

History as Contagion? Herodotus on Silent Trade (4.196)*

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores Herodotus' account of 'silent trade', the phenomenon whereby two parties (in this instance, the Carthaginians and an unnamed Libyan people) exchange goods without any wider social contact. Drawing on parallel accounts of silent trade, it first explores the distinctive features of Herodotus' version, and the question of its historicity. Secondly, it examines the story against the wider background of the *Histories*, in particular Herodotus' model of human contact and his use of the marketplace as an analogy. Finally, it looks at one striking reworking of this episode of the *Histories* in the closing stanzas of Matthew Arnold's *Scholar-Gipsy*.

KEYWORDS: Herodotus, silent trade, Carthaginians, Phoenicians, Libyans, agora, contact, Matthew Arnold, *Scholar-Gipsy*.

And that thou hast but one way, not t'admit
The worlds infection, to be none of it.

(John Donne, 'The First Anniversary. An Anatomy of the World')

In one short passage of his Libyan *logos*, Herodotus describes a pattern of encounters between a group of Carthaginian traders and an unnamed people from beyond the Pillars of Heracles (4.196).

Λέγουσι δὲ καὶ τάδε Καρχηδόνιοι, εἶναι τῆς Λιβύης χώρον τε καὶ ἀνθρώπους ἔξω Ἡρακλέων στηλέων κατοικημένους, ἐς τοὺς ἐπεὰν ἀπίκωνται καὶ ἐξέλωνται τὰ φορτία, θέντες αὐτὰ ἐπεξῆς παρὰ τὴν κυματωγὴν, ἐσβάντες ἐς τὰ πλοῖα τύφειν καπνόν· τοὺς δ' ἐπιχωρίους ἰδομένους τὸν καπνὸν ἰέναι ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ ἔπειτα ἀντὶ τῶν φορτίων χρυσὸν τιθέναι καὶ ἐξαναχωρεῖν πρόσω ἀπὸ τῶν φορτίων· τοὺς δὲ Καρχηδονίους ἐκβάντας σκέπτεσθαι, καὶ ἦν μὲν φαίνηται σφι ἄξιος ὁ χρυσὸς τῶν φορτίων, ἀνελόμενοι ἀπαλλάσσονται, ἦν δὲ μὴ ἄξιος, ἐσβάντες ὀπίσω ἐς τὰ πλοῖα κατέαται, οἱ δὲ προσελθόντες ἄλλον πρὸς ὧν ἔθηκαν χρυσόν, ἐς οὗ ἂν πείθωσι. Ἀδικεῖν δὲ οὐδέτερούς· οὔτε γὰρ αὐτοὺς τοῦ χρυσοῦ ἄπτεσθαι πρὶν ἂν σφι ἀπισωθῆ τῇ ἀξίῃ τῶν φορτίων, οὔτ' ἐκείνους τῶν φορτίων ἄπτεσθαι πρότερον ἢ αὐτοὶ τὸ χρυσίον λάβωσι.

* An early version of this paper was delivered at the first session of the 'Herodotus Helpline' seminar on 1 April 2020. At the risk of becoming quickly dated (for example, in the motif of 'contagion'), I have chosen not to elide references to that specific moment as the COVID-19 pandemic took hold. I am grateful to all those who contributed to discussion, but especially to Antti Lampinen and Rowena Fowler, for pointing me towards Marshall Sahlins and Matthew Arnold, respectively. The paper has also been greatly improved by the comments of Liz Irwin, Jan Haywood, Paul Demont and the anonymous readers.

And the Carthaginians also say the following things: that there is a place in Libya beyond the Pillars of Heracles where men live, where they [the Carthaginians] come and unload their cargoes, laying them all along the beach, and then they go aboard their vessels and light a smoking fire. When the locals see the smoke, they come to the sea and then they put down gold in exchange for the cargoes and withdraw from the cargoes. Then the Carthaginians disembark and have a look, and if the gold seems to them to be equal in value to the cargoes, they take it and they go away. But if it is not equal in value, they go back on board their boats and wait, and then the locals come back and lay down more gold until such point as the Carthaginians agree. And neither party is unjust: the Carthaginians do not take hold of the gold until it is equal in value to their cargoes, and nor do the locals take hold of the cargoes until the Carthaginians take the gold.

Herodotus' account here can be deployed for various purposes and from various perspectives. His testimony, for example, has been adduced as evidence of the positive characterization of the Carthaginians ('the very reverse of Punica fides', according to Erich Gruen), or, more broadly, to support the case that Herodotus' picture of barbarians falls short of any 'blanket characterization of xenophobia and ethnocentrism, let alone racism'¹ — an extreme proposition in the first place.² More usually, discussion has focused on two main questions, both reflected, for example, in a page of the excellent Lorenzo Valla commentary of Aldo Corcella.³ First, where might this encounter have taken place? On the one hand, more cautiously, the scene is located in Morocco or northern Mauretania; on the other hand, in the Gold Coast (modern Ghana), Gambia or as far as Senegal.⁴ Secondly, the passage has been discussed as an example — indeed the first example — of the phenomenon of 'silent trade' or 'silent barter', an idea with a long history in anthropological thought.⁵

In the following pages, Herodotus' account will be examined from a succession of different perspectives: first, narrowly, for its historicity and for the assumptions underlying the account; then, within the wider context of the Libyan *logos* and of the *Histories* more generally; and, finally, in a striking reworking in which the scene is shifted from Libya to Iberia and its two parties subtly transformed. This one brief episode of the *Histories* will itself, indeed, serve as a vessel for the exploration of a range of fundamental aspects of the *Histories* and of history, not

¹ Gruen 2011: 118–19, 3; cf. Quinn 2019: 672 ('almost relentlessly positive').

² For a critique of Gruen's overall position, see Lampinen 2011: 236, Harrison 2020.

³ Asheri, Lloyd and Corcella 2007: 718.

⁴ See e.g. Macan 1895: i. 146, van Stekelenburg 1996: 64, Secci 2011: 9–12. A subsidiary question here is the possible relationship between Herodotus' account and the *Periplus* of Hanno.

⁵ '[U]na descrizione da manuale che più di un antropologo sul campo potrebbe sottoscrivere': Nenci 1990: 313.

least perhaps one of the most fundamental of all: how, without causing injury, injustice or ‘infection’, we may be able to form relationships with others.



If we consult either the most substantial treatment of the theme of silent trade, P.J. Hamilton Grierson’s 1903 volume, or a more recent summary compiled by James Woodburn,⁶ we are presented with a rich harvest of similar accounts drawn from both literature and fieldwork. By way of example, I relate just two (as retold by Grierson), the first from the account of the fourteenth-century Moroccan traveller Ibn Battuta, the second an early anthropological account from Timor.⁷

... Ibn Battuta [sic] informs us that he was told in Bolghar of a land of darkness, at a distance of forty days’ journey, where, when the travellers have arrived, each of them lays down at a certain spot the wares which he has brought with him, and then retires. Next day he returns and finds placed opposite to his goods, sables, ermines, and other furs. If satisfied with what he finds, he takes it away. If not, he leaves it, and the inhabitants of the country add something more to it. Sometimes, however, the natives take back their goods, and leave those of the merchants. The latter do not know whether those with whom they deal are genii or men, for they never see them.

It is said of the natives of the southern end of Timor, that they seldom exchange words with those with whom they trade. When the prows arrive off the coast, the merchants land on the beach the articles they have for barter in small quantities at a time. The natives immediately come down with the produce they have for sale, and place it opposite the goods from the prows, pointing to the articles or description of articles they want to obtain in exchange. The trader then makes an offer, generally very small at first, which he increases by degrees. If he hesitate a moment about adding more to it, the native accepts it as sufficient, snatches it up, and darts off with it into the jungle, leaving his own goods. If he consider it too little, he seizes up his own property, and flies off with it in equal haste, never returning a second time to the same person.

How should we interpret the parallels between Herodotus and such later traditions? For some early anthropologists, a regular game was to match Herodotus’ testimony with the ‘primitive’ customs unearthed through fieldwork,

⁶ Woodburn 2016 (commenting, p. 486, ‘Now, you may well ask, what on earth is James Woodburn doing in citing this set of cases? Are we back in the nineteenth century, where anthropologists picked out tantalizing tit-bits of information from travelers’ tales and other implausible sources, presented them out of their social and cultural context, and sought to build general theories with them?’).

⁷ Grierson 1903: 42, 49.

so confirming the unchanging continuity of a given practice. This, for example, was how Edward Tylor deployed Herodotus on a number of occasions, as evidence of how the ‘modern barbarian represents the ancient’.⁸ (Neither Tylor nor Grierson, it should be made clear, identify this particular parallel.) Conversely, if we are in the mood for a different kind of sport (one with a long history: think of gold-digging ants and Himalayan marmots), the parallel can be invoked in the opposite direction, i.e. to confirm Herodotus rather than modern anthropology — but only at the risk of our being contaminated by ideas of the timeless primitive.⁹ A concern with veracity is implicit in Corcella’s commentary note; others have gone further in making explicit the ‘believable’ nature of such stories.¹⁰ In case we are anxious that a concern with veracity is somehow anachronistic, it is worth adding that Herodotus himself gives us warrant for such questions: although he makes no overt judgement of the truth of the silent trade of 4.196, he engages very directly with the veracity of the Carthaginian report of the preceding chapter (the story that the maidens of the island of Kyrauis draw gold out of the mud of a lake, using bird feathers dipped in pitch, 4.195), citing parallels from his own observations on Zakynthos, and concluding that the report is at least ‘like the truth’ (οικότα ἐστὶ ἀληθείη).

