatures prolific that are timid and fit to eat, so that they be not minished from off the earth by being eaten up, whereas but few young are born to creatures cruel and baneful.

E (108.3) The hare is so prolific, for that it is the prey of every beast and bird and man; alone of all creatures it conceives in pregnancy; some of the unborn young are hairy, some still naked, some are still forming in the womb while others are just conceived.

E' (108.4) But whereas this is so with the hare, the lioness, a very strong and bold beast, bears offspring but once in her life, and then but one cub; for the uterus comes out with the cub in the act of birth. This is the reason of it:—when the cub first begins to stir in the womb, its claws, much sharper than those of any other creature, tear the uterus, and as it grows, much more does it scratch and tear, so that when the hour of birth is near seldom is any of the uterus left whole.

C' (109.1) It is so too with vipers and the winged serpents of Arabia: were they born in the natural manner of serpents no life were possible for men; but as it is, when they pair, and the male is in the very act of procreation, when he ejaculates his sperm, the female seizes him by the neck, nor lets go her grip till she has bitten the neck through. (109.2) Thus the male dies; but the female pays a punishment to the male in the following way; the children avenge their progenitor, and gnaw at the womb while they are yet within her belly; and it is by having eaten her uterus that they find their way out. (109.3) Other snakes, that do no harm to men, lay eggs and hatch out a vast number of young. There are vipers everywhere on earth, and

B' if the Arabian winged serpents do indeed seem to be many, these are all in Arabia and are nowhere else found.

A' (110.1) The Arabians get their frankincense as I have shown.

[4] 'Providence' would be a word too marked by Christianity.

This text is typical of Herodotus' dialogism, that is, the way in which the author partly disappears behind a variety of voices. The circular composition marked ABCC'B'A' helps to merge these different voices. In part C, Herodotus, the 'overt primary narrator',[5] tells us that he will recount how the Arabians (the 'reported narrators' that are 'overt secondary narrators') talk about the winged snakes, and that he is speaking on his own authority about vipers (C ἠπιστάμην, 'I knew'). This is clear, but later (in C'), he discusses both vipers *and* winged snakes, thus merging what the Arabians say and what he understands. The aim is to lead to a kind of omniscient narrative by means of dialogism.

Moreover, it seems that Herodotus implicitly quotes someone else (a third narrator?) from whom he derives his wisdom ('I knew', but from whom?) and whose authority could persuade us of the truthfulness of the narrative about τοῦ θείου ἡ προνοίη ('the divine foresight', in D, E and E'). Or is this authority only οἰκός (Attic εἰκός, 'reasonable, likely'), the overall domination of probability — true for Herodotus himself and for the Arabians? In that case, οἰκός would be the real omniscient narrator. The circular composition leaves only section D without parallel, and thus highlights it as a kind of lesson, the origin of which remains unclear.

Two textual problems

There are traces of dialogism in the textual transmission, as if the scribes themselves were hesitating between authorial voices while copying Herodotus. The initial example is at 3.108.1, where we read two different texts. First, with Nigel Wilson's and Philippe-Ernest Legrand's texts:[6]

> Λέγουσι δὲ καὶ τόδε Ἀράβιοι, ὡς πᾶσα ἂν γῆ ἐπίμπλατο τῶν ὀφίων τούτων, εἰ μὴ γίνεσθαι κατ' αὐτοὺς οἷόν τι καὶ κατὰ τὰς ἐχίδνας ἠπιστάμην γίνεσθαι.
>
> (The Arabians also say that the whole country would be full of these snakes were it not with them as I knew that it is with vipers also.)

Or, following Legrand's suggestion in his apparatus criticus:[7]

> Λέγουσι δὲ καὶ τόδε Ἀράβιοι, ὡς πᾶσα ἂν γῆ ἐπίμπλατο τῶν ὀφίων τούτων, εἰ μὴ γίνεσθαι κατ' αὐτοὺς οἷόν τι ἀπηγέοντο καὶ κατὰ τὰς ἐχίδνας γίνεσθαι.
>
> (The Arabians also say that the whole country would be full of these snakes were it not with them as they reported that it is with vipers also.)
>
> Post αὐτοὺς add. ἀπηγέοντο d ('If it is an interpolation, it could be attributed to a reader who failed to recognize the idiom whereby conditional clauses in *oratio obliqua* may have an infinitive in place

[5] De Jong 2014: 20–3.
[6] Wilson 2015b: 303 (l. 1679–81).
[7] Legrand 1939: 149.

> of a finite verb'):[8] αὐτοὺς οἷόν τι ἀπηγέοντο (transp. Legrand) κατὰ τὰς ἐχίδνας [ἠπιστάμην] (del. Krüger) γίνεσθαι ('The alternative solution is that the verb should be fitted into the structure of the sentence; this is easily effected by transposition to follow οἷόν τι, as suggested by Legrand. If this solution appeals, one could dispense with ἠπιστάμην, as Krüger suggested', Wilson in his *Herodotea*: 62–3).

The second solution ('as they reported that it is ...') deletes the Herodotean voice ('as I knew that it is ...'), which does not seem correct to me. Wilson is certainly right in suggesting that the interpolation in D may stem from the grammatical reason he gives; another reason may be a misunderstanding of Herodotus' dialogism. The text without ἀπηγέοντο and with ἠπιστάμην seems far more appropriate to Herodotus' narrative and inquiry. Herodotus himself knows what is happening in relation to vipers 'everywhere on earth' (κατὰ πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν, 109.3), and connects this knowledge to what the Arabians say about winged snakes in their own country.

There is another problem related to the question of the origin of Herodotean wisdom, but this time it involves the core of his religious thought, the very nature of τὸ θεῖον (3.108.2):

> Καί κως τοῦ θείου ἡ προνοίη, ὥσπερ καὶ οἰκός ἐστι, ἐοῦσα σοφή, ὅσα μὲν [γὰρ] ψυχήν τε δειλὰ καὶ ἐδώδιμα, ταῦτα μὲν πάντα πολύγονα πεποίηκε, ἵνα μὴ ἐπιλίπῃ κατεσθιόμενα, ὅσα δὲ σχέτλια καὶ ἀνιηρά, ὀλιγόγονα.
>
> It would seem that the divine foresight being wise (as is but reasonable) has made all creatures prolific that are timid and fit to eat, that they be not minished from off the earth by being eaten up, whereas but few young are born to creatures cruel and baneful.

