# Ring Composition and Related Phenomena

# in Herodotus

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# Contents

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## 1. Introductory Considerations

In a 2003 collection of scholarly articles on Herodotus amounting to well over 300 pages, "ring composition" is indexed to just three pages; the discussions on those pages are quite brief.[1] In a volume twice as large from the previous year, "ring composition" is indexed to eight pages. One contributor devotes a small section specifically to the subject, but notes: "Ring composition in Herodotus has often been studied, so a detailed treatment is superfluous here."[2] Key sources are cited in a footnote.

One would think then that earlier work has pretty much exhausted the subject. Such is not at all the case. Earlier work on ring composition in Herodotus and other authors is certainly extensive, but many discoveries are still waiting for explorers. Particularly in section 4 of this paper, I hope to have brought a few new discoveries to light, especially as they relate to the various *functions* that are served through a variety of ring composition strategies. Herodotus weaves ring composition structures in and out of his *History* in an intriguing blend of techniques to both remind of something old and to introduce something new. Through frequent, but not exclusive or always predictable, use of ring composition, Herodotus is able to capture his world in its complexity, thereby creating both an interesting and memorable *History*.

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[1] Peter Derow and Robert Parker, eds., *Herodotus and his World* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[2] Simon R. Slings, "Oral Strategies in the Language of Herodotus," in *Brill's Companion to Herodotus*, ed. Egbert J. Bakker, Irene J. F. de Jong, and Hans van Wees (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 71-72.

**Structure**

Ring composition (henceforth abbreviated in body text as RC) is a pattern of a speech or writing in which a sequence of elements is followed by a corresponding sequence in reverse order.[3] Its most simple form is signified as A – B – A, or more often with the prime mark following the repeated element(s): A – B – A'. The simple repetition A – A or A – A' is not counted as RC. RC can be several layers deep: A – B – C – D – E – D' – C' – B' – A'. Perfect symmetry is not always required in order for the designation RC to apply; for example the pattern: A – B – C – C' – D – B' – A' may be considered RC. As the extent of non-symmetry increases, RC may or may not be thought to exist; writers on the subject do not always concur on when a repeating structure is considered part of a larger RC unit. RC without a central, non-repeated, element is sometimes referred to as *chiasm*, obtaining its name from the Greek letter chi ( X , χ ) symbolizing the criss-cross correspondence of elements as follows:

| *Simple Chiasm* | *Extended Chiasm* |
|:---:|:---:|
| A – B | A – B – C – D |
| ✕ | ✕ |
| B' – A' | D' – C'' – B' – A' |

The individual elements, A, B, B', A' etc. may stand for a range of acoustic, verbal, or structural units, i.e. they may be individual phonemes, words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, large text blocks. An entire work may have the form of RC.

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[3] One of the earliest uses of the term "Ringkomposition" along with a more extensive definition of it is provided in W. A. A. van Otterlo, "Untersuchungen über Begriff, Anwendung und Entstehung der griechischen Ringkomposition," *Mededeelingen der Nederlandsche Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afdeeling Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks* 7, no. 3 (1944): 133.

**Terminology**

There is a wide range of terminology for identifying RC, or RC-like, structures. The following terms are used by some authors to denote what others call RC: inclusio, framing, bookending, chiasm/chiasmus, recapitulation (Wiederaufnahme), resumption, epic regression, embedded sequence, sandwiching, symmetry, and others. Hermann Fränkel calls it "ein richtiger Pendelschlag" ("a regular pendulum-swing") and a "Kette" ("chain"), but finds van Otterlo's designation "Ringkomposition" fitting.[4] This paper will generally employ the term "ring composition" (RC) and recognize under that designation a variety of sub-types and diversity of form. However, RC will be differentiated from related phenomena in section 2 below.

Henry Immerwahr notes that in Herodotus' "so-called ring composition the correspondence between initial and final statements is not exact, but purposely varied." Immerwahr is not entirely satisfied with the term RC "which implies the idea of perfection," but admits "I know of no better term."[5] Since the designation RC is not found in an equivalent formulation in works of antiquity, and since no rigid, formal definition has been agreed upon by scholars, I will employ the term rather broadly, but as mentioned above, with certain limitations as outlined in the next section of this paper.

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[4] Hermann Fränkel, *Wege und Formen frühgriechischen Denkens: Literarische und philosophiegeschichtliche Studien*, ed. Franz Tietze, 2 ed. (Munich: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1955), 71. See also footnote 4.

[5] Henry R. Immerwahr, *Form and Thought in Herodotus*, ed. Walton Morris, vol. 23, *Philological Monographs* (Cleveland: American Philological Association, 1966), 55.