It is worth pausing, however, to interrogate the idea of silent trade more closely. For writers like Grierson — although less clearly for his witnesses¹¹ — silent trade was a building block in a larger developmental model of ‘primitive trade’: a stage in which peoples, living largely in isolated groups, dipped their toes into commerce, but in a way that accommodated their fundamental fear and distrust of the ‘stranger’.¹² (The phenomenon of silent trade — and our passage of Herodotus, specifically — was also invoked more recently by Walter Burkert, as part of an evolutionary model of religion. Religious offerings, too, Burkert points out, are deposited in a marginal space. ‘The main action is to deposit and to retreat; to deposit and to leave untouched, this is the most general characteristic of offerings.’¹³) Such large-scale, totalizing models of development may make one uneasy, and some historians of Africa have indeed interpreted the concept of silent trade as no more than a chimera, a ‘primitivist myth’. Testimonies of silent trade, they have pointed out, often have a subtext (as apparently in our passage of Herodotus) of more developed peoples trading with less developed.¹⁴ These

⁸ Tylor 1871: i. 40–1 (Scythian hideboiling), 283 (werewolves), 439 (Scythian grave goods), 1881: 402 (matrilineal descent), 411 (eating the dead), 424; the phrase is from Tylor 1881: 347. There is perhaps an important distinction, for Tylor, between Herodotus’ barbarians and the historian himself: see e.g. his praise for Herodotus’ comments on the alluvial deposits of the Nile, 1881: 336 (‘two thousand years had to pass before these lines of thought were followed up by modern geologists’).

⁹ For an early example of this, see the contributions to his brother George Rawlinson’s commentary of Henry Rawlinson, which repeatedly illustrate Herodotus’ observations of ancient Persia with instances from the contemporary world: e.g. G. Rawlinson 1858–60: i. 273 n. 7, 273–4 n. 9, 274–5 n. 2; ii. 506 n. 3.

¹⁰ So e.g. Vlassopoulos 2013: 148.

¹¹ See here the observations of Woodburn 2016: 487–8.

¹² Blench 1982: 59. For fear as fundamental, Grierson 1903: 31–6.

¹³ Burkert 1987: 48.

¹⁴ So e.g. Farias 1974, Green 2013. Cf. Woodburn 2016: 488–9, identifying that the more

critics have also shown how the evidence for silent trade is built on a ‘systematic pattern of hearsay, borrowing, and misunderstanding’.¹⁵ ‘Thus, under careful scrutiny, the frozen portrait that has been termed silent trade seems to melt away, revealing behind it a much richer and more varied reality of commercial *activity*’.¹⁶

As that final picture of a more varied reality suggests, however, we should perhaps not be forced to choose between extreme alternatives here. We may accept that stories of silent trade have been exaggerated or distorted — that stories of episodes in which ‘communication happened not to occur’ were converted into exchanges in which communication ‘ought not to occur’ (what Woodburn terms the ‘Milkman syndrome’),¹⁷ or that the level of prior mutual understanding, or more varied forms of brokerage, were elided in the telling — without denying *any* basis to such traditions. There will have been good reasons for hunter-gatherer societies to shun more than the most cursory contact with outsiders.¹⁸ Moreover, in the absence of (much) wider social interaction, it is easy to see how the motives of the other party might have been misunderstood, fitted to the mould of a more striking, pre-existing story pattern.¹⁹

Where the critiques of the historicity of silent trade are particularly compelling, however, is in pointing towards the other lessons that such traditions convey, the narratives that they support — in other words, in moving beyond the narrow question of veracity. A particularly rich account of silent trade that makes this point is the one given by the Igala people of Nigeria of the ‘Amelu’, as retold by Roger Blench:²⁰

On enquiring who the ‘Amelu’ were, I was told that they were the same as the ‘âfùnùnù’ — ‘the one who grows a tail’. The Amelu, it transpired, were the real manufacturers of all the Western consumer goods now such an omnipresent feature of everyday life in Nigeria. Cars, fridges and radios were all manufactured by the Amelu in some unspecified location. The Amelu, however, were lacking in salt, and so they brought their fridges, cars etc. to market to exchange for salt. They had long tails, and of these they were ashamed, so in order to disguise the tails they dug deep pits in the market-places. Arriving early in the morning, they sat over the holes, and would not move until the last European trader had gone home. They laid out all their goods in front of them, and Europeans would come and put out what they considered a reasonable quantity of

accessible neighbours are almost invariably the source of traditions of silent trade.

¹⁵ Green 2013: s5.

¹⁶ Farias 1974: 19.

¹⁷ Woodburn 2016: 489.

¹⁸ Woodburn 2016: 489: ‘The general run of the evidence suggests to me that silent trade is a specialized form of exchange involving avoidance practiced by vulnerable stigmatized groups at times when they had every reason to fear closer contacts.’ Cf. the timidity of Herodotus’ Garamantes, 4.174, without weapons of war or means of defence.

¹⁹ Woodburn 2016: 491–2.

²⁰ Blench 1982: 60.

salt in exchange for the goods. If the salt was enough, the Amelu man would nod his head and the European would take away the goods. Otherwise, trading would continue until both parties agreed the exchange was fair.

There is something distinctly magical about the Amelu: how exactly do they produce such a range of goods? (A number of traditions of silent trade may indeed remind us of the ‘tooth fairy’ who, in Britain and elsewhere, leaves a coin under a child’s pillow in exchange for a milk tooth deposited in the same location.²¹) This magical quality — absent in other, more rationalized versions of the tradition — prompts us to read such a story in more than merely literal terms. In Blench’s reading, the story of the Amelu should be understood primarily as emblematic of the difficulties of interaction with others, in particular the tension between two imperatives:²² on the one hand, the need to keep strangers at arms’ length, and on the other hand, the desire to possess their exotic and attractive goods. Silent trade represents a dream solution: ‘an apparently practical way of achieving these impossible goals, of reconciling two contradictory desires.’ Power relations also provide a significant backdrop to the account of the Amelu. The story positions the European colonialists as cheating the Igala and others, selling on at great profit what they obtained only for the price of salt. At the same time, it robs the Europeans of responsibility for manufacturing all those goods, transferring it to the more sympathetic Amelu. In short, this ‘ancient parable of inter-ethnic relations’ has been adapted to express frustration with European political domination.

To return now to our passage of the *Histories*, is there any similar sense of an asymmetry between the two parties? Does the story, for example, preserve any hint that the Carthaginians are exploiting the locals, who in turn are unaware of the value of their gold? This kind of imbalance is a common feature of subsequent ancient traditions of silent trade.²³ The Aestii of Tacitus’ *Germania*, for example, view the amber that they collect in its raw state as completely useless and so are amazed at the price it commands (Tac. *Germ.* 45). The Seres of Ammianus Marcellinus’ account, who lay out their goods along a river frontier, are so modest in their manners that they hand over what they have without taking anything in return (Amm. Marc. 23.68). Herodotus is certainly alert to the extreme variations in the valuation of items as precious.²⁴ The King of the long-lived Ethiopians shows his visitors, the Fish-Eaters, a prison in which all the men are constrained by fetters made of gold; amongst these Ethiopians it is bronze, not gold, that is ‘the rarest and most valued of all things’ (πάντων ὁ χαλκός σπανιώτατον καὶ τιμιώτατον, 3.23).

²¹ See, more widely, Woodburn 1986: 488. In the case of the Igala story, at least the Amelu come face to face with the European traders.

²² Blench 1982: 60–1; cf. Skinner 2012: 148 n. 170 on 4.196 (‘self-evidently a paradigmatic account’).

²³ Grierson 1903: 19–20. For the indeterminacy of rates as a feature of primitive exchange, see Sahlins 2017: 260.

²⁴ And in other respects: cf. e.g. 3.38, 7.152 for the confrontation of different cultural values more widely. Herodotus’ approach is reminiscent at times of the extreme polarities of the *Dissoi Logoi* (90 DK).

The most outlying regions of the inhabited world are likely to possess ‘those things that seem most beautiful to us and which are the rarest’ (τὰ κάλλιστα δοκέοντα ἡμῖν εἶναι καὶ σπανιώτατα, 3.116; cf. 3.106). In the passage at hand, Herodotus’ sustained indirect speech makes clear that this claim — that neither party acted unjustly (Ἄδικεῖν δὲ οὐδετέρους) — is that of the Carthaginians.²⁵ There is clearly then some space for an ironic reading of the passage as highlighting Carthaginian exploitation or self-delusion (something to which we will return).²⁶ At the same time, ostensibly at least, clear emphasis is laid on the justice of both parties to the exchange.

Related to this, we might also interrogate the sustainability of the encounter between Carthaginians and Libyans. Herodotus clearly suggests that the transaction is a repeated one, but in reality this kind of scenario is one that might quickly go wrong.²⁷ Unlike in many of the anthropological parallels curated by Grierson, neither party is kept in line by any fear of divine displeasure.²⁸ The possibility that the locals might just get up and leave with their gold, or that they might threaten to do so, is simply not entertained.²⁹ By contrast with the Timorese, who lay out their goods in small quantities at a time — thus protecting their own position in the trade, and arguably increasing the value of their goods —, the Libyans seemingly deposit their gold in a single cache. So, what is to stop the Carthaginians from driving a hard bargain and just waiting until an absurd quantity of gold is handed over?³⁰ Is this indeed what Herodotus is envisaging? We may opt here for optimistic or pessimistic readings. We may suppose simply that the two parties were sufficiently satisfied with the exchange of goods to continue with the arrangement.³¹ Or, instead, we may choose to stress that this satisfaction was predicated on the imbalance between the two parties — the fact that the Libyans had no appreciation of the wider value of what they were exchanging, or indeed that they had no idea of value at all³² — and that the ‘justice’ of the exchange depends upon their lack of wider contact.

²⁵ The fact of a ‘Carian fort’ on the Atlantic coast of North Africa suggests an alternative route for the transmission of such a Carthaginian report: see Braun 2004: 336 for the suggestion that Carian mercenaries accompanied Hanno. For a survey of the material record of Phoenician settlement in Algeria and Morocco, Mederos Martín 2019.

²⁶ See also below for discussion of 1.1–5.

²⁷ For the potential explosiveness of such scenarios, see Sahlins 2017: 281–2.

²⁸ Grierson 1903: 57–8.

²⁹ Cf. Sahlins’ account of negative reciprocity, 2017: 177: ‘The participants confront each other as opposed interests, each looking to maximize utility at the other’s expense. Approaching the transaction with an eye singular to the main chance, the aim of the opening party, or of both parties, is the unearned increment. One of the most sociable forms, leaning toward balance, is haggling conducted in the spirit of “what the traffic will bear.” From this, negative reciprocity ranges through various degrees of cunning, guile, stealth, and violence to the finesse of a well-conducted horse raid. The “reciprocity” is, of course, conditional again, a matter of defense of self-interest.’

