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Iconatrophu: Herodotus' Perception of Barbarian Monuments of the Hermus Watershed

Wilhelm Spiegelberg (1927, 25) suggested nearly eighty years ago that the strange story of Sesostris' escape from his usurping brother's fiery death trap, in which the queen persuades Sesostris to have two of his sons serve as human bridges over the flames (2.107), stems from a faulty interpretation of a conventional Egyptian relief type, namely the trampling of conquered foes, often with goddess in attendance. This type of oral commentary on monumental objects, a sort of constructive remembrancing on the basis of rationalizing existing notable remains, has been dubbed by the anthropologist Jan Vansina (1985, 10) "iconatrophu," and it results in stories akin to etiological tales familiar from mythology. This notion can be employed to explain much seemingly bizarre material in Herodotus, and it seems to occur in varying degrees, ranging from a reasonably well-remembered historical detail to a wholly rationalized and constructed explanation of a monument.

Two such instances related to currently existing monuments in western Turkey are illustrative. First, Herodotus' citation of the *typoi* of Sesostris in Ionia (2.106) is thought to correspond to Hittite-era stone reliefs in the vicinity of the Karabel pass (see Lloyd 1988, 20-28), complete with hieroglyphic Luwian inscriptions. Recent debate has largely concerned Herodotus' veracity in this instance, and whether or not the ancient roads in question would have gone through the Karabel pass at all (e.g., S. West *Historia* 1992, 117-120; Pritchett 1993, 106-112). In the midst of these concerns, the manner in which Herodotus actually employs the *typoi* with respect to his narrative has gone largely ignored. The second example is the citation of the tomb of Alyattes, the singular Lydian "*ergon megiston*." An overlooked parallel Greek tale about the mound provides insightful comparison: Athenaios (*Deipnosophistai* 13.573), citing the first book of Klearchos' *Erotika*, relates a tale of Gyges' building of this enormous memorial for his mistress, which ever after was called "*Hetairas*," the Courtesan Mound. This provides an interesting parallel to Herodotus' connecting of *paidiskai* with the monument, and it may indicate that one or both versions of the tale are products of iconatrophu, etiological tales about prostitutes to account for the structure's peculiar Lydian name.

This paper explores these and other similar citations likely to have resulted from iconatrophu and argues that this is a ramification of Herodotus' methodological focus on object-associated historical anecdotes (cf. Immerwahr *AJP* 1960, 261-275). The argument then proceeds to characterize this aspect of Herodotus' historiographic method as the widespread employment of "mnemotechnic" devices, and what Vansina calls the forged link between tradition and site (1985, 187). Reliance by the historian on this mode of oral transmission frequently results in various types of iconatrophu or similar forms of "deformation," to use Oswyn Murray's term.