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## DECEIT IN HERODOTUS' HISTORIES: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

**Background.** *Deception plays a pivotal role in Herodotus' Histories, yet the conceptual boundaries of lying and related practices remain insufficiently defined. The objective is to reconstruct Herodotus' conception of deceit by determining both how and under which circumstances speakers mislead and how rhetorical strategies and cultural models of truth and falsehood shape moral judgment and determine the lexical choices of the narrator and his characters.*

**Methods.** *The research integrates three approaches: (1) a logical-semantic analysis, combining cognitive and corpus-based methods with semasiological and onomasiological procedures to map the Greek lexical field of deceit; (2) a narratological and discourse-centered analysis, distinguishing explicit and implicit deception at the character and narrator levels; identifying ideological and other pragmatic implicatures; and (3) a cross-cultural anthropological approach, using focused case studies to situate deceptive speech and behaviour within Persian, Egyptian, and Greek cultural frameworks.*

**Results.** *The findings demonstrate that Herodotus' vocabulary of deceit is systematically calibrated rather than uniform. Persian and Egyptian episodes are framed through lexemes with strongly negative moral connotations (διαβαλ-, δολ-), reflecting relevant culturally grounded expectations. Greek episodes, by contrast, employ more pragmatically flexible or less negatively marked terms (μηχαν-, σοφ-), aligning deception with communicative ingenuity, political dramaturgy, or socially negotiable forms of persuasion. A narratological analysis reveals how identical deceptive structures – such as the disguising and swapping of identities – receive divergent moral valuations depending on narrative status, speaker identity, and the cultural semantics of truth.*

**Conclusions.** *Herodotus' concept of deceit emerges as a context-sensitive construct, shaped by lexical nuance, discourse-pragmatic strategies, and culturally specific ideologies. Greek deception appears as primarily verbal, sophisticated, and socially acceptable, whereas Persian deception is portrayed as morally charged and often non-verbal in nature. Thus, this multi-layered analysis reveals how Herodotus' Histories encodes not only various mechanisms of misleading action but also the different anthropological grammars of truth and un-truth in an ancient Mediterranean context.*

**Keywords:** *deceit, ancient Greek, Herodotus, concept, linguistic anthropology.*

### Background

The focus of my research is informed by the field of anthropological linguistics, and in particular the study of prevalent forms of deception in the ancient Mediterranean. It is interesting to ask how deception can be applied to and perceived by people with different cultural backgrounds. The *Histories* of Herodotus deals with the geopolitical ambitions of the Persian Empire nearly 2.5 thousand years ago. My research can highlight how lies and other forms of deceit are used as weapons in modern informational wars in the past no less than today.

In recent investigations (Pelling, 1997; Zali, 2009; Mash, 2010; de Alvarez, 2015; Nunnally, 2019) there has been considerable debate concerning the values of Western and Eastern civilizations and the culture-specific perception of untruths in different nations. This article seeks to enrich our understanding of how lying and deception operate in different ethnic communities described in the *Histories*, primary those of the Persians, Egyptians and Hellenes. In doing so, it advances a linguo-anthropological approach to lying and deceit that integrates two main strands: (i) fine-grained discourse analysis of how and under which circumstances speakers mislead; (ii) cultural models of truth, responsibility, and social benefit that shape the moral valuation of deceptive speech and its interpretation. In particular, I argue for a culturally and discursively informed account of the concept of deceit, based on a combination of logical, ethical, and epistemic factors.

### Method

What counts as a "lie" is famously contested across philosophy, linguistics, and the social sciences. Philosophical and linguistic accounts have often centered on a narrow core, defining a lie as a false (or believed false) assertion with an intention to deceive. A canonical

formulation is Williams' (2002, p.96) definition – cited by Meibauer (2018, p.358) – of lying as "an assertion, the content of which the speaker believes to be false, which is made with the intention to deceive the hearer with respect to that content." However, both discourse-analytic and cross-cultural findings suggest that ordinary speakers' judgments about lying are more graded, context-sensitive, and norm-laden than this classical binary picture implies (Meibauer, 2018; Stokke, 2016).

Contemporary philosophy of language has also broadened the lens from outright lying to a wider family of related practices, including misleading, paltering, insinuation and other forms of "not quite saying what is false" (Stokke, 2016). Yet some linguistic research points to prototypical effects: whereas many philosophical accounts explicitly separate deception from falsity (Mahon, 2016), folk concepts in several communities treat objective falsity together with an intention to deceive as central to what counts as a lie.

Cross-cultural elicitation studies have also indicated that "lying without saying something false" (e.g., via implicature) is judged as "lie-like" only under restricted conditions, whereas asserted falsity with a deceptive intent robustly anchors the prototypical lie (Meibauer, 2018; Reins et al., 2023). These graded models capture intuitions that binary definitions miss. Marsili's (2014) scalar view – according to which S lies to A about p if S states p, believes p "more likely false than true," and intends A to believe p (Meibauer, 2018, p.361) – predicts intermediate cases in which confidence and epistemic commitment affect lie-judgments. Extending scalarity beyond belief strength, Alejandro Erut (forthcoming) – building on Chen, Hu & He (2013, p.390) – proposes a multi-parameter definition: lying is a speech act that (i) presupposes the semantic untruth of an assertion p

and (ii) varies in lie-likeness with (1) the extent to which the speaker intends to conceal the untruth of p; (2) the extent to which p benefits the self and/or harms others; and (3) the extent to which p benefits others – where, other things being equal, greater concealment and self-benefit increase lie-likeness, while other-benefit decreases it. These factors resonate with ethnographic observations that judgments of deception are moralized through relational expectations informed by solidarity, reciprocity, deference, etc. as well as institutional roles (parent, official, expert), not merely through the veridical properties of utterances.

Broadening the lens to adjacent phenomena helps to clarify the boundaries of lying. If "manipulation," "slander," and "intrigue" serve as viable pragmatic categories, then we face an empirical task analogous to the study of falsity and lying: to identify the linguistic cues of these behaviours, describe their social functions, and situate them within broader frameworks of persuasion, bullshitting, propaganda and other social technologies (Coons, & Weber, 2014; McGinn, 2008; Stanley, 2015; Meibauer, 2018). Anthropological linguistics contributes to this by showing how participation roles and institutional authority recalibrate audience expectations about truthfulness and accountability; what counts as acceptable spin in political discourse may be condemned as a *lie* in interpersonal contexts, and vice versa.

Finally, within the scope of this article, I intend to analyze deceptive strategies across several narrative levels, focusing both on explicit and implicit forms of misrepresentation. Following insights from Laass (2008), I distinguish between deception enacted by characters within the story-world and deception embedded in narrative mediation, whether voiced overtly by a narrator or conveyed implicitly through focalization and perspectival framing. At the same time, I take into account Dynel's (2021) observations on the complexity of such strategies, treating character-level deception and narrator-level manipulation as interrelated but analytically separable phenomena.

From a methodological standpoint, this study draws on three complementary research frameworks. The first is a logical-semantic approach, which integrates cognitive linguistic methods with corpus-based analysis and combines both semasiological and onomasiological procedures to reconstruct the relationship between the lexical meanings associated with the core concepts of deceit in ancient Greek and the logically correlated elements of their contextual use. In particular, I aim to better understand the general concept of lying by demarcating its boundaries from neighboring forms of deceptive or non-truth-oriented discourse, including suspicion of deceit, fiction, and contrivance. Through this lens, I aim to develop a conceptual map of the various forms of lying and deception as they appear in Herodotus' *Histories*, grounding the analysis in both the dictionary meanings of the relevant lexical items and their attested functions within narrative contexts.