Or, with Wilson's edition and *Herodotea*:[9]

> ... ὥσπερ καὶ οἰκός ἐστι, <φαίνεται> ἐοῦσα σοφή. ὅσα μὲν γὰρ ψυχήν ...
>
> It would seem that the divine foresight (as is but reasonable) is plainly wise: it has made all creatures prolific that are timid and fit to eat, so that they be not minished from off the earth by being eaten up, whereas but few young are born to creatures cruel and baneful.
>
> γὰρ del. Stephanus ('a single long period results. That is possible, and was probably the intention of the scribe of MS C, where it looks as if there has been an attempt to erase the particle', Wilson) or ὥσπερ καὶ οἰκός ἐστι, <φαίνεται> ἐοῦσα σοφή. ὅσα μὲν γὰρ ψυχήν ... (<φαίνεται> suppl. Griffiths, 'is convincing').

[8] Wilson 2015a: 62–3.
[9] Wilson 2015b: 303 (l. 1681–3), 2015a: 63.

It is clearly impossible to keep γάρ and punctuate after σοφή without any addition, as proposed in David Asheri and Silvio M. Medaglia's edition: in fact, in this edition Augusto Fraschetti's translation adopts the usual interpretation.[10] Rosalind Thomas, while deleting γάρ, translates: 'The god's foresight is wise, as is likely, for it has ensured that ...'.[11] This is very near to the solution Wilson chooses. But by adding φαίνεται (with Griffiths) and a full stop, Wilson transforms a very nuanced judgement into a much stronger and even somewhat contradictory affirmation: 'divine foresight, in all likelihood (κως), is obviously (<φαίνεται> ἐοῦσα) wise'. No addition, and 'a single long period', seem better choices to me.

However that may be, the relationship between ὥσπερ καὶ οἰκός ἐστι ('as is but reasonable' or 'as it is likely'), ἐοῦσα σοφή ('being wise') and ἡ προνοίη ('the divine foresight') is not clear. Does ὥσπερ καὶ οἰκός ἐστι relate to Herodotus' appreciation of divine foresight, or to the logic that presides over the animal equilibrium and is imposed on the divine itself? I prefer the first interpretation, which keeps the supreme role for the divinity: divine foresight 'being, in all likelihood, full of wisdom, etc.'. But the voice of likelihood (οἰκός) and the wisdom of the foresight of the divine (τοῦ θείου ἡ προνοίη) are profoundly merged.

Winged snakes

What about the reality of this marvellous narrative? There are indeed 'flying snakes',[12] or so-called 'flying snakes' (which really just glide from one tree to the next), but no 'winged snakes' (ὄφιες ὑπόπτεροι/ὑπόπτεροι ὄφιες), as Herodotus expressly claims. Yet he did see such winged snakes — or at least he tells us he saw them, and in my opinion thinks he saw them (unless he is lying), or instead did not see them exactly, but the 'bones and backbones' (or rather 'ossa e spine dorsale', Fraschetti) of those serpents.

> Ἔστι δὲ χῶρος τῆς Ἀραβίης κατὰ Βουτοῦν πόλιν μάλιστά κῃ κείμενος, καὶ ἐς τοῦτο τὸ χωρίον ἦλθον πυνθανόμενος περὶ τῶν πτερωτῶν ὀφίων. Ἀπικόμενος δὲ εἶδον ὀστέα ὀφίων καὶ ἀκάνθας πλήθεϊ μὲν ἀδύνατα ἀπηγήσασθαι, σωροὶ δὲ ἦσαν ἀκανθέων καὶ μεγάλοι καὶ ὑποδεέστεροι καὶ ἐλάσσονες ἔτι τούτων, πολλοὶ δὲ ἦσαν οὗτοι (2.75.1).
>
> Not far from the town of Buto, there is a place in Arabia to which I went to learn about the winged serpents. When I came thither, I saw innumerable bones and backbones of serpents; many heaps of backbones there were, great and small and smaller still.

[10] Asheri and Medaglia 1990: 140–1: Καί κως τοῦ θείου ἡ προνοίη, ὥσπερ καὶ οἰκός ἐστι, ἐοῦσα σοφή· ὅσα μὲν γὰρ ψυχήν τε (...), 'Penso que la divina provvidenza — com'è anche naturale, essendo saggia — ha creato molto fecondi ... .'

[11] Thomas 2000: 142 with n. 25.

[12] See e.g. https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/reptiles/facts/flying-snakes. Hutchinson 1958 thinks these snakes were in fact insects ('locusts'), or 'at least thought [by Herodotus] as insects rather than as snakes'. But the explicit comparison with vipers does not fit with this hypothesis. I have not been able to consult Mayor 2022 in time for publication.