³⁰ Cf. Danieli 1991: 27.

³¹ Secci 2011: 4. Cf. Grierson 1903: 66.

³² See e.g. Parise 1976: 78, Giardina 1986: 300, emphasizing the Libyans’ desire only to satisfy the foreigners; more widely, Humphreys 1978: 116–17.



Before we go too far in seeking to reconstruct the underlying reality of the episode, however, we should perhaps take a breath. In seeking to rationalize why it is that the silent trade works so well against our expectations, are we missing the point? As Rosaria Munson highlights, the way in which the parties' fair dealing is expressed (strikingly, in negative terms: neither was unjust) seems to presuppose that the reader/listener would think otherwise.³³ This passage forms part, in other words, of that larger pattern in the *Histories* — a pattern that we can imagine was informed by Herodotus' wider intellectual context — whereby apparently exotic details of foreign customs are held up as models to the implied shock of his audience.³⁴ These unnamed Libyans have stumbled upon a way of doing business that works!³⁵ An obvious point of contrast here is with Greek commerce as it is caricatured by the Persian Cyrus: the Greeks are those who collect together in a designated place in the middle of their cities (i.e. the agora) to deceive each other under oath (ἀλλήλους ὀμνύντες ἐξαπατῶσι, 1.153).³⁶

The position of this passage within the wider Libyan *logos* should also have a bearing on our reading.³⁷ Like so many other ethnographies, the Libyan *logos* is framed by the encroachment of the Persians — on the pretext of helping out the Cyrenean Pheretime in her vengeance on the city of Barca.³⁸ But the framing of the Libyan *logos* in terms of Persian expansion is notable for the Libyans' disregard for the Persian threat. 'These are those of the Libyans that we are able to name', he concludes, 'and the majority of these gave no thought to the King of the Medes now or then' (τούτων οἱ πολλοὶ βασιλέος τοῦ Μήδων οὔτε τι νῦν οὔτε τότε ἐφρόντιζον οὐδέν, 4.167). Though there are occasional traces of contact with foreign peoples (in the form, for example, of isolated Greek borrowings, and of the mythological connections that are woven throughout the *logos*),³⁹ and though some peoples share attributes with one another (especially in the vicinity of Cyrene, 4.170–1), the overwhelming impression of the Libyans is of a gallery of intensely diverse peoples — 'many and varied peoples' (ἔθνεα πολλὰ καὶ παντοῖά), as Herodotus terms them in the introduction (4.167) — whose variety is a function

³³ Munson 2001: 147 ('The reassuring negative statement here serves as a positive evaluation that defies common assumptions').

³⁴ See e.g. 2.50–3 on the names of the gods.

³⁵ Cf. Kyrtatas 2001: 149: 'the historian actually seems to be saying that some strange "Libyans" had achieved what all civilized people would, or should, wish'. For a rejection of the idea that such exchanges were a characteristic mode of Carthaginian trade, Bondi 1990: 283–5, citing Parise 1976.

³⁶ Cf. Danieli 1991: 28, Millett 1998: 221 (speculating that Cyrus' error was his 'failure to grasp that all the posturing ... was to be accepted as part of the competitive process rather than barefaced conceit'); for parallel explorations, see also Moyer 2020.

³⁷ For the patterns within the *logos*, and the links between it and the wider narrative, see esp. now Baragwanath 2020. For the relationship with Hecataeus' account, Braun 2004: 326–9.

³⁸ As highlighted by Baragwanath 2020: 162, an episode which 'stages a spectacle of what was on the cards for Greece'.

³⁹ So e.g. 4.169, 178, 189, 191, with Zali 2018, esp. 126–30. Contrast Baragwanath's emphasis, however, 2020: 178–9, on the 'plurality of exchanges'.

of their individual isolation.⁴⁰ The Libyan ethnography stretches our assumptions about the organization of human society perhaps more than any other. We witness peoples who hold up female promiscuity as virtue (4.172, 176),⁴¹ whose language sounds like screeching bats (4.183), who have no names, who eat no living creature and see no dreams (4.184), who smear themselves in ochre and eat monkeys (4.194), or who shun all human society (i.e. with other peoples) and all methods of self-defence (4.174). Where contact does occur between peoples, it is a form of contact that does not even recognize the humanity of the Other: the Garamantes hunt (θηρεύουσι) the Troglodyte Ethiopians with their chariots (4.183). This bleak background renders the achievement of the silent trade of 4.196 all the greater. Those ‘locals’ with whom the Carthaginians trade are the very last in Herodotus’ gallery of Libyan peoples: the second of a pair of unnamed peoples, both of whom are known only via the Carthaginians. (The accounts of both, like those of other peoples from the extremes of the earth, concern the extraction of gold.⁴²) They are, in other words, at the very furthest margins of the known world.⁴³ What does it signify that it is here — where the level of communication is at ‘degree zero’, according to Francesca Gazzano⁴⁴ — that the institutions of justice can survive?⁴⁵ Is it only those who shun, or are distant from, wider society — like the Issedonians with their men and women sharing power (4.26) — who are capable of just relationships?

The Carthaginians’ exchanges at 4.196 may also operate in counterpoint to the interactions that enfold the Libyan ethnography within Book 4.⁴⁶ If we accept John Gould’s view of Herodotus’ sense of the ‘seriousness of give and take’ across the *Histories*, then in these pages more than any others we seem to see a world out of kilter, the derangement of appropriate, balanced reciprocal relations: Arcesilaus’ excessive vengeance on his enemies within Cyrene (4.164.1–2);⁴⁷ Aryandes’ minting of a pure silver coinage on the model of Darius’ gold, so ‘making himself equal to Darius’ and requiring his levelling (4.166);⁴⁸ the violence and deceit with which the Persians achieve the conquest of the city of Barca (4.200–201); Pheretime’s own excessive brand of non-verbal communication (the impaling of the Barcaean men, the mutilation of their women, 4.202); or the Libyans’ murder of Persian stragglers for their clothes and possessions (τῆς τε ἐσθῆτος εἶνεκα καὶ τῆς σκευῆς, 4.203).⁴⁹ The measured, silent, just pattern of

⁴⁰ Cf. Thomas 2000: 53–4 on the diversity of animal species (and more widely for the connections between the Libyan *logos* and contemporary discussions on nature).

⁴¹ See here esp. Rosellini and Saïd 1978: 975–85.

⁴² For the extraction of gold, see e.g. 3.98, 102–6, 114, 116; cf. the gold-guarding griffins, 4.13, 27, or the abundance of gold amongst the Massagetæ, 1.215; for the association of gold with ἐρημῆ, 3.102. Much more could be said about the discourse surrounding gold within the *Histories*, though see esp. the observations of Purves 2010: ch. 4.

⁴³ See here Lloyd 1990: 236.

⁴⁴ Gazzano 2020: 21 (‘una sorta di “grado zero” della comunicazione’).

⁴⁵ Giardina 1986: 301, Danieli 1991: 28; for the thesis of a Herodotean scheme of human development more widely, see Harrison 2022.

⁴⁶ I am indebted here to the insight of Bruce Gibson.

⁴⁷ See here Baragwanath 2020: 174.

⁴⁸ See further Kurke 1999: 69.

⁴⁹ Cf. Baragwanath 2020: 176 (‘a random event that suggests carelessness on the Persians’ part’).

exchange between Carthaginians and Libyans stands out starkly against this lurid background. Then, crowning all these exchanges, the gods step in to compensate for the disproportionate vengeance of Pheretima against the city of Barca — to reaffirm the need for a balanced exchange between human agents (4.205).



Importantly, our episode also needs to be set against Herodotus' broader portrayal of the contact between peoples across the course of the first books of the *Histories*. (This is something I have sketched before, so I will only recapitulate it briefly now.⁵⁰) At the outset of the *Histories*, the Phoenician ship that wends its way to Greece, initiating the cycle of hostility between Asia and Europe, is presented as a moment of first contact. What we then see through the early books of the *Histories* is a progressive thickening of contact: leaders are struck by the desire for others' land, or by the 'bug of empire',⁵¹ and countless middlemen — Democedes, Syloson, Aristagoras and many more — grasp the opportunity to appeal to Persian power for their own advantage. Within that process, key moments are all marked: the first Persians to go to Greece (3.138), the ships that signalled 'the beginning of evils' (5.97) and so on. This progressive thickening of contact is set in relief by the few individuals who stand out against it:⁵² the Babylonian Nitocris who, alert to the 'great and restless empire of the Medes' (τὴν Μήδων ὀρώσα ἀρχὴν μεγάλην τε καὶ οὐκ ἀτρεμίζουσιν, 1.185) introduces bends in the Euphrates so that it returns to the same village three times; Tomyris of the Massagetai, who warns Cyrus that he should rule his own people and 'try to bear the sight of [her] ruling hers' (1.206); or the King of the long-lived Ethiopians who relays the message to Cambyses that he should thank the gods for not 'turning the thoughts of the children of Ethiopia to foreign conquest' (3.21).⁵³ The course of history, for Herodotus, is the gradual breaking down of barriers, a progressive increase in contact — akin to Thucydides' idea of the *kinēsis* of people at the outset of his *History* (Thuc. 1.2).⁵⁴ And such contact, as the reciprocal exchanges of Herodotus' opening chapters reveal (1.1–5), can always tip over into conflict. Just as Claude Lévi-Strauss observed, so also for Herodotus: 'Exchanges are peacefully resolved

⁵⁰ Cf. Harrison 2009: 384, 2002: 555–8, and for a development of these ideas, Harrison 2022. See also esp. the excellent pages of Cobet 2002: 402–5.

⁵¹ I.e. a virus: Harrison 2009: 390.

⁵² Noted by Skinner 2018: 212.