Second, a narratological and discourse-centered approach enables us to distinguish several forms of deception which operate at distinct narrative levels (explicit vs. implicit; character-level vs. narrator-level), thereby capturing the multilayered nature of deceptive communication in Herodotus. This framework also makes it possible to describe the linguistic resources that make deception pragmatically possible – such as evidential framing, epistemic downtoners, narrative sequencing, and

the management of implicatures – all of which allow speakers to mislead while maintaining plausible deniability.

Third, a cross-cultural approach – especially through focused case studies – places the speech-practices that Herodotus reports within the broader Asian and Hellenic cultural frameworks in which they were produced and interpreted. This perspective makes visible how the lexical choices used to evaluate or calibrate acts of lying reflect underlying ethnic and political ideologies, along with associated moral concerns. By situating deceptive practices within these culturally specific communicative environments, we can better understand how Herodotean discourse constructs, negotiates, and contests moral judgments about truth and falsehood.

To this end, this multi-layered approach allows me to examine how verbal and non-verbal cues interact to produce different kinds of deceit and how narrative and cultural grammar shape the audience's interpretive experience.

Deception, which is conceptualized by the ancient Greeks as an intentional communicative act, invites the communication of false beliefs in various ways, such as *Misinformation*, *Slander*, *Manipulation*, *Intrigue*, *Insidiousness*, and *Ruse*. Objective falsity may be conveyed through one of several non-deceptive strategies – *Contrivance* and *Delusion* (Polishchuk, 2023). The linguo-conceptual methodology is explained in two steps. In the first stage, the contextual varieties of terms for deceit are classified based on their dictionary definitions, the lexical choices of the translators and connotative meanings. For this research we use 36 lexical items in 186 contextual uses.

**The list of lexemes identified in the *Histories***

- ψευδ-** ψεύδω, ἐπικαταψεύδομαι, (ἀ)ψευδής 2, ψεύδος τό, ἀψευδέως, ψευδομαντις ὁ and ἡ, ψευδοπάρθενος ἡ, ψευδορκισ 2
- διαβαλ-** διαβάλλω / διαβάλλομαι, διαβολή ἡ
- ἀπατ-** ἀπάτη ἡ, ἀπατάω, ἐξαπατάω
- δολ-** δόλω, δόλος ὁ, δολερός 3
- μηχαν-** μηχανή ἡ, μηχανάομαι
- σοφ-** σοφός 3, σοφία ἡ, σοφισμα τό
- τεχν-** τεχνάζω, ἐπιτεχνάομαι, ἀνπιτεχνάομαι
- σφαλ-** σφάλω, ἀποσφάλω
- (παρ)αγ-** παράγω, παραγωγή ἡ, προάγω
- ἐπιφερ-** ἐπιφέρω
- πλαν-** πλανάω
- πλασ-** πλάσσω
- διακρου-** διακρούομαι
- κιβδηλ-** (ἀ)κιβδηλος 3
- κακολογ-** κακολογία ἡ

Further to this, following Polishchuk's (2023, p. 53) framework, the contextual markers for each meaning have been identified: asserted falsity, (graded) semantic untruth, deceptive intent, social benefit or harm (e.g. pejoration of the image, criminal violations), defensive / offensive strategies, the presence / absence of cooperative tactics, verbal / non-verbal and single / multiple actions, single / plural actors, etc. Then, in the second stage, the working definitions for the types of deceit are elaborated and the entire corpus of lexical items is double-checked after considering social and ethnic peculiarities of the contexts.

**Types of deceit identified in the *Histories***

(1) *Misinformation*<sup>1</sup> denotes the verbal representation of an alternative reality, whether intentionally or unintentionally created in speech; pretending to be someone; fiction. It is usually mentioned in opposition to the truthful or real state of affairs, so that in most cases it can be

<sup>1</sup> ψευδ- 1.138.1 (2), 2.133.5, 2.174.2, 3.27.3 (2), 3.72.4 (4), 3.72.5 (2), 3.118.2, 4.69.2, 4.180.2, 6.82.1, 8.8.3\* (unintentional); τεχν- 3.130.2, 6.1.2; κιβδηλ- 5.91.2; πλασ- 4.77.2\* (unintentional), 8.80.2.

identified as lying, understood as "making a believed-false covertly untruthful assertion" (Dyrel 2021, p. 215). The covertness of *misinformation* often testifies to a defensive intention on the part of a deceiver. Due to the aspect of intentional falsity, *disinformation* can be considered as a potential cause of disapproval on the part of a receiver. This type of deceit can be illustrated in Hdt. 6.1.1-2, where the Greek tyrant of Miletus Histiaeus, being suspected to have prepared an Ionian revolt, lied by demonstrating a complete ignorance of the cause of the rebellion and even feigned surprise at the turn of the events. Nevertheless, for his interlocutor Artaphrenes, who knew the truth about the mutiny in all its details (εἰδὼς τὴν ἀτρεκείην τῆς ἀποστάσιος) and probably noticed Histiaeus' falsehood from his "body language" (ὁρέων αὐτὸν τεχνάζοντα), Histiaeus' defensive tactics became evident:

Hdt. 6.1.1-2 ἀπιγμένον δὲ αὐτὸν ἐκ τῶν Σούσων εἴρετο Ἀρταφρένης ὁ Σαρδίων ὑπαρχος κατὰ κοῖον τι δοκέει Ἰωνας ἀπεστάναι. ὁ δὲ οὔτε εἰδέναι ἐφη ἐθώμαζε τε τὸ γεγονός, ὡς οὐδὲν δῆθεν τῶν παρεόντων πρηγμάτων ἐπιστάμενος. [2] ὁ δὲ Ἀρταφρένης ὁρέων αὐτὸν τεχνάζοντα εἶπε, εἰδὼς τὴν ἀτρεκείην τῆς ἀποστάσιος, ὡς τοι Ἰστιάει ἔχει κατὰ ταῦτα τὰ πρήγματα: τοῦτο τὸ ὑπόδημα ἔρραφας μὲν σύ, ὑπεδήσατο δὲ Ἀρισταγόρης. "When he [Histiaeus, the tyrant of Miletus] came there from Susa, Artaphrenes, the governor of Sardis, asked him for what reason he supposed the Ionians had rebelled; Histiaeus said that he did not know and marvelled at what had happened, pretending to have no knowledge of the present troubles. [2] But Artaphrenes saw that he dissembled and, knowing the exact story of the revolt, said: "I will tell you, Histiaeus, the truth of this business: it was you who stitched this shoe, and Aristagoras who put it on."