In Herodotus' opinion the heaps of bones were 'innumerable' and very impressive, and he travelled to a place near Buto in the Nile Delta to ask about them (ἦλθον πυνθανόμενος). This is clearly a starting point, and perhaps a source, for his inquiry of Book 3, in which he writes that these snakes 'attack Egypt'. Not only could the serpents have been innumerable near Buto, but they could also have attacked everywhere on earth. From the very beginning, these serpents are described (by the Arabians? by Herodotus?) as quasi-human military agents: the snakes 'make expeditions' against Egypt (ἐπιστρατεύονται) and 'guard' (φυλάσσουσι) the spice-bearing trees. If they are guards, they have been placed there by some superior authority for this task. The reported observation is merged with interpretative theory.[13]

Hares and superfetation

Superfetation in hares and other species, including fish and perhaps human beings, also seems to exist in reality. Superfetation is the title of the Hippocratic treatise Περὶ ἐπικυήσιος, *De superfetatione*,[14] composed maybe some fifty years after Herodotus (although this part of the Hippocratic Corpus is very old). The first chapter, on the superfetation of women, begins in this way: Ὁκόταν ἐπικυίσκηται γυνή, ἢν μὲν ἐν τῷ μέσῳ τῆς μήτρης τὸ πρῶτον ἔχῃ παιδίον καὶ ἐπικύημα ...('when a woman has a superfetation, if she has the first baby and the product of superfetation in the middle of her womb ...,' 8. 476 sq. Littré, who gives human and animal examples in his 'Argument', 472–4). Thomas notes the use of the 'extraordinary technical and unusual word' ἐπικυΐσκεται in Herodotus, and rightly adds that such a term could nevertheless have been 'current in medical circles' and in 'contemporary debates'.[15] Here superfetation is linked to the problem of πολυγονίη, 'clearly an issue of importance' in the intellectual context of the time, as Thomas shows.[16]

Thomas also quotes a remarkable observation about twins made by a doctor at the end of the fifth century, in *On the Nature of Child*, 31 (20 Potter). Even if there is no explicit mention of superfetation in this text, Iain Lonie is

[13] On serpents 'guarding' (φυλάσσω) trees, compare Hesiod, *Theog*. 334–5, where the serpent (ὄφιν: *Theog*. 334; the same word Herodotus uses for the winged snakes) 'guards' (φυλάσσει, *Theog*. 335) the tree with the golden apples in the Garden of the Hesperides. Less closely connected is Sophocles (*Trach*. 1100), who uses φύλαξ in apposition with δράκων to refer to this same tree-guarding serpent. Euripides similarly uses δράκων (*HF* 397) of this serpent, but he employs the verb φρουρέω (*HF* 399) for 'guard'. A serpent/serpents guarding a tree/trees would seem to be an example of the folktale motif B11.6.2, 'dragon guards treasure', found in Stith Thompson's *Motif Index of Folk-Literature*. In Hesiod the treasure would be the golden apples, in Herodotus frankincense (I am very grateful to one of the anonymous readers for this note).

[14] Lienau 1973: I, 2, 2. Lienau quotes a similar text (perhaps a source) in Hp. *Epid*. *5* 11.2 (8.210 Littré 7 Grmek-Jouanna, p. 125 n. 3): Αὕτη ἡ γυνὴ ἐκύησε καὶ ἐπεκύησε, 'This woman became pregnant and she became pregnant again', and he compares Aristotelian passages about superfetation (47–50). Galen was probably aware of this treatise (51). See Bourbon 2017: 215–6 (quoting *inter alia* Roellig, Menzies, Hildebrandt, Goeritz, 2011 about what could be a 'myth'), 236–8 (on *Epidemics* and superfetation), 276 and 299.

[15] Thomas 2000: 145–6.

[16] Thomas 2000: 143.

probably right in suggesting in his wonderful commentary that the insistence of the author on the idea that twins are conceived from a single act of copulation presupposes a debate on superfetation.[17] The doctor bases his conclusion on what he has seen (αὐτοὶ ὁρέομεν, cf. εἶδον, Hdt. 2.75), and provides 'proof' of what he says (ἱστόριον).[18] The methods of the two inquirers are of course akin to one another. Nevertheless, the explanations given by the doctor and by Herodotus are not similar, as they support quite opposite theses.

For the doctor, prolific birth is related to the fact that the womb (in Greek we often find a plural: αἱ μῆτραι) has a number of 'pockets' or 'sinuses' in which the male seed is distributed simultaneously. This is true for humans, but also for 'all living beings'. For Herodotus (and his source?), in the pregnancy he describes, the seeds must have been dispatched into the hare at four different times. An omniscient description with no equivalent in the Hippocratic Corpus shows at the same time the state of the belly (the word γαστήρ is frequent in the Hippocratic Corpus in relation to pregnancy, i.e. ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχειν), with hairy and naked young, the formation in the μῆτραι and a new act of copulation. Note the vividness created by οὕτω δή, by ἄρτι and by the quick succession of τὸ μὲν, τὸ δὲ, τὸ δὲ, τὸ δὲ with verbs in the present indicative. This is a way to embed the readers within the inquiry: they see what is happening from inside the belly to the μῆτραι and to copulation. There is another fundamental difference: for Herodotus the hare is not simply presented as an example of *polygoniē*, but as a unique exception among wild beasts (μοῦνον πάντων θηρίων). This is very useful for his argument: he can thus draw the most efficient, I would say the most *rhetorical*, contrast possible between hares = *polygoniē* and lionesses = only one cub.

Lions and lionesses

Lionesses, then. This time the story is mere fiction, a ληρώδης μῦθος, as Aristotle has already noted.[19]

> Ο δὲ λεχθεὶς μῦθος περὶ τοῦ ἐκβάλλειν τὰς ὑστέρας τίκτοντα ληρώδης ἐστί, συνετέθη δ' ἐκ τοῦ σπανίους εἶναι τοὺς λέοντας, ἀποροῦντος τὴν αἰτίαν τοῦ τὸν μῦθον συνθέντος· σπάνιον γὰρ τὸ γένος τὸ τῶν λεόντων ἐστὶ καὶ οὐκ ἐν πολλῷ γίνεται τόπῳ, ἀλλὰ τῆς Εὐρώπης ἀπάσης ἐν τῷ μεταξὺ τοῦ Ἀχελῴου καὶ τοῦ Νέσσου ποταμοῦ. Τίκτει δὲ καὶ ὁ λέων πάνυ μικρὰ οὕτως ὥστε δίμηνα ὄντα μόλις βαδίζειν. Οἱ δ' ἐν Συρίᾳ λέοντες τίκτουσι πεντάκις, τὸ πρῶτον πέντε, εἶτ' ἀεὶ ἐνὶ ἐλάττονα· μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα οὐκέτι οὐδὲν τίκτουσιν, ἀλλ' ἄγονοι διατελοῦσιν. (Arist., *HA* 6, 31, 579b).