⁵³ In each case, the outcome is mixed: Nitocris may have a limited posthumous revenge on Darius, 1.187, but Babylon is conquered; Tomyris achieves a fuller vengeance on Cyrus himself, but only after the death of her son, 2.111–14; Cambyses' assault on the Ethiopians runs into the ground, 3.25, but Ethiopians take part in the Persian expedition against Greece, 3.97, 7.9.2, 7.69–70, 9.32. In the case of the Ethiopians, we should almost certainly draw a distinction between two Ethiopias, one which really existed (and was subject to Persian rule, 2.29–31), the other (that of the long-lived Ethiopians, 3.17–26) a utopia: see Török 2014: 52–3, 84–97, 103–111, and now Haywood 2021; contrast Asheri's notes on 3.17–25, 3.97.2 (Asheri, Lloyd and Corcella 2007: 415–17, 495–6), and see also Irwin 2014 (pp. 59–60, connecting the King's warning to the Sicilian expedition).

⁵⁴ See further Harrison 2022.

wars, and wars are the result of unsuccessful transactions'.⁵⁵ Against this wider historical canvas, the encounter of the Carthaginian traders with the Libyans stands out — no less than the story of the Amelu — as a kind of parable: an example of a form of contact that minimizes contact, a means to trade without the accompanying dangers of conflict.⁵⁶

As Emily Baragwanath has pointed out, moreover, the language in which the encounter of Carthaginians and Libyans is described strikingly recalls Herodotus' opening account of the Phoenicians' arrival in Greece — the Phoenicians whose relationship with the Carthaginians is like that of parents to children (3.19).⁵⁷ In Argos, the Phoenicians similarly lay out their cargoes on the shore,⁵⁸ but in other respects the scenario is very different. Neither party withdraws; instead the Phoenicians are pictured alongside their ships onshore. Their goods are sold piecemeal rather than in a single batch.⁵⁹ And their encounter is sufficiently extended (Herodotus speaks of the fateful moment occurring on the fifth or sixth day) so as to allow much fuller contact: the Argive women, including Io, only venture to the shore to see the goods available when nearly all are sold. Finally, the manner in which the exchange takes place seems to assume a maximum level of interaction: the women stand around the stern of the ship buying those goods for which they have a desire (Ταύτας στάσας κατὰ πρύμνην τῆς νεὸς ὠνέεσθαι τῶν φορτίων τῶν σφι ἦν θυμὸς μάλιστα). The phrasing suggests that they are browsing for items that take their individual fancies, even bargaining for them. The initial encounter between Phoenicians and Argives, in short, presents a complete contrast to that of the Carthaginians and Libyans: in the latter, contact is collective,⁶⁰ and strictly contained. Importantly, however, Herodotus' account of Io's subsequent abduction (or rather, we should say, his account of the Persian's version of that event) is itself contested — by Herodotus' Phoenicians themselves (1.5.1–2):

Περὶ δὲ τῆς Ἰοῦς οὐκ ὁμολογέουσι Πέρσησι οὕτω Φοῖνικες· οὐ γὰρ ἀρπαγῇ σφέας χρησαμένους λέγουσι ἀγαγεῖν αὐτὴν ἐς Αἴγυπτον, ἀλλ' ὡς ἐν τῷ Ἄργεϊ ἐμίσγετο τῷ ναυκλήρῳ τῆς νεὸς· ἐπεὶ δὲ ἔμαθε ἔγκυος ἐοῦσα, αἰδεομένη τοὺς τοκέας, οὕτω δὴ ἐθελοντὴν αὐτὴν τοῖσι Φοῖνιξι συνεκπλῶσαι, ὡς ἂν μὴ κατάδηλος γένηται.

⁵⁵ Lévi-Strauss 1969: 67, cited by Sahlins 2017: 281–2.

⁵⁶ Cf. Sahlins' description of silent trade, 2017: 183: 'good relations are maintained by preventing any relations'. In using the term 'parable', I do not mean to deny that the story could also be deployed as evidence of Carthaginian trade (as by Mavrogiannis 2004: 57), though clearly any such reading would need to take into account the wider role of the passage within the *Histories*.

⁵⁷ Baragwanath 2020: 158–61. For a rich discussion of Herodotus' Phoenicians through the prism of the history of scholarship, see also Vasunia 2012. For Herodotus' distinction of Carthaginians and Phoenicians, Maciocio 1999, esp. p. 277 on 4.42–3.

⁵⁸ See Sahlins 2017: 220 for the beach as an emblematic location for exchange (among the Busama).

⁵⁹ Cf. Danieli 1991: 26.

⁶⁰ A point made to me by Tatiana Bur in discussion.

But, concerning Io, the Phoenicians do not tell the same story as the Persians. For they say that it was not by using force that they led her to Egypt, but that in Argos she slept with the captain of the ship. When she learnt that she was pregnant, she was ashamed in relation to her parents, and so she in fact willingly sailed away with the Phoenicians, so that this would not become obvious.

How should we understand all these competing versions, including the account of contactless trade at 4.196? On the one hand, with Baragwanath, we might see 4.196 as a ‘rejoinder’ to the learned Persians of 1.1, as evidence of the Carthaginians’ ‘defend[ing] the actions of their Phoenician forebears’.⁶¹ On the other hand, we might suggest that the contested nature of the Phoenicians’ first appearance in the *Histories* — coupled with their wider reputation for woman-stealing and piracy, within and beyond Herodotus’ text⁶² — should lead the reader to question the Carthaginians’ version of their encounter with the Libyans that is its doublet. A further alternative would be to see the different versions, more neutrally, as in counterpoint, each destabilizing our reception of the other.

Herodotus’ accounts of four more naval encounters beyond the Mediterranean complicate the picture still further. In the context, first, of his exploration of the nature of the continents, Herodotus relates three naval expeditions in turn. The Egyptian King Necho sent a party of Phoenicians from the Red Sea with instructions to return through the Pillars of Heracles (4.42); each year, they put in to land, planted a crop and reaped the harvest, before continuing on and reaching their destination in the third year. Secondly, the Persian Sataspes was sent by Xerxes on a mission to circumnavigate Libya as a punishment for raping the virgin daughter of Zopyrus, son of Megabyzus (4.43) — a penalty recommended by the victim’s mother as worse than impalement. Then, Darius ordered the Greek Skylax of Karyanda to investigate where the river Indus issued into the sea; after thirty months’ journey, he returned to the spot from which Necho’s Phoenicians had set out (4.44). Finally, later in Book 4, Herodotus recounts how a Samian ship’s captain, Colaesus, was blown off course, through the Pillars of Heracles, to Tartessus (4.152) — a story that intersects with the convoluted narrative of the foundation of Cyrene. Of these four expeditions, it is those of Sataspes and Colaesus that are most clearly in dialogue with the account of silent trade and with one another. After setting out from Egypt, where he sourced both ship and crew, Sataspes sailed past the Pillars of Heracles and around Libya, until — after many months, and for fear of the length of the journey and its emptiness (τὴν ἐρημίην) — he turned about. Justifying himself to Xerxes, he gave more details (4.43.5–6),

⁶¹ Baragwanath 2020: 159, 160.

⁶² 2.54, 56; more widely, Giardina 1986: 295–6, Danieli 1991: 25, Mavrogiannis 2004: 57–9. Contrast the biblical image of the Tyrians, e.g. at Isaiah 23.8 (‘Who hath taken this counsel against Tyre, the crowning city, whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honourable of the earth?’).

φὰς τὰ προσωτάτω ἀνθρώπους μικροὺς παραπλέειν ἐσθῆτι φοινικηίη διαχρωμένους, οἱ ὄκως σφεῖς καταγοίατο τῇ νηὶ φεύγεσκον πρὸς τὰ ὄρεα καταλείποντες τὰς πόλεις· αὐτοὶ δὲ ἀδικέειν οὐδὲν ἐσιόντες, βρωτὰ δὲ μοῦνα ἐξ αὐτέων λαμβάνειν. Τοῦ δὲ μὴ περιπλώσαι Λιβύην παντελέως αἴτιον τόδε ἔλεγε, τὸ πλοῖον τὸ πρόσω οὐ δυνατόν ἔτι εἶναι προβαίνειν ἀλλ' ἐνίσχεσθαι.

saying that, at the furthest distant point, he sailed past little men who wore clothing of date-palm; and that, whenever they brought their ship ashore, these men deserted their cities and fled to the mountains. But they [Sataspes and his men] did nothing unjust when they landed, and only took cattle from them. As for his not sailing around Libya completely, he said that this was the reason: that the ship was unable to go any further but was held back.

Xerxes did not accept that Sataspes was telling the truth (οὐ συγγινώσκων λέγειν ἀληθεία), and so ordered that he be impaled, returning to the original punishment. As for Colaeus and his men, after setting off from the island of Platea, off Cyrenaica, en route for Egypt, they (4.152.2–23)

ἀποφερόμενοι ἀπηλιώτη ἀνέμῳ· καὶ οὐ γὰρ ἀνίει τὸ πνεῦμα, Ἡρακλέας στήλας διεκπερήσαντες ἀπίκοντο ἐς Ταρτησσόν, θείῃ πομπῇ χρεώμενοι. Τὸ δὲ ἐμπόριον τοῦτο ἦν ἀκήρατον τοῦτον τὸν χρόνον, ὥστε ἀπονοστήσαντες οὗτοι ὀπίσω μέγιστα δὴ Ἑλλήνων πάντων τῶν ἡμεῖς ἀτρεκεῖην ἴδμεν ἐκ φορτίων ἐκέρδησαν, μετὰ γε Σώστρατον τὸν Λαοδάμαντος Αἰγινήτην· τούτῳ γὰρ οὐκ οἶά τέ ἐστι ἐρίσαι ἄλλον.

were carried off course by an easterly wind, and the wind did not abate until they had passed through the Pillars of Heracles and arrived, with divine guidance, to Tartessus. This *emporion* was untapped at this time, so that when these men returned back they made the greatest profit from their cargoes of all Greeks indeed that we know of accurately, after Sostratos the son of Laodamas, the Aeginetan.

With six of the sixty talents that they made as profit they crafted a giant bronze krater with griffins' heads projecting all around the rim, and three colossal kneeling figures supporting it, and dedicated this in the Samian Heraion.