(2) *Slander*<sup>1</sup> denotes the intentional creation of prejudices by means of dubious or false allegations and verbal insults to damage someone's image and ultimately cause hatred. Contrary to the majority of types of deceit, which presuppose the existence of two communicants (a deceiver and a deceived), slander is mostly constituted from three elements akin to the disposition in the court: a "plaintiff", who creates a prejudice, a "defendant", in whom a deceitful information is created, and a "jury", to whom a prejudice is addressed (Cf. Hdt. 7.10G.2<sup>2</sup>). Slander is employed in order to increase emotional distance and distrust between one's adversary and the "jury" (Carey 2004, pp. 2–5). An example from the *Histories* is the following:

Hdt. 6.46.1... δευτέρῳ δὲ ἔτει τούτων ὁ Δαρείος πρῶτα μὲν Θασίους διαβληθέντας ὑπὸ τῶν ἀστυγειτόνων ὡς ἀπόστασιν μηχανώσατο, πέμψας ἄγγελον ἐκέλευε σφᾶς τὸ τεῖχος περιαιρέειν καὶ τὰς νέας ἐς Ἄβδηρα κομίζειν. *In the next year after this, Darius first sent a message bidding the Thasians, who were falsely reported by their neighbors to be planning rebellion, to destroy their walls and bring their ships to Abdera.*

In this case there are three participants. The Thasians were the target of a slander. The Thasians' neighbors are those who committed a slander (διαβληθέντας). Their allegation was concerned not with what the Thasians had done, which is presupposed by *misinformation*, but with

what they had been planning to do (μηχανώσατο), which is more difficult, and perhaps impossible, to specify and prove. The Persian king Darius, who demands that Thasians destroy their military power, is one who may be considered as the "jury executing the sentence". The hypothesis regarding the falsity of claims made by the Thasians' neighbors in the narrator's view is supported by several linguistic forms, such as the conjunction ὡς implying a subjective, non-veridical statement as well as the oblique optative which may also suggest that the reported allegations of the slanderers may not be true. Thus, slander as a kind of misdirection can be perceived as a border-case between simple *misinformation* and the more complicated and uncertain case of manipulation.

(3) *Manipulation*<sup>3</sup> is a complex strategy of concealing one's true intent through a partial distortion of the real state of affairs to control the consciousness of a person or a group of people against their interests. The offensive goals and intentions of the speaker must be invisible to the other party under the veil of cooperative tactics on the part of the deceiver. An example is offered by the *Histories* 6.2.1:

Hdt. 6.2.1 Ἰστιάσιος δὲ δεῖσας ὡς συνιέντα Ἀρταφρένα ὑπὸ τὴν πρῶτην ἐπελθοῦσαν νύκτα ἀπέδρη ἐπὶ θάλασσαν, βασιλέα Δαρείον ἐξηπατηκώς: ὃς Σαρδῶ νῆσον τὴν μεγίστην ὑποδεξάμενος κατεργάσασθαι ὑπέδυνε τῶν Ἰώνων τὴν ἡγεμονίην τοῦ πρὸς Δαρείον πολέμου. *Histiaeus was frightened by Artaphrenes' understanding of the matter and fled the next night to the sea, for he had deceived Darius by promising to subdue Sardo, the greatest of the islands, while secretly intending to make himself leader of the Ionians in their war against Darius.*

This case of a clear contradiction in the stated intentions of Histiaeus and his true goal can be considered within a wider context of Books 5-6 of the *Histories*. Under the guise of cooperative tactics, the former Milesian ruler promised to king Darius to promote the expansion of the Persian Empire by conquering the largest of the islands, Sardo. The exact words of this promise are rendered in 5.106.5-6, when the ex-regent of Miletus swears by the gods of the royal house just after the suppression of the Ionian revolt to make the island Sardo a tributary to Darius (Σαρδῶ νῆσον ... δασμοφόρον ποιήσω). But in reality, Histiaeus secretly sought to gain the leadership of the Ionians in their struggle against the king. The lexical meaning of the participle ὑποδεξάμενος 6.1.2 "to make a show of, pretend to" marks a line between the true military preparations of Histiaeus and his misleading actions (ἐξηπατηκώς) and speech on the part of Darius.

(4) *Intrigue*<sup>4</sup> denotes a series of devised verbal and non-verbal acts against an adversary, which usually take the form of a conspiracy and involve the assistance of other participants to damage the victim's political positions, property or even threaten one's life. Thus, unlike pairing and cooperative interactions which are peculiar to manipulation, intrigue-tactics are not necessarily co-operative towards a victim, as they often involve the third party, who helps a deceiver to realize devised plans by means of cunning, lies, subordination, etc. *Intrigue* may take longer preparation time than manipulation. An example is the behaviour of Aristagoras:

<sup>1</sup> διαβαλ- 3.1.4, 3.66.3, 3.73.2]\* (assumption), 5.96.1, 6.46.1, 6.51.1, 6.61.1, 6.64.1, 6.94.1, 6.123.1, 6.133.1, 7.10G.1, 7.10G.2 (3), 8.22.3, 8.90.1 (2), 8.90.3, 9.17.4; ἐπιφέρ- 1.26.3, 4.154.2, 4.166.2; κακολογ- 7.237.3.

<sup>2</sup> *Slander is a terrible business; there are two in it who do wrong and one who suffers wrong. The slanderer wrongs another by accusing an absent man, and the other does wrong in that he is persuaded before he has learned the whole truth; the absent man does not hear what is said of him and suffers wrong in the matter, being maligned by the one and condemned by the other* (Hdt. 7.10G.2).

<sup>3</sup> διαβαλ- 5.50.2 act, 5.97.2 (2), 5.107.1, 8.110.1, 9.116.2; ἀπα- 1.59.5, 1.90.2, 1.153.1, 1.187.1, 2.114.2, 4.154.4, 6.2.1, 6.62.2, 6.80.1, 6.136.1, 9.94.3, 9.116.1; δολ- 1.205.2, σφαλ- 7.16A.1; κιβδηλ- 1.66.3, 1.75.2; (παρ)αγ- 6.62.2, (προ)αγ- 9.90.3; διακρου- 7.169.1, πλαν- 2.115.3.

<sup>4</sup> ἀπατ- 3.74.2, 3.79.2; μηχαν- 3.15.4, 3.127.2, 4.154.2 (2), 5.37.1, 5.62.2, 5.90.1, 5.106.5, 6.88.1, 6.121.2, 6.123.1; τεχν- 5.70.1.

Hdt. 5.37.1 οὕτω δὴ ἐκ τοῦ ἐμφανέος ὁ Ἀρισταγόρης ἀπεστήκεε, πᾶν ἐπὶ Δαρείῳ μηχανώμενος. *Then Aristagoras revolted openly, devising all he could to harm Darius.*

The summarizing sentence 5.37.1 shows how the actions devised (μηχανώμενος) by the acting Milesian vice-regent Aristagoras against (ἐπὶ) King Darius were varied in nature (πᾶν). At this period of time the conspiracy of Aristagoras and his trusted confederates progressed from a preparatory phase into openly armed confrontation (ἐκ τοῦ ἐμφανέος... ἀπεστήκεε). Their actions were aimed at the change of the tyrannical regimes in Ionia to a democratic form of rule in order to gain support among the vast population and in so doing ensure the victory of the anti-Persian revolt (5.37-38). Commenting on these events to the king, the other secret organizer of this rebellion, Histiaeus, confirms that the Ionians had long had a desire (τῶν πάλαι ἴμερον εἶχον 5.106.5) for such actions.