[17] Thomas 2000: 146 n. 36.
[18] Cf. Thomas 2000: 165–6.
[19] How and Wells 1990 (1928): 291 add: 'H. fails to explain how under his system the race of lions survives at all.'

> The story which is told about the lioness losing her uterus in parturition is nonsense, and was made up to account for the scarcity of lions by someone who was at a loss to explain it otherwise. It is a fact that the lion is a scarce animal, and is not found in many places—in the whole of Europe it occurs only in the tract of country between the rivers Acheloös and Nessos. The lioness' cubs are so small when born that at two months they can barely walk. Lions in Syria bear five times: five the first time, then one fewer each succeeding time; after that they bear no more, but continue without offspring. (tr. A.L. Peck 1970)

This and other Aristotelian texts are quoted by Thomas as showing 'a combination of ancient discussions'.[20] I would also say that Aristotle implicitly *refers* twice to Herodotus himself here, pointing to our text and to another passage, from Book 7:

> Εἰσὶ δὲ κατὰ ταῦτα τὰ χωρία καὶ λέοντες πολλοὶ καὶ βόες ἄγριοι, τῶν τὰ κέρεα ὑπερμεγάθεά ἐστι τὰ ἐς Ἕλληνας φοιτῶντα. Οὖρος δὲ τοῖσι λέουσί ἐστι ὅ τε δι' Ἀβδήρων ῥέων ποταμὸς Νέστος καὶ ὁ δι' Ἀκαρνανίης ῥέων Ἀχελῷος· οὔτε γὰρ τὸ πρὸς τὴν ἠῶ τοῦ Νέστου οὐδαμόθι πάσης τῆς ἔμπροσθε Εὐρώπης ἴδοι τις ἂν λέοντα, οὔτε πρὸς ἑσπέρης τοῦ Ἀχελῴου ἐν τῇ ἐπιλοίπῳ ἠπείρῳ, ἀλλ' ἐν τῇ μεταξὺ τούτων τῶν ποταμῶν γίνονται.
>
> There are many lions in these parts, and wild oxen, whose horns are those very long ones which are brought into Hellas. The boundary of the lions' country is the river Nestus that flows through Abdera and the river Achelous that flows through Acarnania. Neither to the east of the Nestus anywhere in the nearer part of Europe, nor to the west of the Achelous in the rest of the mainland, is any lion to be seen; but they are found in the country between those rivers. (Hdt. 7.126)

A Pseudo-Aristotelian problem asks, 'why are some living creatures prolific, like the sow, the bitch and the hare, but others, like man and lion not?' (Διὰ τί τὰ μὲν πολύτεκνα τῶν ζῴων, οἷον ὗς, κύων, λαγώς, τὰ δὲ οὔ, οἷον ἄνθρωπος, λέων;), and answers that 'it is that the former have many wombs and places which the sperm hastens to fill and into which it is divided, while the latter are the opposite' (τὰ μὲν πολλὰς μήτρας καὶ τύπους ἔχει, ἃς καὶ πίμπλασθαι ἐπιθυμεῖ καὶ εἰς ἃ σχίζεται ἡ γονή, τὰ δὲ τοὐναντίον, *Probl.* 10. 14, 892a38–b3, quoted by Thomas). This is also part of the discussions on Herodotus and the Hippocratic Corpus in the Aristotelian school.[21]

What, then, about this Herodotean fiction? Herodotus supplies a rational explanation that is at the same time an awful θῶμα, and he gives it, as always, dispassionately, without the least indication of his personal feeling: it is *the* rational explanation of *oligogoniē*. The readers are again embedded inquirers, once more seeing what is happening in the womb and following the chronology of growth, this time by τε-links and in the right time sequence. Again, we have a chiasmus:

[20] Thomas 2000: 144.
[21] The reception of Herodotus in the Aristotelian school would deserve a further study.

copulation is at the exact centre of our text, at the end of E and the beginning of E'. Moreover, the readers not only see but also *hear* the womb being scratched and torn, with an accumulation of occlusives: Τὸ δὲ αἴτιον τούτου τόδε ἐστί· ἐπεὰν ὁ σκύμνος ἐν τῇ μητρὶ ἐὼν ἄρχηται διακινεόμενος, ὁ δὲ ἔχων ὄνυχας θηρίων πολλὸν πάντων ὀξυτάτους μύσσει τὰς μήτρας, αὐξόμενός τε δὴ πολλῷ μᾶλλον ἐπικνέεται καταγράφων· πέλας τε δὴ ὁ τόκος ἐστὶ καὶ τὸ παράπαν λείπεται αὐτέων ὑγιὲς οὐδέν.

Herodotus reenacts, too, the folktale motif in which a beautiful and sweet wild cub is nurtured but becomes terribly dangerous (as attested for example in Aesop). The cub is neither in the house, as in the famous passage from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (v. 717–736, ἔθρεψεν δὲ λέοντος ἶνιν ...), nor in the city, as in the case of Alcibiades (οὐ χρὴ λέοντος σκύμνον ἐν πόλει τρέφειν, Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1431), but in the mother herself, as in the case of (presumably) Pericles and his mother (ἐδόκεε λέοντα τεκεῖν, Hdt. 6.131), and in the womb, i.e. the 'matrix' (μήτρας). The parallelism created by these cases of awful danger for the mother linked to the birth of a ferocious child or cub in the *oikos*/*polis*/*mētēr*/*mētrai* is a θῶμα that the readers should now understand, one of the θωμαστά that should not become ἀκλεᾶ.

All the manuscripts, except D^{ac}, have ἐν τῇ μήτρῃ ἐὼν (AD^{pcr}), not ἐν τῇ μητρὶ ἐὼν: I wonder whether one should not come back to this reading (as I did in the above text). Of course, afterwards, we have the plural τὰς μήτρας, which is far more frequent in the Hippocratic Corpus[22] and could explain an easy transformation of μητρὶ to μήτρῃ.