Both these encounters again occur on the shore, explicitly so in the case of Sataspes. As at 4.196 and 1.1, we hear of the cargoes (φορτίων) from which Colaeus made his legendary profit. Sataspes insists to Xerxes that he and his party 'did nothing unjust' (ἀδικέειν οὐδὲν) — except, we might supply, stealing from them —, just as the Carthaginians claim of themselves and the Libyans (and, indeed, as the Phoenicians claim at 1.5, albeit without the verbal echo). The Libyans encountered by Sataspes are no less shy of human society than those of 4.196. Where the Phoenicians abducted the King's daughter (or, by their account, merely

took her along out of politeness), Sataspes had raped the cousin of the King.⁶³ While Sataspes was held back by a mysterious force (or so he claimed), Colaeus was blown back, by divine guidance, hundreds of miles from Platea through the Pillars to Tartessus.⁶⁴ And, though the unnamed people he encountered may not have been as uncivilized as the Libyans met by the Carthaginians or Persians, the reason for Colaeus' profit was that the *emporion* was a virgin one, or 'undefiled' — in other words, that they profited off the differential (between themselves and the unnamed Celts) in the valuation of the traded goods.⁶⁵ A virgin daughter, a virgin *emporion*. Three peoples undertaking expeditions beyond the Pillars. And in two of the three cases, serious questions over the veracity of the accounts. (Who are we to believe, the wife-stealing Phoenicians or the convicted Persian rapist?) Only in the case of Colaeus can Herodotus confidently supply confirmatory details — although in so doing he heavily foregrounds the question of veracity (μέγιστα δὴ Ἑλλήνων πάντων τῶν ἡμεῖς ἀτρεκέϊν ἴδμεν).

How again are we to interpret this play of parallels? To begin minimally, this pattern might certainly serve to reinforce a more cynical response to the Carthaginians' claims of justice at 4.196. (We have seen all this before by now: the claims of fairness; adventitious traders profiting off innocent natives.) In the traditions of Colaeus in Tartessus and the Carthaginians at 4.196 we might also see traces of a tradition of the Atlantic West as a kind of El Dorado: a land where gold or other goods can be got 'for a steal',⁶⁶ and where the inhabitants run away leaving you their cattle.⁶⁷ Another theme that emerges is the effective emptiness of this landscape: Colaeus discovers his virgin *emporion*; Sataspes becomes afraid of the solitude (τὴν ἐρημίην); the Phoenicians sent by Necho are always fortunate in finding land ready for cultivation, but apparently never encounter another human being.⁶⁸ I say 'effective emptiness', however, because it is surely clear that inhabitants are being elided — or represented as simply giving way to the newcomers (4.43; cf. Hanno *Periplus* 11).

It begins to become clear, then, that these traditions of exploration into virgin territory, far from being the function of a disinterested curiosity, reflect

⁶³ And, fancifully, we might add that Io was — in other accounts — transformed into a heifer, and that Sataspes kidnaped the Libyans' cattle.

⁶⁴ 'There is something suspicious about the journey': Roller 2006: 4; Roller also suggests that Herodotus' characterization of Tartessus as untapped may have been what he was told by the Samians (to put off competitors). For a full discussion of the historical implications of Herodotus' references to Tartessus, Celestino and López-Ruiz 2016: 33–42.

⁶⁵ Danieli 1991: 29. Cf. Ps.-Scylax 112.8–10 for a trade between Phoenicians and Ethiopians, who exchange animal skins and teeth (including ivory) for the Phoenicians' products (such as perfumed oil).

⁶⁶ I.e. a bargain.

⁶⁷ Cf. the friendly 'little men' encountered by the Nasamonians, 2.32, Timaeus' account of the extraordinary fertility of an island in the Ocean, *BNJ* 566 F 164, Eudoxus of Rhodes on birds larger than cattle, *BNJ* 79 F 3; for the association of Erytheia with cattle, Strabo 3.5.4; cf. Hecataeus *BNJ* 1 F 26 (from Arr. *Anab.* 2.16.5–6). For the West in the Greek geographical imagination see esp. Gómez Espelosin 2009; for an acute account of Herodotus' overall coverage of the West, Corcella 2007: 55–60.

⁶⁸ For scepticism, see Lloyd 1977: 148–54 (in relation to their harvests, pp. 151–2); contrast Bondi 1990: 268–9.

competing claims of ownership.⁶⁹ There is a much wider context here, of course. The connections of the landscape of Libya with Greek mythical heroes — not least around Lake Triton — constitute clear charters for a potential Greek colonization.⁷⁰ (And, clearly, the myths of Heracles' Labours in the West serve the same function.⁷¹) The expedition of Sataspes is part of a pattern of Persian exploration prior to conquest,⁷² as is made clear by Herodotus' conclusion to his account of Skylax's *periplus*: that Darius subdued the Indians and used this sea (Μετὰ δὲ τούτους περιπλώσαντας Ἰνδούς τε κατεστρέψατο Δαρεῖος καὶ τῆ θάλασση ταύτη ἐχράτο, 4.44). As for the Phoenicians-Carthaginians, their 'claim' to the West is less explicit within Herodotus' text — although, of course, it is likely that the very idea of the 'Pillars' of Heracles originates in the projection of the twin pillars of (Heracles-)Melqart onto the landscape.⁷³

Some sense of a division of spheres between naval powers may be implicit, moreover, in the idea of the Pillars as a geographical limit. That the waters beyond the Pillars are unpassable was apparently already proverbial by the time that the image is deployed by Pindar (*Nem.* 4.69–72):⁷⁴

Γαδείρων τὸ πρὸς ζόφον οὐ περατόν· ἀπώτρεπε
αὔτις Εὐρώπαν ποτὶ χέρσον ἔντεα ναός·
ἄπορα γὰρ λόγον Αἰακοῦ
παίδων τὸν ἅπαντά μοι διελεθεῖν.

That which lies to the west of Gadeira cannot be crossed; turn back again the ship's tackle to the mainland of Europe, because it is impossible for me to go through the whole account of Aeacus' descendants.

This tradition of the Pillars as a frontier is reflected in the stories of the obstacles that impede different expeditions: not only the mysterious force that blocked Sataspes, but the mud and seaweed that faced pseudo-Skylax,⁷⁵ or the lack of water, crippling heat and streams of lava gushing into the sea that deterred Hanno

⁶⁹ For the association of sexual conquest and the conquest of land in the Greek context, see Hall 1995.

⁷⁰ For alternative interpretations focused on Athenian imperialism, Coppola 1999.

⁷¹ See here Braun 2004: 298–300.

⁷² See (from different perspectives) Martin 1965, Christ 1994: 175–82.

⁷³ Burkert 1985: 210: 'the Melqart pillars in the temple of Gadeira/Cadiz became the Pillars of Heracles'. Herodotus describes the twin pillars at Tyre at 2.44.2; the association between the temple pillars and the geographical feature is made in antiquity by Strabo 3.5.5, citing Posidonius. For the alternative tradition of the Pillars as constructed by a (Greek) Heracles (again presenting a charter for Greek expansion), Diod. Sic. 4.18.1–3. For fuller details, Gómez Espe-losín 2009: 289, Álvarez Martí-Aguilar 2019.

⁷⁴ Cf. Pind. *Nem.* 3.21–3, *Ol.* 3.44–5, *Isthm.* 4.11–14, Eur. *Hipp.* 741–7. See here esp. Amiotti 1987, connecting a new sense of the Pillars as impassable to the destruction of Tartessus and the strengthening of Carthaginian maritime control (reflected e.g. in the first treaty between Rome and Carthage, Polyb. 3.22). See also Romm 1992: 17–19.

⁷⁵ 112.6, with Shipley 2011: 208.

(Arr. *Ind.* 43.11–12).⁷⁶ If Hecataeus, like pseudo-Skylax, began and ended his *Periodos Gēs* at the Pillars,⁷⁷ then they can be thought of as an historiographical as well as an actual frontier. One passage from late in the *Histories* may suggest that the Pillars also represent a limit to (Greek) imperial expansion.⁷⁸ After Salamis, Ionian messengers come to the Greek fleet asking for its support in liberating Ionia (8.132):

οἱ προήγαγον αὐτοὺς μόγις μέχρι Δήλου. Τὸ γὰρ προσωτέρω πᾶν δεινὸν ἦν τοῖσι Ἕλλησι οὔτε τῶν χώρων ἐοῦσι ἐμπείροισι, στρατιῆς τε πάντα πλέα ἐδόκεε εἶναι· τὴν δὲ Σάμον ἐπιστέατο δόξη καὶ Ἡρακλέας στήλας ἴσον ἀπέχειν. Συνέπιπτε δὲ τοιοῦτο ὥστε τοὺς μὲν βαρβάρους τὸ πρὸς ἐσπέρης ἀνωτέρω Σάμου μὴ τολμᾶν ἀναπλώσαι καταρρωδηκότας, τοὺς δὲ Ἕλληνας χρηζόντων τῶν Χίων τὸ πρὸς τὴν ἡῶ κατωτέρω Δήλου· οὕτω δέος τὸ μέσον ἐφύλασσε σφραων.

The Greeks led them just about as far as Delos. For everything that was further ahead was terrible to the Greeks, who had no experience of those places, and they thought that there were armies everywhere. In their understanding, Samos was as far distant as the Pillars of Heracles. So it came about that the barbarians were too afraid to dare to sail further west than Samos, and the Greeks, despite the Chians' request, no further east than Delos. In this way, fear guarded the middle space between them.

Herodotus' reference to the Greeks' lack of experience of the eastern Aegean, together perhaps with the reference to Delos, so central to the Athenians' early ἀρχή, points forwards clearly to a future when the Athenians, at least, would be anything but ignorant of these locations. Fear maintains a kind of buffer zone between Greeks and Persians — for now. But how far might they go if they overcame their fear or lack of experience?⁷⁹ The passage probably reflects the grandiose schemes of Athenian expansion from the period of the Atheno-Peloponnesian Wars, when Thucydides represents Alcibiades as eager to conquer not only Sicily but also Carthage (Thuc. 6.15.2, 90.2; cf. Plut. *Per.* 20.3), or when

⁷⁶ For the speculation that the Phoenicians deliberately exaggerated their reports of the dangers, Romm 1992: 18, Roller 2006: 27–8; for the streams of lava as emitted from Mt Cameroon, Roller 2006: 40, 2019: 651–2. Cf. the difficulties faced by Himilco in travelling north from the Pillars, as reflected in Avienus' *Ora Maritima*, e.g. ll. 113–20.