#### Non-verbal actions

(5) **Insidiousness**<sup>1</sup> is considered an immoral form of wrongdoing, which takes place as a result of hidden non-verbal actions of a deceiver against a victim. In contrast to intrigue, it is non-verbal in nature. For instance, in Hdt. 1.212.2 (quoted below), the queen of the Massagetai Tomyris accuses the Persian king Cyrus of being involved in her son's death, which was caused by treacherous poisoning in wine or a similar substance. She rebukes the king that he has not overcome (ἐκράτησας) her son in a fight but had cunningly used drugs (φαρμάκω δολώσας):

Hdt. 1.212.2 ἀπληστε αἵματος Κύρε, μηδὲν ἐπαερθῆς τῷ γεγονότῳ τῷδε πρήγματι, εἰ ἀμπελίνω καρπῷ, τῷ περ αὐτοὶ ἐμπιπλάμενοι μαίνεσθε οὕτω ὥστε κατιόντος τοῦ οἴνου ἐς τὸ σῶμα ἐπαναπλέειν ὑμῖν ἔπτα κακά, τοιοῦτῳ φαρμάκω δολώσας ἐκράτησας παιδὸς τοῦ ἐμοῦ, ἀλλ' οὐ μάχη κατὰ τὸ καρτερόν. *Cyrus who can never get enough blood, do not be elated by what you have done; it is nothing to be proud of if, by the fruit of the vine—with which you Persians fill yourselves and rage so violently that evil words rise in a flood to your lips when the wine enters your bodies—if, by tricking him with this drug, you got the better of my son, and not by force of arms in battle.*

(6) **Ruse**<sup>2</sup> denotes a non-verbal equivalent of manipulation: a misleading action, such as a military trick or fraud that is used to turn an unfavorable situation to the agent's advantage at the expense of a credulous victim. A vivid Herodotean example of a ruse is provided by the court groom who assisted Darius during his election for the head of the Persian empire. Persian noblemen came to an agreement to recognize who would be the winner for the throne whose horse would be the first to neigh at sunrise. Darius, hoping that his experienced servant could help to win the contest, addressed him with a question: Hdt. 3.85.1 νῦν ὣν εἴ τινα ἔχεις σοφίην, μηχανῶ ὡς ἂν ἡμεῖς σχῶμεν τοῦτο τὸ γέρας καὶ μὴ ἄλλος τις. *Now if you have any cunning, figure out how we and no one else can win this prize.* Good knowledge of horses' behaviour accompanied by actions secretly taken in advance by the groom resulted in his winning the horse competition, and consequently the title of a king for Darius.

#### Non-truth-oriented discourse

Apart from the above-mentioned forms of deception, there are some adjacent values such as *Contrivance* and *Delusion*. These meanings are not related to the designation of false actions but are still included in the general consideration due to their close semantic links with terms denoting deceit.

(1) **Contrivance**<sup>3</sup> denotes an invention based on a creative comprehension of facts, cleverness, fantasy or art. This kind of ingenuity is not hidden and selfish, so it cannot be treated as a true deception. Although it somewhat resembles ruse, contrivance is treated as a defensive strategy.

Hdt. 3.152.1 ἐπτά δὲ μηνῶν καὶ ἐνιαυτοῦ διεληλυθότος ἤδη ὁ Δαρεῖός τε ἤσχαλλε καὶ ἡ στρατιὴ πᾶσα οὐ δυνατὴ εὐοῦσα ἐλεῖν τοὺς Βαβυλωνίους. καίτοι πάντα σοφίσματα καὶ πᾶσας μηχανὰς ἐπεποιήκεε ἐς αὐτοὺς Δαρεῖος. *A year and seven months passed, and Darius and his whole army were bitter because they could not take Babylon. Yet Darius had used every trick and every device against it.*

In this passage the usage of siege-devices stands as an example of contrivance. It is the closest thing to what is seen as a trick. Moreover, the word σοφίσματα denoting a military invention is used in the same context with another term, μηχανάς, denoting cunning strategies.

(2) **Delusion**<sup>4</sup>, or self-deception, is perceived as a false impression, mistaken belief or misjudgment, and appears in the following passage from Book 8:

Hdt. 8.40.1 ἐπὶ γὰρ τοῖσι κατήκουσι πρήγμασι βουλήν ἔμελλον ποιήσασθαι ὡς ἐψευσμένοι γνώμης. *They [the Athenians] had been disappointed in their plans, so they were going to hold a council about the current state of affairs.*

This case of delusion is elaborated in the next sub-chapter (8.40.2), where it is explained that the Athenians hoped to find the entire male population of the Peloponnese in Boeotia awaiting the Persians' attack, but they faced a completely different situation. Despite all their expectations, the Peloponnesians were fortifying the Isthmus, judging the defence of the Peloponnese to be the most important thing. When the Athenians learned this disregard of the common need, they held a council in order to concentrate their forces on the defence of Attica.

#### Case Studies

To illustrate the cross-cultural approach undertaken in this study, I have chosen three instances involving the same deceitful action: a deliberate changing of identities. In all three cases one person pretends to be another, but the same trick is designated with different lexical means. The purpose of this example is to uncover disparities between the author's and the characters' designations, as well as the factors that influence their choices of words. Firstly I will present the three stories and then analyze them. The three stories involve three different ethnic groups: Persians, Greeks and Egyptians.

#### The three stories: Identity Swap

I. **The story about pseudo-Smerdis** (Hdt. 3.67.2-3.72.3)<sup>5</sup>

Ethnic and social variables: *Persians, domestic politics*

Narrator's characteristic: τὴν ἀπὸ σφέων ἀπάτην ἐς Πέρσας 3.74.2, cf. τῶν Μάγων τὴν ἀπάτην 3.79.2

<sup>1</sup> δολ- 1.91.1, 1.212.2, 1.214.5, 2.100.2, 3.65.6 (2), 3.158.1, 4.78.2, 4.160.4, 5.37.1, 9.90.3; μηχαν- 2.100.3, 3.11.1, 4.154.2, 7.197.1, 8.106.3; τεχν- 2.119.2.

<sup>2</sup> δολ- 3.22.1 (2), 4.146.3, 4.201.1, 6.77.1; μηχαν- 1.9.1, 1.21.1, 1.59.3, 2.121A.1, 2.121E.1, 2.133.5, 3.9.1, 3.85.1, 3.85.2, 3.87.1, 3.152.1, 4.201.1, 5.63.3, 5.67.2, 7.239.3, 8.7.1; σοφ- 3.85.2, 3.127.2 (2), 3.152.1 (2), 5.21.2, 5.23.2, 5.50.2; τεχν- 1.63.2, 1.123.3, 2.121D.1

<sup>3</sup> μηχαν- 1.48.2, 2.32.3, 2.42.3\*, 2.95.1 (2), 2.121C.2, 6.133.3, 7.172.3, 7.176.4; σοφ- 2.160.1, 2.172.2, 4.46.2, 8.124.2; τεχν- 2.2.2, 2.121A.2.

<sup>4</sup> ψεύδ- 1.141.2\* (in a fiction), 1.165.3, 2.13.3\* (assumption), 2.22.1, 7.9C.1, 8.40.1, 9.48.3\* (assumption), 9.61.3\* (assumption); σφαλ- 4.140.2, 5.50.2, 6.5.1, 7.50.2, 7.52.1; πλαν- 6.52.6 (assumption).

<sup>5</sup> For simplicity, further I will call this "the Smerdis story".