We do not see the very end of the process, the terrible delivery, but read only πέλας τε δὴ ὁ τόκος ἐστὶ, 'the hour of birth is near'. The most horrible aspect is not described, only hinted at.

Vipers and Arabian serpents

Herodotus is a master of the crescendo. An extra step in the horror and θῶμα is still to come, and this time we have the awful τόκος. Above all, now, and only now, the question of life or death for mankind emerges — Herodotus is going to explain why we are all alive! In the case of vipers and Arabian snakes, 'were they born in the natural manner of serpents no life were possible for men' (εἰ ἐγίνοντο ὡς ἡ φύσις αὐτοῖσι ὑπάρχει, οὐκ ἂν ἦν βιώσιμα ἀνθρώποισι). Here, as sometimes in Herodotus and in the Hippocratic Corpus, φύσις keeps its etymological meaning of 'natural development'. So, the natural development of snakes has been stopped, but by whom? How? The answer to 'how' is given, though not the answer to 'by whom', which has to be supplied from the beginning of the text. It is the foresight of the divine that prevents the natural development to *polygoniē* of vipers and Arabian snakes, and it does so in order to preserve the life of *human beings* specifically. This is an important point, to which I will return below.

[22] Bourbon 2008: 122 n. 8.

How is their natural development stopped?

> ... ἐπεὰν θορνύωνται κατὰ ζεύγεα καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ ᾖ ὁ ἔρσην τῇ ἐκποιήσι, ἀπιεμένου αὐτοῦ τὴν γονὴν ἡ θήλεα ἅπτεται τῆς δειρῆς καὶ ἐμφῦσα οὐκ ἀνιεῖ πρὶν ἂν διαφάγῃ. Ὁ μὲν δὴ ἔρσην ἀποθνήσκει τρόπῳ τῷ εἰρημένῳ, ἡ δὲ θήλεα τίσιν τοιήνδε ἀποτίνει τῷ ἔρσενι· τῷ γονέϊ τιμωρέοντα ἔτι ἐν τῇ γαστρὶ ἐόντα τὰ τέκνα διεσθίει τὴν μήτραν, διαφαγόντα δὲ τὴν νηδὺν αὐτῆς οὕτω τὴν ἔκδυσιν ποιέεται.
>
> μήτραν A Medaglia : μητέρα D Hude Legrand Wilson
>
> (109.1) ... when they pair, and the male is in the very act of procreation, when he ejaculates his sperm, the female seizes him by the neck, nor lets go her grip till she has bitten the neck through. (109.2) Thus the male dies; but the female pays a punishment to the male in the following way; the children avenge their progenitor, and gnaw at the womb while they are yet within her belly; and it is by having eaten her uterus that they find their way out.

It is a unique case of a vivid and precise description of monstrous sexuality, with the death of the male *during* ejaculation (normal ejaculation and its consequences are described in the Hippocratic Corpus, e.g. in *Generation*). This kind of sexual cannibalism seems to happen sometimes in reality, for example, with scorpions, but *after* mating — a somewhat less horrible narrative.[23] It is never the case with vipers, as far as I know.

Aristotle is more precise and trustworthy than Herodotus when he describes vipers. This time he does not criticize Herodotus, but he may remember some part of the Herodotean narrative when he traces the birth of young vipers: for him, what Herodotus describes may sometimes be partly true.

> Young vipers are born inside a membrane that tears after three days, but sometimes from inside the egg they devour what was around them and then come out (ἐνίοτε δὲ καὶ τὰ ἔσω διαφαγόντα — the verb that Herodotus uses — αὐτὰ ἐξέρχεται, Arist., *HA* 5.34, 558a28).

Offences and revenge

The horrible part for us here is the concomitance of sexuality and death. Herodotus develops the meticulous description of such cannibalism into a narrative sequence of offences and revenge reactions (τίσιν τοιήνδε ἀποτίνει ... τιμωρέοντα) reminiscent of tragedy, but a tragedy in the womb. In this narrative I adopt μήτραν, which is the text of the best manuscript (A), not μητέρα, the text found in D and printed by most editors: 'the children eat the womb' of the female, and then 'her

[23] Karttunen 2002: 469.

belly', not 'the mother'. Herodotus calls neither the male 'father' nor the female 'mother', but twice ὁ ἔρσην and ἡ θήλεα. Afterwards, the male is τῷ γονέϊ, the 'progenitor', not the 'father'. That is perhaps another argument for adopting μήτρῃ, 'womb', in the passage about lionesses too. The story reminds us of tragic tales: 'Herodotus' vivid imagination conceives the serpent pair as a sort of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra';[24] 'Thus Arabian snakes kill their mothers, as Orestes did, to avenge their sire.'[25] This is true, except that Herodotus chooses a quasi-scientific vocabulary for describing parents and children: male, female, genitor and wombs (or womb). He inserts a quasi-scientific inquiry into a tragic pattern, or a tragic pattern into a prescientific inquiry.[26] The death of the mother is not necessary: it is enough that the female cannot have any other young. There is no psychological description of wrath, no appeal to the gods in order to achieve revenge, as in tragedy, just a necessary succession of acts and responses, horrible precisely because they are described without any *pathos*. In the natural world of animals the foresight of the divine does not need religion and wrath to fulfil his plans, but uses similarly dreadful means. I could paraphrase Thomas Harrison's words here and say that this is divine retribution through *animal* agency.[27] No wrath, no psychology, only τίσιν ἀποτίνειν and τιμωρεῖν ('pay a punishment' and 'avenge').