⁷⁷ See F. Pownall's commentary on Hecataeus *BNJ* 1 F 38, with further references; also Braun 2004: 294–5. For the possibility that (the authentic) Skylax of Karyanda was the author of a *Periplus* of the lands beyond the Pillars, see P. Kaplan's commentary on *BNJ* 709 T 1; and, for the possibility of an early text by Promathus of Samos on the ends of the world, see H. Beck's biographical note on Promathion (*BNJ* 817).

⁷⁸ Cf. Isoc. 5.112 for Heracles' positioning of the Pillars as 'a trophy of victory over the barbarians, a memorial of his bravery and the dangers he faces and the boundaries of the territory of the Greeks' (τρόπαιον μὲν τῶν βαρβάρων, μνημεῖον δὲ τῆς ἀρετῆς τῆς αὐτοῦ καὶ τῶν κινδύνων, ὄρους δὲ τῆς τῶν Ἑλλήνων χώρας).

⁷⁹ Cf. Harrison 2007: 58–9.

Aristophanes' Demosthenes encourages the ambitious Sausage-Seller to turn his right eye towards Caria and his left to Carthage (Ar. *Eq.* 173–6).⁸⁰ It might also, however, be grounded in wider conceptions of geographical space. Although Herodotus maintains the position that the Mediterranean, the Atlantic and the Red Sea are all one, the Mediterranean is 'the sea which the Greeks sail' (τὴν μὲν γὰρ Ἕλληνες ναυτίλλονται, 1.202). In the ease with which Necho's Phoenicians alone circumnavigate Libya,⁸¹ in the naming of the island of Erytheia (the Red Island, 4.8), possibly even in the clothing made of date-palms (ἐσθῆτι φοινικηίῃ) worn by the natives encountered by Sataspes,⁸² we see perhaps the traces of an idea that it is the waters beyond the Pillars to the west or Necho's canal to the south — their original homeland, of course, according to Herodotus (1.1) — to which the Phoenicians-Carthaginians properly belong.⁸³ The evidence here is no more than suggestive. What is clearer, however, is the way in which Herodotus' account reveals the interests of the Persians, Carthaginians and Greeks creeping like shadows over the landscape of the West.



Herodotus' account of silent trade, then, is very far from being an isolated anthropological curiosity. Instead, the Carthaginians' encounter — when read in dialogue with other passages of the *Histories* — can be seen to activate a network of (in some cases, obscure) associations: the reputation of the Carthaginians and their 'parent' Phoenicians; the undeveloped peoples at the fringes of the known world; Athenian ambitions (no matter how airy they may have been in practice) of ousting Carthage and achieving Mediterranean-wide domination; the hazards and opportunities of contact between cultures; and reciprocity in human relations more widely. If now we return to the place from which we began — to the Carthaginians' encounter on the Libyan shore — where do we stand? What is the moral (if any) of this 'parable' of intercultural contact?

It will be clear from the title of this contribution that one reason for focusing on this episode is its resonance in the current moment. 'When the plague was raging at Winchester', according to an eighteenth-century history of England's first capital, 'those who wished to exchange without coming into touch with those who were stricken placed the articles on a large stone outside the city walls.'⁸⁴ In the same way today, we look for items deposited at a distance on our doorsteps, by drivers who are frequently on their heels before we even glimpse them. Our

⁸⁰ See here esp. Irwin 2014: 63–4; for Cambyses' aborted plans to conquer Carthage, cf. 3.19. Persia, of course, provides a model for this wide scope of empire: cf. Hdt. 1.209.1, 7.8.γ, 19.1, 54.2, 8.53.2, 109.3; Aesch. *Pers.* 189–99.

⁸¹ The pattern of winds would have made an east–west passage easier: Lloyd 1977: 149 (though doubting the veracity of the entire episode).

⁸² This scarcely clad people may make us ask what the Libyans of 4.203 were wearing before they stole the Persians' clothing.

⁸³ For the Phoenicians' origins, see e.g. Bondi 1990: 257–64. A significant historical landmark which may lie in the background here is the takeover of Tartessus by Carthage, for which see Braun 2004: 302.

⁸⁴ Milner 1798–1801: i. 428, cited by Grierson 1903: 64.

version of silent trade is designed, of course, to mitigate a different risk from that of Herodotus' Carthaginians: the risk, that is, of an actual contagion, rather than the contagion of human contact.⁸⁵ And yet, given that 'the contagion is an infection of our network of relationships', according to Paolo Giordano,⁸⁶ the outcome is the same. Is the moral of Herodotus' story then that contact is dangerous and should be reduced to a minimum: that we should stay home? Is the lesson of history that we should retreat from history? Or is it possible to recreate the silent trade of the Libyans in the heart of the *polis*,⁸⁷ and to develop safe and just means of engagement with others?

Plato in his *Laws* prescribes that the market-trader should fix only a single price for whatever he is selling. If that price is not met by a buyer, the trader can take away his goods, but he cannot fix an alternative price on the same day, and he cannot indulge in haggling (Pl. *Leg.* 917b–c). Plato's ostensible purpose is to counter perjury, although — in anticipating the world of the barcode, and in establishing rules against selling anything faulty (κίβδηλόν) — the passage is concerned more widely with establishing what we might term trading standards. Elsewhere, the *Laws* provide that foreign traders (one of four categories of *xenoi*) should be processed in 'markets, harbours and public buildings outside the *polis*'; the appointed magistrates need to be on guard in case any of the *xenoi* should introduce an innovation (νεωτερίζη), distributing justice to them correctly, and 'making use of them as necessary but as little as possible' (ἀναγκαῖα μὲν, ὡς ὀλίγιστα δ' ἐπιχρωμένους, Pl. *Leg.* 952d–953a). Herodotus, by contrast, issues no such legislative prescriptions. What he does do, however, is offer a series of contrasting images of exchange; strikingly, two of the rare instances in which Herodotus expresses explicit approval of a foreign *nomos* are both also marketplaces.⁸⁸

The first, of course, is the notorious Babylonian wife-market (1.196). Here the goods for sale are the women of marriageable age, with a crowd of men standing around while a herald manages the auction. The women are sold one by one ('piecemeal', like the goods at 1.1), and their precise valuation can vary as the rich of Babylon outbid each other (ὑπερβάλλοντες ἀλλήλους) for the beautiful. The relative valuation of the women, on the other hand, appears to be the subject of a clear consensus. There are also rules to ensure fair play.⁸⁹ 'It was not possible for someone to give away his own daughter to whomever he wished' (Ἐκδοῦναι δὲ τὴν ἑωυτοῦ θυγατέρα ὅτεω βούλοιοτο ἕκαστος οὐκ ἐξῆν);⁹⁰ it was not possible, in other

⁸⁵ Of course, our reduced exchanges are predicated — just as 'silent trade' may, in practice, have been — on a wider network of relationships (i.e. online middlemen).

⁸⁶ 'Il contagio è un'infezione della nostra rete di relazioni', Giordano 2020: 8.

⁸⁷ Giardina 1986: 301.

⁸⁸ Both *nomoi*, of course, are restricted to the Babylonians so do not address the greater difficulties of managing just exchange with others — although 1.196 does reflect a concern about intermarriage between Babylonian communities. See also his portrayal of the inverted gender roles in Egyptian markets, 2.34 (cf. Soph. *OC* 337–9) with Danieli 1991: 28.

⁸⁹ The concern with justice is also reflected in a phrase, often deleted, which explains the Babylonians' shift to prostituting their daughters: ἵνα μὴ ἀδικοῖεν αὐτάς μηδ' ἔς ἑτέραν πόλιν ἄγωντα. For the textual and linguistic issues, McNeal 1988: 62–3. For prostitution to be a remedy to '[protect] the girls from the violation of guarantees' (Asheri in Asheri, Lloyd and Corcella 2007: 210) is surely intended to be absurd.

⁹⁰ Cf. the Athenian Callias, 6.122, singled out for allowing his daughters their choice of husband.

words, to override the system. ‘Nor was it possible to take away the woman you had bought without giving some security’ (οὐδὲ ἄνευ ἐγγυητέω ἀπαγαγέσθαι τὴν παρθένον πριάμενον), as reassurance that you would indeed make her your wife. In the event of a disagreement, the law established that the money be returned (εἰ δὲ μὴ συμφερόιατο, ἀποφέρειν τὸ χρυσίον ἔκειτο νόμος). The wisdom and beauty of this custom (Herodotus’ terms) appear to consist in its efficient, ‘democratic’ functioning,⁹¹ and in spite of the glaring difficulty: the fact that free Babylonians — wealthy and poor — are disposing of their daughters in marriage through what appears, for all intents and purposes, to be a slave market.⁹²

The second wisest custom of the Babylonians is their system of crowd-sourcing medical treatment (1.197). Here the goods carried to market are again human, and again they are put on show, but they are not themselves for sale. Rather than one item being matched with another of equal value, the symptoms of the sick are matched with the similar past experiences of the viewers. There is no payment or return for medical advice offered, but there is an implicit expectation of eventual reciprocity: this is ensured by the rule that no one may pass by the sick person in silence, until he has inquired what illness they have (Σιγῇ δὲ παρεξελθεῖν τὸν κάμνοντα οὐ σφί ἐξεσσι, πρὶν ἂν ἐπείρηται ἤντινα νοῦσον ἔχει). It is this requirement of equal participation — the establishment of clear rules — that appears to render the custom just in Herodotus’ view,⁹³ although again there may be glaring difficulties (at least if Herodotus had any sense that diseases could be contagious, or that medical specialization had a useful role).⁹⁴ If we overlook the Phoenicians’ wider reputation and take the Carthaginians at their word in their report of silent trade, or if we take the Persian concern with truth-telling at face value⁹⁵ and align our judgement with that of Cyrus at 1.153, then we can infer a Herodotean dig at his fellow Greeks. However, given the ironic complexion of all these accounts, a more poised Herodotean position seems increasingly likely: that, while all these passages explore the possible shape of a just form of exchange, all of them markedly fail to achieve such a thing.