Characteristic of a character: είτε δόλω ἔχουσι αὐτὴν κτησάμενοι 3.65.6

• Hdt. 3.67.2

ὁ δὲ δὴ Μάγος τελευτήσαντος Καμβύσεω ἀδεῶς ἐβασίλευσε, ἐπιβατεύων τοῦ ὀμωνύμου Σμερδίου τοῦ Κύρου, μῆνας ἑπτὰ τοὺς ἐπιλοίπους Καμβύση ἐς τὰ ὀκτῶ ἔτα τῆς πληρώσιος. *Cambyses being dead, the Magus, pretending to be the Smerdis of like name, Cyrus' son, reigned without fear for the seven months by which Cambyses had fallen short of reigning eight years.*<sup>1</sup>

καὶ δὴ ὑμῖν τάδε ἐπισκήπτω θεοὺς τοὺς βασιλῆους ἐπικαλέων καὶ πᾶσι ὑμῖν καὶ μάλιστα Ἀχαιμενιδῶν τοῖσι παρεούσι, μὴ περιιδεῖν τὴν ἡγεμονίην αὐτίς ἐς Μῆδους περιελθοῦσαν, ἀλλ' εἴτε δόλω ἔχουσι αὐτὴν κτησάμενοι, δόλω ἀπαιρεθῆναι ὑπὸ ὑμέων, εἴτε καὶ σθένει τῶν κατεργασάμενοι, σθένει κατὰ τὸ καρτερόν ἀνασώσασθαι. *In the name of the gods of my royal house I charge all of you, but chiefly those Achaemenids that are here, not to let the sovereignty fall again into Median hands; if they have it after getting it by trickery, take it back through trickery of your own; if they have got it away by force, then by force all the stronger get it back.*

Hdt. 3.74.2

τούτων δὴ μιν εἶνεκεν καλέσαντες φίλον προσεκτῶντο πίστι τε λαβόντες καὶ ὀρκίοισι, ἧ μὲν ἔξιν παρ' ἑωυτῶν μὴδ' ἐξοίσειν μηδενὶ ἀνθρώπων τὴν ἀπὸ σφέων ἀπάτην ἐς Πέρσας γενοῦσαν, ὑπισχνέμενοι τὰ πάντα οἱ μυρία δώσει. *For these reasons they [Magi] summoned him [Prexaspes] and tried to make him a friend, having bound him by tokens of good faith and oaths to keep to himself and betray to no one their deception of the Persians, and promising to give him all things in great abundance.* (translation by A. D. Godley).

**II. The story about Pisistratus and Phya** (Hdt. 1.60.3-5)<sup>2</sup>

Ethnic and social variables: Athenians, domestic politics  
Narrator's characteristic: ἐν Ἀθηναίοισι ... σοφίην

**μηχανῶνται** 1.60.3 (2)

Hdt. 1.60.3

ἐνδεξαμένου δὲ τὸν λόγον καὶ ὁμολογήσαντος ἐπὶ τούτοις Πεισιστράτου, μηχανῶνται δὴ ἐπὶ τῇ κατόδῳ πρῆγμα εὐθέστατον, ὡς ἐγὼ εὐρίσκω, μακρῶ, ἐπεὶ γε ἀπεκρίθη ἐκ παλαιτέρου τοῦ βαρβάρου ἔθνεος τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν ἔδον καὶ δεξιότερον καὶ εὐηθείης ἡλιθίου ἀπηλλαγμένον μάλλον, εἰ καὶ τότε γε οὗτοι ἐν Ἀθηναίοισι τοῖσι πρῶτοις λεγομένοις εἶναι Ἑλλήνων σοφίην μηχανῶνται τοιάδε. *Once the proposal had been presented and Pisistratus had agreed to it on those terms, they devised [a plan]—regarding his return to the city—that, as far as I can judge, was exceedingly naïve, by a great measure. For long before this the Greek people had separated themselves from the barbarians and had shown themselves more intelligent and free from silly foolishness. Yet even then these men, although they belonged among the Athenians who were considered the foremost of the Greeks, contrived such a scheme [in the name of political wisdom].* (translation mine).

Hdt. 1.60.4-5

ἐν τῷ δῆμῳ τῷ Παιανίει ἦν γυνὴ τῇ οὐνομα ἦν Φύη, μέγαθος ἀπὸ τεσσέρων πηχέων ἀπολείπουσα τρεῖς δακτύλους καὶ ἄλλως εὐειδής· ταύτην τὴν γυναῖκα σκεύασαντες πανοπλίη, ἐς ἄρμα ἐσβίβασαντες καὶ προδέξαντες σχῆμα οἷον τι ἔμελλε εὐπρεπέστατον φανεῖσθαι ἔχουσα, ἤλαυνον ἐς τὸ ἄστυ, προδρόμους κήρυκας

προπέμπαντες: ... αὐτίκα δὲ ἕξ τε τοὺς δῆμους φάτις ἀπῖκετο ὡς Ἀθηναίη Πεισιστράτον κατάγει, καὶ οἱ ἐν τῷ ἄστει πειθόμενοι τὴν γυναῖκα εἶναι αὐτὴν τὴν θεὸν προσεύχοντό τε τὴν ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἐδέκοντο Πεισιστράτον. *There was in the Paeanian deme a woman called Phya, three fingers short of six feet, four inches in height, and otherwise, too, well-formed. This woman they equipped in full armor and put in a chariot, giving her all the paraphernalia to make the most impressive spectacle, and so drove into the city; heralds ran before them ... and immediately the report spread in the demes that Athena was bringing Pisistratus back, and the townfolk, believing that the woman was the goddess herself, worshipped this human creature and welcomed Pisistratus.* (translation by A. D. Godley).

**III. The story about Amasis and his alleged daughter** (Hdt. 3.1-4)<sup>3</sup>

Ethnic and social variables: Egyptians, intercultural communication: private issue

Characteristic of a character: διαβεβλημένος ὑπὸ Ἀμάσιος Hdt. 3.1.4

Hdt. 3.1.3-4

[3] *There was a daughter of the former king Apries, all that was left of that family, quite tall and pretty, and her name was Nitetis; this girl Amasis adorned with clothes and gold and sent to Cambyses as his own (ὡς ἑωυτοῦ θυγατέρα).*

[4] *μετὰ δὲ χρόνον ὡς μιν ἡσπάζετο πατρόθεν ὀνομάζων, λέγει πρὸς αὐτὸν ἡ παῖς*

*ὦ βασιλεῦ, διαβεβλημένος ὑπὸ Ἀμάσιος οὐ μανθάνεις. ὅς ἐμὲ σοὶ κόσμῳ ἀσκήσας ἀπέπεμψε ὡς ἑωυτοῦ θυγατέρα διδοῦς, εἴδουσαν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ Ἀπριεω, τὸν ἐκεῖνος ἔδοντα ἑωυτοῦ δεσπότητα μετ' Αἰγυπτίων ἐπαναστὰς ἐφόνευσε.'*

*But after a time, as he embraced her addressing her as the daughter of Amasis, the girl said to him, "O King, you do not understand how you have been made a fool of by Amasis, who dressed me in finery and sent me to you as his own daughter, when I am in fact the daughter of Apries, the ruler Amasis revolted from with the Egyptians and killed."* (translation by A. D. Godley).

### Linguistic-Anthropological Analysis of 'Identity Swap' Deceit Cases

Let us now consider several deceitful actions that involve the covert substitution of one person for another. In all three cases mentioned above, one individual assumes the identity of another, yet Herodotus describes the same underlying deceptive strategy using different lexical resources.