Here, a brief semantic exploration is necessary. In modern psychology, 'revenge' represents a type of 'immediate and affective causality'[28] opposed to 'reason', but, if affectivity and anger were often linked to revenge in ancient Greece, a rational analysis of honours offended must play the main part.[29] Let us look at the last verb, τιμωρεῖν.[30] Τιμωρός belongs to a series of compounds in –ωρός with a first nominal element, normally oxytone, whose meaning is 'the one who watches over the τιμή, i.e. over "the honours", "the prerogative", by "defending" them, either preventively (hence the meaning of "protector", "defender") or to punish a previous aggressor (hence the meaning of "avenger")'. The distinction between the two translations 'avenger' and 'helper' (found very frequently in Herodotus) is therefore only secondary (and should prevent us from studying 'revenge in Herodotus' solely on the basis of the occurences of *timoriē* that can be translated as 'revenge'). The distinction between help and revenge is only based on contextual considerations: it is always watching over τιμή. Here the children watch over the prerogative of their attacked genitor, and take revenge on the female.

[24] How and Wells 1990: I. 291.
[25] Myres 1952: 49.
[26] Is it mainly a tragic pattern *for us*? Was it more generally a common story pattern of offence and revenge? It was indeed compared to tragedy by Aelianus, when he pastiches Herodotus, but adds a human vocabulary (νύμφη, γαμέτης and τιμωροῦντα τῷ πατρί, *Nat. Animal*. 1.24): τί οὖν οἱ Ὀρέσται καὶ οἱ Ἀλκμαίωνες πρὸς ταῦτα, ὦ τραγῳδοὶ φίλοι; 'Dear tragedians, what are your Orestes and Alcmeones in comparison with that?' See also Nicander, *Theriaca* 128–134 (with Jacques 2002: 90–2).
[27] Harrison 2000: 111 ('through human agency').
[28] De Romilly 1971: 314–37.
[29] Cf. the gruesome end of Pheretime's story at 4.205: revenge should not be 'excessively harsh', in order not to provoke divine jealously (I thank one anonymous reader for this note).
[30] Demont 1995: 37–45.

The foresight of the divine

This act of revenge is perfectly rational, a way to guarantee the survival of mankind in a world where every τιμή is protected by the gods and should not overlap with other τιμαί. This is typical of Herodotean thought: the προνοίη of 'the divine', in order to maintain the balance of the world, not only encourages 'respect for rights', 'help' or 'revenge', but sometimes makes this very concern limit the expansion of a dangerous race. Such is divine wisdom in the animal world. Such also is divine φθόνος in the human world, as we know from the two other occurrences of τὸ θεῖον: 'the divine is entirely grudging and troublesome to us', or, more exactly, 'entirely envious, jealous' (Solon: Ὦ Κροῖσε, ἐπιστάμενόν με τὸ θεῖον πᾶν ἐὸν φθονερόν τε καὶ ταραχῶδες ἐπειρωτᾷς ἀνθρωπηίων πρηγμάτων πέρι, 1.32.5), 'I know the divine, how jealous he is' (Amasis: τὸ θεῖον ἐπισταμένῳ ὡς ἔστι φθονερόν, 3.40.6). The divine, God, sees that no animal and also no man surpasses this condition and threatens His privileges, and He overturns everyone who becomes too great. Harrison writes about these uses of τὸ θεῖον: 'a term applied to the diagnosis of divine intervention in the world', which is employed with 'a surprising degree of initiative'.[31] Herodotus refers to the divine, and not to one god or another, probably because it would be impossible to know which specific god was responsible for these actions (it would even be impious to try to understand the exact repartition of *timai* among the gods, their privileges and their arts, καὶ τιμὰς καὶ τέχνας, 2.53.2). Wilamowitz was right, in my opinion, when he wrote: 'So hat Herodot ... die Einzelgötter neben dem θεῖον niemals aufgegeben.'[32] However, I am not sure he was right in thinking that there was a contradiction between the two, 'die Einzelgötter' and 'das θεῖον'. Perhaps, regarding τὸ θεῖον, we could use a formula recently proposed by Vinciane Pirenne-Deforge about Greek polytheism in general (without any reference to the Herodotean τὸ θεῖον): 'une sorte de singulier pluriel'.[33]

There are very few occurrences of πρόνοια in the fifth century BC, but the doctor who wrote the Hippocratic *Pronostic* uses it twice in his first chapter when discussing the aim of every doctor, i.e. to practise foresight (πρόνοιαν ἐπιτηδεύειν, 1.1, Littré 2.110 Jouanna 1). He should be able to explain what has happened, what is happening and what is going to happen to the patient, even before any explanation from him or the people around him. He should also know how to practise foresight in order to explain that there is something divine in the diseases (καὶ εἴ τι θεῖον ἔνεστιν ἐν τῇσι νούσοισι, καὶ τουτέων τὴν πρόνοιαν ἐκμανθάνειν, 1.2, Littré 2.112 Jouanna 3).[34] The doctor's foresight can thus announce good or bad things. Foresight is not Providence, and that is why the foresight of the divine may prepare good or bad things for both animals and men. It is a result of the doctor's or the divine's knowledge.

[31] But not about our passage (Harrison 2000: 176–7).
[32] Wilamowitz ³1959: II, 204: 'Thus Herodotus ... never abandoned the individual gods besides the θεῖον.'
[33] Pirenne-Delforge 2020: 21: 'a kind of singular plural'.
[34] Jouanna 2013: c. 1 (with Demont 2014: 221–7).

Even if our text is circular, there is progression from the first part to the second. In the first part, the wise foresight of the divine achieves a balance between living species through the natural distinction between *polygoniē* versus *oligogoniē*, which is perfectly clear from the contrast between hares and lionesses. But in the second part, the defence of humanity requires a new element in order to achieve a balance between snakes and human beings, *timōriē*, *tisis* and *apotisis*. This is proved by the case of vipers, as Herodotus already realises, and the Arabian snakes, which the Arabians explain to him. Any reader of Herodotus knows that from the very beginning *timōriē* is also a rule for preserving balance within the human world. This text is an example of dialogism, but also of strong authorial mastery that leads to a tremendous, overarching crescendo.