To derive from the model of thickening contact outlined above — and of the inevitable hazards of human contact, of history as contagion — the lesson that we should ‘stay at home, [and] save lives’⁹⁶ would be similarly to iron out the open texture of Herodotus’ work. Whether we should adopt the modest civic lifestyle of Tellus the Athenian, the figure held up as the most fortunate by Solon in Book 1 (1.30), or — with Xerxes and Mardonius — appreciate the need to act, to engage

⁹¹ The term is Munson’s, 2001: 139; see also the important discussion of Kurke 1999: 238–42.

⁹² Herodotus’ concluding judgement that the custom is no longer in place but that now everyone who lacks a livelihood prostitutes their daughters adds a further ironic gloss: here the outcome is ‘undemocratic’ and yet the element of prostitution is a constant between both versions. The passage also needs to be read against the Lydians’ most shameful custom of temple prostitution, 1.199, for which see esp. Kurke 1999: 228–9, 237 (‘a grotesque parody of the public sphere of a Greek city’). For Lydian trading, see also 1.94.1, 155, with Kurke 1999.

⁹³ Munson 2001: 140; as Demont observes, 2018: 175, Herodotus does not make the grounds for his judgement explicit.

⁹⁴ Contrast the Persian quarantining of the sick, 1.138.1, and Egyptian specialization, 2.84.

⁹⁵ See, however, Harrison 2004.

⁹⁶ My reference is to a British government slogan of 2020.

in history (7.9.γ, 50.1), is arguably one of the central questions of the *Histories*, but it is one that Herodotus leaves unresolved.⁹⁷ Herodotus' text, as critics have explored, lays heavy emphasis on contingency, and is rich in instances of the momentous outcomes of insignificant events.⁹⁸ But, as should be clear from his account of the Greeks' rallying in response to Xerxes' invasion, humans are not mere cogs in a chain of onward transmission, but can also — for good and ill — be agents of change in their own right. Are there benefits of cross-cultural contact that balance the risks? Alongside the development of trade (by the Phoenicians, Phocaeans and others),⁹⁹ the *Histories* also track the development and diffusion of human *nomoi*: the spread of knowledge of the gods, of forms of worship, of armour, of pederasty, from Egypt, Libya and so on to others.¹⁰⁰ With the exception perhaps of knowledge of the gods, there is nothing inherently positive about the diffusion of *nomoi*. Openness to foreign custom may indeed be a distinctive feature of the expansionist powers of Persia and Athens.¹⁰¹

Here we come up against powerfully rooted assumptions about Herodotus and his text. In a fine passage of his *Travels with Herodotus*, the Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuściński offers a striking description of China — surely coloured by a Herodotean schematism — as a land full of walls.¹⁰² For Kapuściński, informed by his own desire to break free from the isolation of Cold War Poland, this is all simply a waste of human effort, 'proof of a kind of human weakness, of an aberration, of a horrifying mistake'.¹⁰³ By contrast, Herodotus stands out as the first 'globalist'.¹⁰⁴ We would probably all identify with something like this idea of Herodotus — even if, in practice, it is hard to pin down from his text. Though he may problematize the division of the world into continents (4.45), the division between Asia and Europe that runs through the text is, at least in some senses, reaffirmed by the outcome of the *Histories*.¹⁰⁵ Herodotus' clearest statement of cultural relativism at 3.38, though it may express the foolhardiness of mocking the customs of others, might also be taken to suggest the imperviousness to change of a people's *nomoi*. Awareness of human variety may foster an appropriate humility,¹⁰⁶ but does not

⁹⁷ See here Harrison 2018, esp. 352–5; for a positive reading of Xerxes' wisdom vis-à-vis Artabanus, see Pelling 1991, esp. 132–6.

⁹⁸ Contingency: 5.36.1, with Hornblower 2013: 139. The significance of the insignificant: van der Veen 1996.

⁹⁹ 1.163.1: 'These Phocaeans were the first of all the Greeks to undertake long voyages, and they are the people who discovered the Adriatic and Tyrrhenian seas and Iberia and Tartessus ...' Contrast Mavrogiannis 2004: 65 ('Merchants are of course bearers of civilization').

¹⁰⁰ See further Harrison 2022.

¹⁰¹ 1.135, Thuc. 2.38, Xen. *Ath. Pol.* 2.7–8, with Harrison 2020: 150.

¹⁰² Kapuściński 2007: 58; cf. p. 59 for walls as engendering a mental attitude. For distortion of the landscape within the *Histories*, to prevent or assist human contact, see e.g. 1.185, 2.108, 8.98–9. See also Kurke 1999: 237 for a very similar description of Herodotus' Babylon as resembling two 'elaborate set[s] of Chinese boxes'.

¹⁰³ For Kapuściński's own desire to cross the border, 2007: 9; cf. p. 36 for his vision of India as a country 'without boundaries or end'.

¹⁰⁴ Kapuściński 2007: 77.

¹⁰⁵ See here Harrison 2007, responding to Thomas 2000.

¹⁰⁶ Harrison 2018: 352–5. For good and bad inquirers *within* the *Histories*, however, see e.g. Christ 1994, Demont 2009, Grethlein 2009, Harrison 2015.

appear to create any meaningful common ground. That at least is the implication of yet another ‘marketplace’ within the *Histories*: the marketplace of human peccadilloes¹⁰⁷ at 7.152. Responding to reports of Argive contact with the Persian King, Herodotus concludes (7.152.2):

Ἐπίσταμαι δὲ τοσοῦτο, ὅτι, εἰ πάντες ἄνθρωποι τὰ οἰκῆια κακὰ ἐς μέσον συνενεΐκαιεν ἀλλάξασθαι βουλόμενοι τοῖσι πλησίοισι, ἐγκύψαντες ἂν ἐς τὰ τῶν πέλας κακὰ ἀσπασίως ἕκαστοι αὐτῶν ἀποφεροῖατο ὀπίσω τὰ ἐσηνείκαντο.

But this much I understand, that if all men were to carry their own private faults to market, wishing to exchange them with their neighbours, when they had looked into the faults of others, each of them would gladly carry back home what they had brought.

Herodotus seems to visualize the marketgoers as stooping down to peer (ἐγκύψαντες) into the goods of others. This is a market, however, in which no one wants to do business, but each person goes home with their own merchandise — precisely as he envisages in his judgement on Cambyses in yet another marketplace, the marketplace of *nomoi* (3.38):¹⁰⁸

γάρ τις προθείη πᾶσι ἀνθρώποισι ἐκλέξασθαι κελεύων νόμους τοὺς καλλίστους ἐκ τῶν πάντων νόμων, διασκεψάμενοι ἂν ἐλοῖατο ἕκαστοι τοὺς ἑωυτῶν· οὕτω νομίζουσι πολλόν τι καλλίστους τοὺς ἑωυτῶν νόμους ἕκαστοι εἶναι.

For if someone were to propose it to all people to choose the most beautiful customs of all customs, each after looking into it would choose his own; for each considers their own customs to be much the most beautiful.

This passage, in effect, represents the positive counterpart of 7.152: where that latter passage is focused on our worst human features, here instead we are asked to select our best *nomoi*. The use of the superlative καλλίστους — otherwise only used of *nomoi* in the context of the Babylonian wife-market — brings out still further the sustained and deliberate nature of the image of the market.

This image not only raises questions about the principles for building a more just society — the ways of reimagining the public sphere, in the phrase of Kurke.¹⁰⁹ The Herodotean marketplace also has a metaliterary dimension.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ My rendering of οἰκῆια κακὰ as ‘faults’ or ‘peccadilloes’ is at odds with other translations, so e.g. Godley (‘troubles’), Waterfield (‘problems’), Purvis (‘afflictions’); Argive medism, the starting point for Herodotus’ discussion, cannot easily be termed an affliction.

¹⁰⁸ Munson 1991: 58, Kurke 1999: 87.

¹⁰⁹ Kurke 1999: 227.

¹¹⁰ It is worth noting that the image of the marketplace is a striking one with which to describe his own writing, given the disparagement of market-traders: see esp. Millett 1998: 218–19 on

Who selects and juxtaposes the most beautiful *nomoi* other than our narrator? The οικήια κακά that are the goods at market at 7.152 are none other than the historical reports that are the very fabric of Herodotus' *Histories*. When he insists that he is bound only to say what is said (λέγειν τὰ λεγόμενα), is the historian any different from Plato's market-trader, who cannot vouch for his own (potentially faulty) wares but merely lays them out for others to examine? Alternatively, and more positively, we can see Herodotus' historical marketplace in collective terms: that is, from the perspective of the buyers, themselves enabled to discern the true value of the goods arrayed in front of them. Thus Artabanus opens his rejoinder to Xerxes' plans for the conquest of Greece (7.10a1), again deploying the language of the market:¹¹¹

Ὁ βασιλεῦ, μὴ λεχθισέων μὲν γνωμέων ἀντιέων ἀλλήλησι οὐκ ἔστι τὴν ἀμείνω αἰρεόμενον ἐλέσθαι, ἀλλὰ δεῖ τῇ εἰρημένῃ χρᾶσθαι· λεχθισέων δὲ ἔστι, ὥσπερ τὸν χρυσὸν τὸν ἀκήρατον αὐτὸν μὲν ἐπ' ἑωυτοῦ οὐ διαγινώσκομεν, ἐπεὰν δὲ παρατρίψωμεν ἄλλῳ χρυσῷ, διαγινώσκομεν τὸν ἀμείνω.

'Oh King, if opposing judgements are not spoken, it is not possible for others to choose the better one, but it is necessary to go along with what has been said. But if they are spoken, it is possible, just as we cannot discern that gold is undefiled when it is on its own, but when we rub it against other gold we can discern which is better.'