#### Lexical attribution of Deceit

The lexemes chosen to label the deceit vary markedly in their narrator's evaluative connotations – from strongly negative in the case of διαβαλ- and δολ- in the first and third stories to more neutral or even positive associations in the second case, where the deception is designated by μηχαν- and σοφ-<sup>4</sup>. A plausible explanation for this variation lies in the subtle differences in the nature of the deceptive act itself or, perhaps, in the ethnic identity of the deceiver, assuming that an ethnic bias in Herodotus' treatment of deceit is operative. These lexical patterns may therefore reflect not only the mechanics of the substitution but also broader ideological or evaluative considerations that shape Herodotus' narrative judgments.

In the first two situations, i.e. the Smerdis and the Pisistratus stories, deception begins with the formation of its

<sup>1</sup> Here and further an English translation by A. D. Godley. Cambridge. Harvard University Press. 1920.

<sup>2</sup> For simplicity, later I will call this "the Pisistratus story".

<sup>3</sup> For simplicity's sake, from now on I will call this "the Amasis story".

<sup>4</sup> There are several passages in which μηχαν- and σοφ- lexemes carry a positive evaluative force from the narrator's perspective. For μηχαν-, such cases include 2.42.3 (Zeus), 2.95.1 (Egyptians), 1.21.1 (Ionians), and 7.239.3 (Spartans). Similarly, σοφ- lexemes appear with positive connotations in 2.172.2 (Egyptians) and 4.46.2 (Scythians).

concept in the minds of two close partners, namely the two Magoi in the Persian case (3.61.1) and the Athenian aristocrats Megacles and Pisistratus among the Greeks. At the second stage of the deception a third partner is invited. In the first story, Pseudo-Smerdis, who was falsely alleged to be King Cyrus's son, and his brother tried to gain the loyalty of Prexaspes, a Persian nobleman who killed the actual Smerdis (3.74.2-3). In the second story, two noble Athenians found a woman from Attica, whose attractive appearance and epicletic name alluding to Athena's vegetative function<sup>1</sup> suited their political PR-technology goals.

In both cases the initial plan was designed in order to seize supreme power and accordingly the deceptive actions may be identified as the specific type of deceit which can be identified as *intrigue*. However, in the Persian context of the Smerdis story, the first characterisation is verbalized by the character of Cambyses who was deceived by the treacherous conspiracy of the Magoi in a highly emotional manner as trickery, *δόλω*, a term often associated with the non-verbal and intentional deceit identified here as *insidiousness* (3.65.6) (2). Herodotus describes both stories in detail to show the co-operative tactics of deceivers towards public opinion. In the Persian case of an identity swap, the narrator mentions the following details: a formal resemblance, the correspondence in name (3.61.2), concealment of physical defects (3.69.4), and the performance of official state duties (3.67.3, 3.69.2), including non-formal ones, such as the duties of attending wives of the previous king (3.68.3).

What is important in the Pseudo-Smerdis story is that all above-mentioned misleading routines are accompanied by official allegations to the army (3.61.3) that they must henceforth obey Smerdis. All these kinds of verbal and non-verbal deceit are predictably referred to by the narrator as instances of selfish manipulation – *ἀπάτην* ἐς Πέρσας (3.74.2). The conspirators even planned to disseminate disinformation to the general public (3.74.3), but at the final stage a third of the allies refused to continue this dishonorable political intrigue, revealed the truth and committed suicide. It is worth noting that the earlier Greek episode of deliberate deception (1.59), which enabled Peisistratus to secure tyrannical power in Athens, is explicitly described with the verb *ἐξ-απατάω* (1.59.5). In both narratives, then, we observe verbal strategies of manipulation, indicating that deception functions not merely as non-verbal performance but as a linguistically framed form of political action, carried out for wholly self-interested purposes.

The final case of Egyptian deceit at first appears the most challenging to interpret. This is due to not only Herodotus' word choice but also the language of the character Nitetis, who twice perceived herself as a victim in this situation. Firstly, Nitetis was a daughter of the former King of Egypt, who had been oppressed by the present ruler Amasis. Secondly, she was given by the same person to the Persian King not as his legitimate wife but as his concubine. Thus, she had reasons to take vengeance on her offender and applied corresponding rhetorical techniques against him at an opportune moment. Contrary to the reality, at least as it is described by Herodotus, Nitetis presented Amasis' non-verbal trick with identity swap (since Amasis adorned her with clothes and gold and sent her to Cambyses) as if it was a purely verbal type of deception, having chosen the worst

of all possible options. Nitetis intentionally defined the wrongdoing committed by Amasis as a *slander*: where the Egyptian king was a slanderer, she is the one who was slandered, and the King Cambyses is the one who was misled. Such a formulation of guilt made Amasis' sin much more wicked in the eyes of the Persian King, since, according to Persian customs, slander was considered the worst of all forms of deceit: *διαβολή γάρ ἐστὶ δεινότατον* (7.10G.2.). Nitetis' likely awareness of this aspect of Persian culture is supported by a remark made by Herodotus in the immediate context: *εἰ γὰρ τινὲς καὶ ἄλλοι, τὰ Περσέων νόμιμα ἐπιστάται καὶ Αἰγύπτιοι* (3.2.2) *for if any understand the customs of the Persians, the Egyptians do.*

#### Inventiveness in verbal and non-verbal communication

The fundamental problem raised by Benardette (1969), Pelling (1997), Zali (2009), de Alvarez (2015) and Nunnally (2019) deals with the differences between Eastern and Western conceptualizations of reality and simultaneously challenges the polarity between the Greeks and the Persians. While Benardette (1969, p. 70) pays more attention to the common ground between these groups and claims that speech assumes an importance for both of them that it never had in Egypt, other scholars tend to focus on Greek and Persian dissimilarities.

All the examples considered above show how the same deceitful act may be associated with different types of fraud. Moreover, even in the case of a common attribution Asian and Greek manipulations are similar but not equal phenomena. The importance of persuasion differs in these stories: verbal appeals to the general public was a major task of Greek political tricksters, while Persian and Egyptian deceivers primarily concentrated on maintaining social and non-verbal rituals. The importance of formal non-verbal attributes in confirming the identity of the holder of power is noticeable not only in the Smerdis story but also in the narration devoted to the disguise of the Persian nobleman Artabanus in royal robes (7.14-18). The purpose of this concealment of identity was to mislead the ghost who had been visiting the real King at night. The trick partially succeeded, as after Artabanus put on Xerxes' attire and sat on the King's throne (*ἐνδύς δὲ τὴν Ξέρξεω ἐσθῆτα καὶ ἰζόμενος ἐς τὸν βασιλῆιον θρόνον* 7.17.1), a deity hitherto unfamiliar to Artabanus appeared to him in a dream as if to the King.

Verbal content also appears to be different in both cultures. For the Persians, "word and deed, theory and practice fully correspond to each other" (de Alvarez, 2015, p. 124), and so their perception of the actual world is based on the denial of the image. Words that enlighten reality allow a person to dominate it. Conversely, words that hide the world from others allowed the Persians to enhance themselves at the expense of the truth, but such deformation of the objective order is far from creativity and imagination, the ability to shape it with a minimal risk of being refuted.