A last point: 'The Arabian winged serpents do indeed seem to be many; but it is because (whereas there are vipers in every land) these are all in Arabia and are nowhere else found'. On the one hand, the readers may now understand why there are so many heaps of bones in Egypt and may develop, once again by consulting Herodotus, a good understanding of the relativity of things (there are heaps, but only in this part of the world, and this is why they seem abundant). On the other hand, we also see the importance of the account of a θῶμα in this faraway region of Arabia for understanding what is happening with vipers in every other land.

Herodotean reflection is thorough, but perhaps flawed. Let us change our focus and try to encapsulate the cultural story of the relationship between animals and men that runs from Hesiod to Plato. It enhances Herodotus' originality, and in my opinion allows us to note Herodotus' critical reception by Plato.

Intertextuality: from Hesiod to 'Platagoras'

First, Hesiod, as a possible starting point in contrast with Herodotus. Hesiod explicitly separated the lot of men from that of animals in *Works and Days*: 'This is the law (νόμον) that Cronus' son has established for human beings: that fish and beasts and winged birds eat one another, since Justice is not among them (ἐπεὶ οὐ δίκη ἐστὶ μετ' αὐτοῖς); but to human beings he has given Justice, which is the best by far' (276–80, tr. Most 2006). The specificity of other living species in relation to men appears: they devour each other. Yet their way of eating is only proof of the absence of justice among them; there is no observation at all regarding the balance of species, and no possibility that some kind of just defence of prerogatives exists among them. In the *Theogony* and *Works and Days* there is also another means of separating animals, men and gods, which allows men to sacrifice animals and give one part to the gods. Herodotus is very far from such views.

Secondly, there is another master of dialogism, Plato, and the myth in his *Protagoras*, which has often been compared to our passage because the first section also uses the very rare vocabulary of *polygonia* and *oligogonia*. Here Protagoras tells a new version of the Promethean myth, in which Epimetheus first distributes the qualities among living beings in order to allow each species to live, but forgets about man; Prometheus then intervenes to give man fire and the arts, but not the political art, which Zeus finally sends to man through Hermes in the form of 'justice' and 'awe'. If one reads the whole myth, one immediately sees the

differences between Herodotus and Platagoras (i.e. Protagoras as he is in Plato).[35] Here food ('Then he proceeded to furnish each of them with its proper food, some with pasture of the earth, others with fruits of trees, and others again with roots; and to a certain number for food he gave other creatures to devour') and reproduction ('to some he attached a paucity in breeding [ὀλιγογονίαν], and to others, which were being consumed by these, a plenteous brood [πολυγονίαν], and so procured survival of their kind') are only a limited aspect of the 'plan of compensation' Epimetheus invented for the survival of living species (*Prot.* 321b2–7, tr. Lamb 1924). The main point is the diversity of gifts given to the different species, except men. It prepares the notion of 'art' (τέχνη) as something that will allow men to equip themselves, once Prometheus has given it to them, and the idea that something else (i.e. politics) may then be forgotten. From a Platonic point of view, although Herodotus' narrative climaxes with the war between men and snakes, he never describes the counterpart given to humanity in the overall scheme of compensation. It seems that 'Platagoras' inserts the Herodotean description within the Hesiodic myths of Prometheus in *Theogony* and *Works and Days* and their reception in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* in order to correct this flaw. It is possible to be more specific if one looks at the way the description attested in Herodotus is embedded in the Protagorean myth. Plato constructs a double chiasmus:

> Herodotus:
>
> Καί κως τοῦ θείου ἡ προνοίη, ὥσπερ καὶ οἰκός ἐστι, ἐοῦσα σοφή (A), ὅσα μὲν [γὰρ] ψυχήν τε δειλὰ καὶ ἐδώδιμα, ταῦτα μὲν πάντα πολύγονα[c] πεποίηκε, ἵνα μὴ ἐπιλίπῃ κατεσθιόμενα, ὅσα δὲ σχέτλια καὶ ἀνιηρά, ὀλιγόγονα[d] (B).
>
> It would seem that the divine foresight being wise (as is but reasonable) (A) has made all creatures prolific[c] that are timid and fit to eat, that they be not minished from off the earth by being eaten up, whereas but few young are born[d] to creatures cruel and baneful (B).
>
> Platagoras:
>
> καὶ τοῖς μὲν ὀλιγογονίαν[d'] προσῆψε, τοῖς δ' ἀναλισκομένοις ὑπὸ τούτων πολυγονίαν[c'] (B'), σωτηρίαν τῷ γένει πορίζων. ἅτε δὴ οὖν οὐ πάνυ τι σοφὸς ὢν (A') ὁ Ἐπιμηθεὺς ἔλαθεν αὐτὸν καταναλώσας τὰς δυνάμεις εἰς τὰ ἄλογα (*Prot.* 321b7–c3).
>
> To some he attached a paucity in breeding[d'], and to others, which were being consumed by these, a plenteous brood[c'] (B'), and so procured survival of their kind. Now Epimetheus, being not so wise as he might be, heedlessly squandered his stock of properties on the brutes. (A').

In B and B', the same theme is taken up again (πολύγονα versus ὀλιγόγονα becoming ὀλιγογονίαν versus πολυγονίαν with a chiasmus in the chiasmus: cd/d'c'). But

[35] This is the nickname given to Protagoras speaking in Plato's *Protagoras* by Farrar 1988: 80.

in A and A', while in Herodotus the 'wisdom' of the divine is emphasized, with some qualification (σοφή + κως + ὥσπερ καὶ οἰκός ἐστι), in Plato, we are in the presence of the minor god Epimetheus and the evidence of 'imperfect wisdom', also with some qualification (ἅτε δὴ οὖν οὐ πάνυ τι σοφὸς ὤν). I therefore suggest that we can perceive an ironic double echo here. To explain it further, we are of course restricted to hypotheses. One solution, or rather, my solution, is to see this as an intertextual game, played by the writer Plato using Herodotus' text, whatever the relationship may be between Herodotus and Protagoras on the one hand, and Socrates and Protagoras on the other. Yet Plato also imitates Protagoras himself: is the sophist the object of this half-ironic reference to the doctrines of Providence developed by Herodotus about all living species? Or is the sophist its author? The lack of evidence makes it impossible to decide, and that is why I use the nickname 'Platagoras', given to the narrator of the myth by Cynthia Farrar. We may perhaps reconstruct a hypothetical story. The lesson about prolific birth given in part D (with the examples in E and E'), which is linked to εἰκός (a very important concept for Protagoras)[36] and which appears again in Protagoras' mouth in Plato, could be truly Protagorean. Herodotus adds the foresight of the divine, his knowledge of vipers and then what the Arabians told him about winged snakes. This quasi-tragic story pattern has no counterpart in *Protagoras* and is truly Herodotean.