The possibility of a metaliterary dimension to Herodotus' images of exchange leads me, finally, to a striking reworking of Herodotus' account of silent trade, one which evokes — and, in some respects, caps — many of the themes discussed in the preceding pages: the final stanzas of Matthew Arnold's pastoral elegy, *The Scholar-Gipsy*. Arnold's poem tells the story of a poor Oxford scholar ('Of pregnant parts and quick inventive brain') who — two hundred years before the time of the poem — had turned his back on all worldly preferment in favour of the wisdom of 'gipsy-lore' (in particular, the art of 'mesmerism'), and from then on is only glimpsed fleetingly as he shifts like a shadow across the hills that ring Oxford. After reflecting that the scholar-gipsy will have long ago been laid to rest in a quiet graveyard, the poet addresses him directly as a figure immune to the lapse of time. Unlike the rest of us, who have 'used our nerves with bliss and teen, | and tired upon a thousand schemes our wit', the scholar-gipsy's departure from the world has preserved the freshness of his powers. The poet finally calls upon his mysteriously passive protagonist to flee from contact with his (the poet's) own world — in so doing deploying the image of infection —, before turning, in an enigmatic coda, to the travels of a 'Tyrian trader'. (To bring out a little of the

Aristotle. Distinctions can be drawn, however, between e.g. κάπηλοι and ἔμποροι (so, Kurke 1999: 74–5) and between the traders themselves and the purchasers.

¹¹¹ Cf. Kurke 1999: 62–3 seeing the passage in the context of Greek didactic poetry.

connection between the final two stanzas and the preceding sections, I begin my quotation slightly earlier.)

But fly our paths, our feverish contact fly!
For strong the infection of our mental strife,
Which, though it gives no bliss, yet spoils for rest;
And we should win thee from thy own fair life,
Like us distracted, and like us unblest.
Soon, soon thy cheer would die,
Thy hopes grow timorous, and unfix'd thy powers,
And thy clear aims be cross and shifting made;
And then thy glad perennial youth would fade,
Fade and grow old at last, and die like ours.

Then fly our greetings, fly our speech and smiles!
—As some grave Tyrian trader, from the sea,
Descried at sunrise an emerging prow
Lifting the cool-hair'd creepers stealthily,
The fringes of a southward-facing brow
Among the Aegean Isles;
And saw the merry Grecian coaster come,
Freighted with amber grapes, and Chian wine,
Green, bursting figs, and tunnies steep'd in brine—
And knew the intruders on his ancient home,

The young light-hearted masters of the waves—
And snatch'd his rudder, and shook out more sail;
And day and night held on indignantly
O'er the blue Midland waters with the gale,
Betwixt the Syrtes and soft Sicily,
To where the Atlantic raves
Outside the western straits; and unbent sails
There, where down cloudy cliffs, through sheets of foam,
Shy traffickers, the dark Iberians come;
And on the beach undid his corded bales.

Arnold's rendering of the encounter presents some striking differences from that of Herodotus, so much so that the allusion might at first sight be missed. (The connection was initially made by the Liverpool scholar Kenneth Allott in a letter to the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1963.¹¹²) Most obviously, the Carthaginians are here rendered as Phoenician (or 'Tyrian'), and the 'shy traffickers' with whom they engage are no longer Libyan but Iberian.¹¹³ The plural

¹¹² Allott 1963.

¹¹³ A change made also (in subconscious memory of Arnold?) by Brandwood 2020: 36 n. 51; cf. p. 35 n. 27. Herodotus does observe one similarity between Libya and Tartessus: the nature

Carthaginians are transformed into a single Tyrian, and the repeated pattern of Carthaginian trade becomes a single act — one more in keeping, in fact, with Herodotus' opening account of the Phoenicians' encounter in Argos. The Tyrian trader's journey, moreover, marks the succession of one naval power by another: his recognition of the 'merry Grecian coaster' prompts him to set sail for new waters, Atlantic waters which — with their raving, 'cloudy cliffs', and 'sheets of foam' — are starkly contrasted with the 'blue Midland waters' and their typical trade of wine, grapes and 'green, bursting figs'.

The relation of these final stanzas to the rest of Arnold's poem has puzzled readers.¹¹⁴ What function does the Tyrian trader serve, and are the changes to Herodotus' version merely casual? (For Kenneth Allott, for example, the Tyrian trader was not in himself a nod to Herodotus but prompted him to recall Herodotus' Phoenicians because 'Carthage was founded as a colony of Tyre'.¹¹⁵) Clearly, the 'merry Grecian coaster' — and the civilization for which it stands — are intended as analogous to the world from which the scholar-gypsy has taken flight: the Tyrian trader's withdrawal is a rejection of the hedonism, the 'thoughtless pursuit of advancement and material gain' of both Greeks and Victorians.¹¹⁶ The nature of the Tyrian trader's contact with the Iberians (its silence, to be fair, is understated in Arnold's telling) can also be compared with the mesmerism of the gypsies, a 'form of communication which operates through withdrawal'.¹¹⁷

Some further insight, then, can be gleaned from Arnold's familiarity with contemporary works of ancient history. From George Grote's *History of Greece*, for example, he may have drawn his idea of the Phoenicians' withdrawal in the wake of their 'enterprising rivals', the Greeks (though Grote figures this change as a 'gradual retirement', rather than a single moment).¹¹⁸ From Grote too, he seems to derive a distinction between the quality of Phoenician trade and that of the Greeks (although it is possible that Grote himself here was influenced by

of their weasels (4.192, with Alonso-Núñez 1987: 248), but no wider claim is implicit.

¹¹⁴ See e.g. the comments of apRoberts 1978: 52 n. 20: 'The Tyrian trader might be considered not quite an artistic success; he functions as symbol at the cost of some strain. Certainly he defies New Criticism, and probably one should not have to bring to an explication so much material from outside a poem. In fact, though, I think we have all got rather fond of him, snatching his rudder and sailing off that way in a sort of huff. He has certainly caused us a lot of trouble, but the trouble has been pleasurable ...'

¹¹⁵ Allott 1963.

¹¹⁶ Douglas 1974: 429. For the wider tension between worldliness and the desire for a refuge in Arnold's work, see Coulling 1988; cf. Carroll 1969: 28.

¹¹⁷ Carroll 1969: 29, 32.

¹¹⁸ Grote 1846–56: iii. 353–4, cited by Douglas 1974: 424 (noting that Arnold's image presupposes that rivalries between nations will express themselves in trade terms): 'But at the time when the historical era opens, they seem to have been in course of gradual retirement from these regions, and their commerce had taken a different direction. Of this change we can furnish no particulars; but we may easily understand that the increase of the Grecian marine, both warlike and commercial, would render it inconvenient for the Phoenicians to encounter such enterprising rivals,—piracy (or private war at sea) being then an habitual proceeding, especially with regard to foreigners.' Arnold's choice of 'Tyrian' may have been based on Tyre's antiquity (as Farrell 2005: 292) or on the biblical image of Tyre (at Ezekiel 27, noted by Grote 1846–56: iii. 361).

Herodotus' description of the Carthaginian silent trade):¹¹⁹

The Phoenician, superior to the Greek on shipboard, traversed wider distances, and saw a greater number of strangers, but had not the same means of intimate communion with a multiplicity of fellows in blood and language. His relations, confined to purchase and sale, did not comprise that mutuality of action and reaction which pervaded the crowd at a Grecian festival.

Arnold's substitution of Libyans for Iberians, finally, may have been informed by his own father's characterization of that barbarian people in his *History of Rome*. For Thomas Arnold, the Iberians were notable for their 'remarkable courage' (which separated them from the 'common mass of barbarians'), their use of writing and their creation of historical records, but he also raises the tantalizing possibility of their own onward colonizing:¹²⁰

We ourselves have in some degree a national interest in the Iberians, if it be true, that colonies of their race crossed the Bay of Biscay, and established themselves on the coast of Cornwall. But their memory has almost utterly perished ...

In short, these connections to contemporary scholarship suggest that the younger Arnold's poem was influenced strongly by ideas of the continuing succession of empires. Just as the Greek civilization had been 'awakened and transformed' by contact with the older cultures of the Phoenicians and Egyptians,¹²¹ so the Iberians may in turn have sparked the beginnings of a new Atlantic civilization further to the north. (Arnold writes elsewhere of how the barbarians had 'reinvigorated and renewed our worn-out Europe'.¹²²)

The historical image with which the *Scholar-Gipsy* closes also has wider moral and metaliterary dimensions, however. As a number of scholars have highlighted, Herodotus' opening description of first blows traded between Asia and Europe strikingly merges the Phoenicians' travel with the progress of the narrator. The narrative is itself figured as a journey, as he proceeds further into the interior (προβήσομαι ἐς τὸ πρόσω τοῦ λόγου), passing through small and great cities (ἐπεξιών, 1.5).¹²³ Arnold's 'grave Tyrian trader' likewise conveys us not only across and beyond the Midland Sea to the edge of the known world, but also to

¹¹⁹ Grote 1846–56, ii. 301–2, cited by Carroll 1969: 30–1. See also Grote 1846–56: ii.137–8, a passage coloured by anti-Semitic tropes of the crafty Jewish trader.

¹²⁰ T. Arnold 1838–43: i. 486. Douglas 1974: 427 suggests that the transposition of the episode to Iberia may also have been influenced by the large maritime vessels of Strabo 3.2.3.

¹²¹ M. Arnold 1868: 9–10, in the course of a review of (the English translation of) Ernst Curtius' history.

¹²² M. Arnold 1932: 162; the context is the use of the term 'Barbarian' to describe the aristocratic class.

¹²³ Greenwood 2018: 167, Clarke 2018: 82; more widely, Purves 2010: 126–7, Wood 2016.

the uncertain brink — the cliff edge — of the future. Will this exchange indeed prompt a further handing on of the baton of maritime empire? Will subsequent powers follow the predictable pattern of moral decline, which is embodied in the vision of the ‘merry Grecian coaster’? Is there in fact some way — analogous to the silent trade of the Carthaginians or the mesmerism of the ‘gipsy-crew’ — for the scholar-gipsy to reengage with the world,¹²⁴ or for all of us to gain immunity to the ‘strange disease of modern life | With its sick hurry, its divided aims’? Significantly, the trader’s ‘corded bales’ are left unopened.

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¹²⁴ A prospect raised by Carroll 1969: 33: ‘Here, thanks again to his trading analogy, Arnold has found a character who can withdraw from the dangers of involvement, and yet, unlike the Scholar Gipsy, can be seen to act decisively in his withdrawal. He is able to act in accordance with the values of an older culture in which the self is not jeopardized.’

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