In the Greek episode, before the final stage of visually manipulating the public consciousness, heralds asked Athenians to warmly welcome Pisistratus, whom Athena honors herself and now is bringing back to her own acropolis. This can be compared to the proclamations of Persian heralds. While the Persians were instructed to make false allegations that distorted reality to its opposite, the Greeks manipulated the crowd's beliefs about the

<sup>1</sup> The name Φύη (lit. "growth," from φύομαι < IE \*bheh<sub>2</sub>u- 'to grow, arise, spring up') may symbolize extraordinary physical beauty and stature, while also evoking associations with agricultural fertility. This interpretation is reinforced by the testimony of the *Pseudo-Aristotelian Constitution of the Athenians*, where we are told that Phye may have been a flower-girl. Furthermore, according to an entry in the *Lexica Segueriana* (no. 2), Athena had a festival dedicated to her in her role as a vegetation-related goddess (*ὑπὲρ τῶν φυομένων καρπῶν*) (Petridou 2023, p. 17, 22), which further supports the connection between Phye's name and her role in the Peisistratid procession.

non-empirical realm. Consequently, their claims were not so easily refuted – indeed, hardly refuted at all. Moreover, these patterns of religious discourse were spread and further enhanced by rumours, so that Athenians who were believed to be the most critically thinking among the Greeks finally believed that the woman attired like a goddess was Athena herself and so welcomed Pisistratus.

The ability to think within a conventional reality considerably distinguished the Greeks from other civilizations. For example, de Alvarez (2015) argues that reading Herodotus suggests that poetry, or rather the fantasy and imagination hidden in it, reveals a fundamental difference between the Greeks and the Persians. By applying symbolic resources from different domains and providing their verbal interpretations, Greek politicians created a new imaginative and complex reality.

Within a Greek context, the unique affair (πρῆγμα, Hdt. 1.60.4) consisted in dressing a tall, beautiful woman in full armor and presenting her as Athena. Thus Pisistratus, the Athenian politician in exile, could be led back into Athens through a ceremonial procession as if the goddess herself were restoring him to power. This episode, which is qualified by Herodotus himself as absurd, has nevertheless attracted the attention of modern scholars precisely because it appears as politically and religiously sophisticated. For example, Georgia Petridou (2023) argues that the procession was not simple trickery but a carefully constructed ritual performance employing epiphanic symbolism that was familiar to Athenian religious culture. The success of Pisistratus' political dramaturgy seems to derive from the fusion of recognizable cultural elements – the ritual framework of the thanksgiving festival *Procharistēria*, long-standing beliefs in divine favour, and Homeric imagery portraying Athena as *theos pompos* ("escorting deity") – which together shaped the powerful public response to the chariot procession led by the beautiful Phye.

By the classical period, Greek audiences were accustomed to actors appearing as gods in both ritual and theatrical contexts, understood simultaneously as symbolic presence and literal embodiment (Renée, 2018). We cannot, therefore, dismiss the possibility that, from the Athenians' perspective, divine involvement in a political performance of this kind would have been not only traditional but even anticipated. Against this background, Pisistratus' procession appears as a powerful act of political communication, enacting a delicate negotiation of authority between the *demos* and its leader, mediated by the goddess as an idealized and legitimizing presence. Ultimately, this epiphanic performance facilitated not only Pisistratus' re-entry into the community, but, more significantly, his reinstatement in the political consciousness of the Athenians an ideal and divinely favored ruler (Petridou, 2023, p. 26).

#### Moral judgement of Deceit

Given the peculiarly Persian perspective of the *Histories*, it is not surprising that Herodotus says a lot about the deception of the Persians compared to other Asiatic nations. The first thing which he emphasizes is the fact that the rejection of lies can be considered a defining feature of the Persian mentality (1.138.1)<sup>1</sup>. Herodotus repeatedly mentions (1.117.2; 3.27.3) and describes (3.118.2) the cruel scenes of punishment doled out for lying to the Persians, which can include death. Analyzing similar remarks on

historical Persian culture, de Alvarez (de Alvarez 2015, p. 122) points out that the Persians are not simply presented to us as bearers of truth (1.1), some of them do not even glorify the feats of one of their most powerful rulers, Cyrus the Great (1.95) and strongly condemn the use of slander and intrigue in international politics (7.10G).

By contrast, nowhere in the *Histories* do we find any comparable condemnation of lying within Greek society. This does not imply, of course, that one nation was more virtuous than the other. Rather, it shows that the two cultures frame deceit in different ways. We recall the painstaking efforts undertaken by Pseudo-Smerdis and his associates as they sought to prevent disclosure – and how, once the truth finally came to light, popular indignation culminated in the villains' cruel execution. Pisistratus, on the other hand who in fact committed the same crime, the illegitimate seizure of supreme power – escaped any punishment whatsoever. Through the staged beating – merely altering his outward appearance (though without changing his clothing) – he managed to obtain command of a military force with which he seized the Acropolis and thus took power in Athens (1.59. 3-6). Yet this coup secured Pisistratus' rule only briefly, and his political opponents soon drove him out. But this failure did not lead to his physical destruction or political annihilation. Before long, through a network of complex alliances, Pisistratus once again returned triumphantly to Athens, gaining the favour of the Athenians with a carefully orchestrated scenario of a "theophany" of the city's patron goddess.

As noted above, this staging could hardly have deceived the citizens; indeed, they seem to have consciously chosen to participate in the "marriage" between ruler and people, viewing the earlier phases of the political struggle as a sophisticated game of social technologies. Thus, the theatrical devices used to create a positive public image belonged to the framework of falsehood, yet through the efforts of non-institutional political propaganda, such as rumours, they could easily be transformed into a persuasive mechanism for influencing the collective consciousness.

This dual character of the event must have provoked similarly ambivalent feelings in Herodotus – especially since he was born not only a Greek, but also a subject of the Persian Empire. Let us therefore turn to Hdt. 1.60.3, where the author expresses his barely concealed indignation at Pisistratus' manipulations as he sought to reenter the Athenian political arena. Herodotus calls the act "exceedingly foolish" (εὐηθέστατον ... μακρῶ), since it should have been obvious to any reasonably intelligent Greek that such an artifice could not deceive anyone. Furthermore, the woman's name would have been more or less accessible information—certainly available even to non-citizens such as Herodotus. It is therefore hardly plausible that the Athenians, who prided themselves on being the most civilized and discerning of all Greeks, would have believed that a mortal woman was literally Athena. The premise either insults Athenian collective intelligence or creates a tension with Herodotus' broader cross-cultural claims that Greeks, being rational and consequently less prone to simple-minded foolishness, had long since distinguished themselves from the *barbaroi*<sup>2</sup>. He further characterizes the Greek *ethnos* as "more clever" (ὑπερσοφώτερον) and "more free from simple-mindedness"

<sup>1</sup> ἀσχίστον δὲ αὐτοῖσι τὸ ψεῦδεσθαι νενόμισται, δεύτερα δὲ τὸ ὀφείλειν χρεός, πολλῶν μὲν καὶ ἄλλων εἴνεκα, μάλιστα δὲ ἀναγκαίην φασὶ εἶναι τὸν ὀφείλοντα καὶ τι ψεῦδος λέγειν. "They hold lying to be the most disgraceful thing of all and next to that debt; for which they have many other reasons, but this in particular: it is inevitable (so they say) that the debtor also speak some falsehood" (Hdt. 1.138.1).