In the Protagorean myth, there is also a concern for justice, but as a separate gift to mankind from Zeus, in the third part of the text, and linked not with *timōria* but with *aidōs*. This time Plato's intertextual play is with Hesiod and Aeschylus. As in Hesiod (*Op.* 83–9), Epimetheus is wrong, but here he does not give a bad gift (Pandora) to mankind; Prometheus steals fire, but 'Platagoras' does not evoke, except in a fleeting and ironic way, his Hesiodic theft. The concern shown by Epimetheus to ensure 'that no species be annihilated' (εὐλάβειαν ἔχων μή τι γένος ἀϊστωθείη, *Prot.* 321a2–3) is exactly opposed to the will that Prometheus attributes to Zeus in Aeschylus' *Prometheus*, following the *Cypria*: 'He took no account of the wretched mortals. On the contrary, he wanted to annihilate the race (ἀϊστώσας γένος), and create a whole new one' (v. 231–232). The same verb, ἀϊστόω, is found in both texts with the same context: its use in *Protagoras*, unique in Attic prose, may refer to Aeschylus. In the Protagorean myth, the image of a jealous and vengeful god is thus doubly corrected (which could not fail to please Plato himself): in place of a Zeus seeking to make the human race disappear, 'Platagoras' substitutes first of all an Epimetheus who is concerned, inversely, to preserve all living races, but who forgets man, then a Prometheus and a Zeus who, between them, finally ensure the salvation of man. The fear of Zeus, at *Prot.* 322b9–10, even becomes 'that our entire race may disappear' (δείσας περὶ τῷ γένει ἡμῶν μὴ ἀπόλοιτο πᾶν). Herodotus' interpretation of the divine may also be in the background. That 'the divine is entirely envious, jealous to us' is not acceptable at all to Plato. Similarly unacceptable is the idea that taking revenge on the father's wrongdoing may be right. The first lie of the poets condemned in his *Republic* is the story about Cronos taking revenge on his father Uranus (by castrating him, *Theog.* 167–210): for Hesiod's readers, children may thus be right

[36] On the notion and use of εικός for Protagoras and... 'Platagoras,' see Arist., *Rh.* 2.24, 1402a3–28, with Bodin 1975.

to take revenge on their father's wrongdoing. This pattern of revenge is not very far from Herodotus' argument about snakes in our passage.

> Πρῶτον μέν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, τὸ μέγιστον καὶ περὶ τῶν μεγίστων ψεῦδος ὁ εἰπὼν οὐ καλῶς ἐψεύσατο ὡς Οὐρανός τε ἠργάσατο ἃ φησι δρᾶσαι αὐτὸν Ἡσίοδος, ὅ τε αὖ Κρόνος ὡς ἐτιμωρήσατο αὐτόν. τὰ δὲ δὴ τοῦ Κρόνου ἔργα καὶ πάθη ὑπὸ τοῦ υἱέος, οὐδ' ἂν εἰ ἦν ἀληθῆ ὤμην δεῖν ῥᾳδίως οὕτως λέγεσθαι πρὸς ἄφρονάς τε καὶ νέους, ... Καὶ οὐ λεκτέοι γ', ἔφην, ὦ Ἀδείμαντε, ἐν τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ πόλει. οὐδὲ λεκτέον νέῳ ἀκούοντι ὡς ἀδικῶν τὰ ἔσχατα οὐδὲν ἂν θαυμαστὸν ποιοῖ, οὐδ' αὖ ἀδικοῦντα πατέρα κολάζων παντὶ τρόπῳ, ἀλλὰ δρῴη ἂν ὅπερ θεῶν οἱ πρῶτοί τε καὶ μέγιστοι. Οὐ μὰ τὸν Δία, ἦ δ' ὅς, οὐδὲ αὐτῷ μοι δοκεῖ ἐπιτήδεια εἶναι λέγειν.
>
> 'There is, first of all,' I said, 'the greatest lie about the things of greatest concernment, which was no pretty invention of him who told how Uranus did what Hesiod says he did to Cronos, and how Cronos in turn took his revenge; and then there are the doings and sufferings of Cronos at the hands of his son. Even if they were true I should not think that they ought to be thus lightly told to thoughtless young persons ..., Adeimantus, in our city, nor is it to be said in the hearing of a young man, that in doing the utmost wrong he would do nothing to surprise anybody, nor again in punishing his father's wrong-doings to the limit, but would only be following the example of the first and greatest of the gods.' 'No, by heaven,' said he, 'I do not myself think that they are fit to be told.' (Plato, *Republic* 2.377e–378b, tr. Shorey 1937)

Of course, here Plato's target is Hesiod's narrative about Cronos and Uranus, but I suspect he would not allow young people to read our Herodotean passage either...[37]

My own target has been twofold: to highlight what is specific to Herodotus' narratology in this passage, i.e. the weaving together of different authorial voices with his own voice in order to deliver a lesson about the foresight of the divine in his own vocabulary of revenge, and to suggest an intertextual play against this very passage by Plato in his *Protagoras*, where he aims to assert what divine foresight about mankind really is.

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[37] I will not trace here the history of the balance achieved by nature and divinity (or often nature alone, without any kind of revenge) in order to preserve the world of living beings, and especially to preserve mankind. See references to Xenophon, Aristotle and Galen in Parker 1992: 84–94, and in my paper, Demont 2011: 67–85 (revised version of Demont 1994: 145–58).

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