<sup>2</sup> Although in Herodotus' narrative the Persian authorities appear among the most active users of deceptive interaction as an instrument of aggression on the international stage, the Persians' general cultural attitude toward the unacceptability of falsehood makes it possible for the Egyptian ruler Amasis, through his substitution trick, to deceive the Persian king Cambyses, who was unable to distinguish the real princess from her replacement.

(εὐηθείης ἡλιθίου ἀπηλλαγμένον μᾶλλον), hinting at the well-known Greek propensity for critical thinking. The Athenians, moreover, were widely regarded as the foremost among Greeks (πρῶτοισι λεγομένοισι εἶναι Ἑλλήνων), and among these exceptionally capable Athenians, Megacles and his newly acquired son-in-law Pisistratus stood out as leaders. Moreover, their ridiculous plan is referred to as resourceful intelligence and political wisdom (σοφίην).

This is because intellectual primacy is only one of the contextual inferences which may be drawn from in this episode. The expression πρῶτοισι designates the Athenian aristocrats Megacles and Pisistratus, indicating their high political status – the same political preeminence that the Athenians as a whole enjoyed in the wider Greek world. Accordingly, the meaning of the entire sentence involving πρῶτοι, which also concerns political superiority, may be rendered as follows:

Hdt. 1.60.3. εἰ καὶ τότε γε οὗτοι ἐν Ἀθηναίοισι τοῖσι πρῶτοισι λεγομένοισι εἶναι Ἑλλήνων σοφίην μηχανῶνται τοιάδε. *Even though these men were counted among the foremost Athenians, who were themselves regarded as the foremost among the Greeks, yet they contrived such a plan [in the name of political wisdom].*<sup>1</sup>

Thus, Pisistratus' "wisdom" lay in the fact that, since he possessed real political power and support, he did not need to resort to a cheap spectacle featuring a girl on a chariot impersonating Athena; still he chose to employ it in order to restore his legitimacy by winning the favour of public opinion – and he succeeded brilliantly<sup>2</sup>.

Thus, what from a logical and discursive standpoint might be regarded as falsehood or falsification was based on the sacred understanding of power shared by Pisistratus and Athenian society, a true and wise social act. Herodotus was likely impressed by this sophisticated communication, mixing truth and untruth, so the focus of his attention was shifted away from the previously negative moral aspects of manipulation and towards the rather positively marked ingenuity of the event, as expressed in σοφίην μηχανῶνται.

#### Discussion and conclusions

The passages examined above allows us to draw several inferences about Herodotus' conceptualisation of deceit. First, narratives about disguising one's identity reveal that Herodotus does not treat deception as a uniform category but calibrates its meaning through finely tuned lexical distinctions that reflect both the mechanics of a deceitful act and the cultural identity of its agents.

The lexicon of deceit in the *Histories* is systematically polyfunctional rather than haphazard: stems such as διαβαλ-, ἀπατ-, and δολ- tend to index moral censure and social harm, whereas μηχαν- and σοφ- carry instrumental and sporadically even positive ingenuity, especially in ritual-political settings. This distribution of words shows how evaluative load is encoded lexically and not only pragmatically. Thus, a conceptual map of "lying" and related notions (e.g., suspicion of deceit, fiction, contrivance) reveals graded boundaries: episodes of asserted falsity with intent anchors the prototypical lie, while fiction / contrivance cluster at the edge where creativity, device, and public utility attenuate blame. Deceptive meaning is stratified across narrative levels. Distinguishing character-level and narrator-level acts prevents conflating what characters do with how the narrator makes us judge it.

Herodotus' lexical calibration and narration of similar deceptive acts pay close attention to the cultural frameworks within which those acts occur. Asian episodes are more often cast in terms that foreground a sharp conceptual divide between truth and un-truth, whereas Greek cases are more vague and open to ingenious interpretation. This anthropologically coloured analysis of Herodotus' discourse thus yields contrasting images of falsehood in Persian and Greek cultures. For Persians, deceit is conceived primarily as a verbal, but more likely non-verbal act, which is strongly condemned on moral and political grounds. For Greeks, by contrast, deceit is framed primarily as a verbal practice – often being sophisticated and rhetorically intricate – precisely because it may blend truth and its opposite. As a result, Greek forms of deception frequently appear to be more socially negotiable, being perceived as part of a broader repertoire of social play and human inventiveness.

Thus, "deceit" in the *Histories* is not a single type of act but a context-sensitive construct whose recognition and evaluation emerge from the co-ordination of verbal and non-verbal cues within culturally intelligible scenarios.

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<sup>1</sup> cf. translation by A. D. Godley: "that it is strange ... that these men should devise such a plan to deceive Athenians, said to be the subtlest of the Greeks".

<sup>2</sup> This popular ritual practice alludes to the way in which Constantine the Great contributed to the formation of ecclesiastical ceremonial procedure through the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325.

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## ОБМАН В "ІСТОРІЇ" ГЕРОДОТА: АНТРОПОЛОГІЧНИЙ ПОГЛЯД

**Вступ.** Обман посідає важливе місце в "Історії" Геродота, проте поняття межі брехні та споріднених комунікативних практик залишаються нечітко окресленими. Мета полягає у відтворенні уявлень Геродота про обман шляхом з'ясування як того, яким чином і за яких обставин мовці вводять в оману, так і того, як риторичні стратегії та культурні моделі правди і неправди формують моральну оцінку та впливають на лексичний вибір оповідача і його персонажів.

**Методи.** Дослідження поєднує три підходи: (1) логіко-семантичний підхід, що інтегрує когнітивні й корпусні методи із семасіологічними та ономазіологічними процедурами для окреслення давньогрецького лексичного поля обману; (2) наратологічний аналіз і дискурсивний, які допомагають розрізнити явний і прихований обман на рівні персонажів і наратора, а також виявляють ідеологічні та інші прагматичні імплікатури; (3) міжкультурний антропологічний підхід із використанням фокусованих кейсів, що застосовується для порівняння обманного мовлення й поведінки в перському, єгипетському та грецькому культурних середовищах.

**Результати.** Дослідження засвідчує, що геродотівська лексика обману є системно диференційованою, а не однорідною. Епізоди, пов'язані з персами та єгиптянами, подано за допомогою лексем із виразно негативними моральними конотаціями (*βίαβάλλω*, *δόλος*), що відповідає культурно зумовленим очікуванням щодо цих спільнот. Натомість у грецьких епізодах уживаються прагматично більш гнучкі та м'які лексеми (*μηχανή*, *σοφία*), які подають обман як комунікативну винахідливість, політичну драматургію або соціально прийнятні форми переконання. Наратологічний аналіз показує, що однакові способи обману – наприклад, маскування чи підміна особистостей – отримують різні моральні оцінки залежно від наративного статусу, ідентичності мовця й культурної семантики правди.

**Висновки.** Обман у Геродота постає як контекстуально чутливий концепт, сформований лексичними відтінками значень, дискурсивно-прагматичними стратегіями та культурно специфічними ідеологіями. Грецький обман є переважно вербальним, витонченим і соціально прийнятним, тоді як перський – з чіткими моральними межами і здебільшого невербальним. Отже, проведене багаторівневе дослідження демонструє, що "Історія" Геродота кодує не лише різні механізми введення в оману, а й різні антропологічні "грамматики" істини в контексті давнього Середземномор'я.

**Ключові слова:** обман, давньогрецька мова, Геродот, концепт, лінгвістична антропологія.

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