## 2. Ring Composition and Its Past: Oral Tradition

**The Study of Oral Tradition and Orality**

The study of orality and oral tradition has experienced phenomenal growth since the middle of the 20th century, as quantitatively illustrated by the charts below.[6]
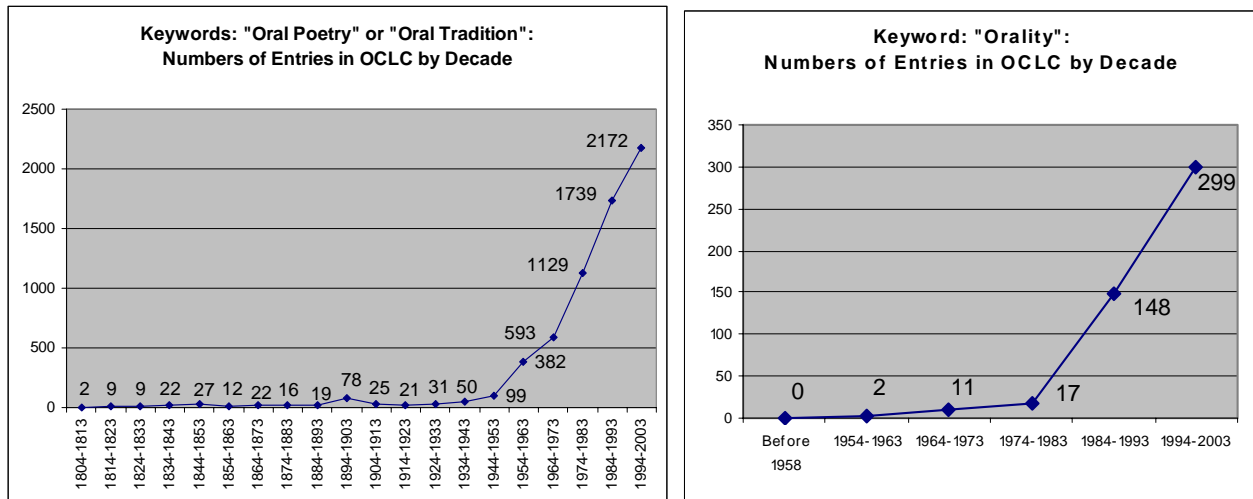


The upsurge in works written about "oral poetry" or "oral tradition" (left chart above) was instigated by the work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord in their field work of the oral tradition in the former Yugoslavia, published by Lord as *The Singer of Tales* in 1960. The popularity of the book is evidenced by the appearance of a second edition in the year 2000 with an accompanying audio and video CD-ROM.[7] The term "orality" has become widely used in titles relating to oral tradition especially since the publication of Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy* in

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[6] An earlier, more general observation was made by Eric A. Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New York and London: Yale University Press, 1986), 24–25.

[7] Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2000).

1982.[8] Many other works, especially those by Eric Havelock, have broadened our understanding of ancient oral Greek culture.[9]

**The Connection between Ring Composition and Oral Tradition**

RC may be thought to belong to the various formulae that have been identified as forming the structural base for oral tradition. Included among the formulae identified by Parry and Lord are parallelism, chiasm, and RC structure, although the latter is not referred to by them as such.[10] Among the paratactic structures identified by Bruno Gentili as "underlying the unity and identity of epic and lyric" is:

> juxtaposition along with interpretations or parentheses, which tend to create a hierarchy between different elements. Typical of this method of structuring is the cyclical, circular, or "ring" pattern (*ring composition*). Here the idea that introduced a compositional section is repeated at its conclusion, so that the whole passage is framed by material of identical content.[11]

According to Tilman Krischer, epic regression, a general structural category in which he places RC, is an integral part of epic poetry. In part II of the section "Der katalogische Stil" in his *Formale Konventionen der Homerischen Epik,* Krischer gives examples of epic regression and notes:

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[8] Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

[9] See Bibliography under Havelock, Eric.

[10] Lord, *Singer of Tales*. See pp. 56–57 for parallelism and chiasm; pg. 96 for a classic example of RC. On pg. 119 Lord notes among different performances of the same song an occasional "different order in a series; usually the reverse order" and adds "one might conjecture as to why the change of order is often to the reverse. It would seem to be a sort of 'chiasmus.' Singers often use a series of questions followed by the answers in reverse order. Such a shift of order is regular practice."

[11] Bruno Gentili, *Poetry and Its Public in Ancient Greece: From Homer to the Fifth Century*, trans. A. Thomas Cole (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 48.

Here with the return to the point of departure the goal is reached…Since the turning point lies exactly in the middle of the twelve verses comprising this account, the unmistakable symmetry-effect known as "ring composition" is produced. This seemingly so artistic ornamentation of poetic structure rests…on the deeply anchored regression of the epic style…

Regression is applied so frequently as means of epic presentation that it is more difficult to find examples of a non-regressive point of entry than a regressive one.[12]

Eric Havelock identifies RC structure, although he does not refer to it by that designation, as a characteristic feature of epic poetry alongside formulae and physical rhythm. He also addresses the *function* of RC structure as a means to "assist the retention of the material in the memory"[13] referring to patterns of the type ABA, ABBA, and their extensions. He explains the "mnemonic necessity" of RC structure as follows:

The psychological reason for correspondences and symmetries lies in the difficulty of remembering an adequate connection between statements which are novel and which therefore have minimal connection with each other. The problem confronting memory is to remember a host of what we would call "facts" or "data" which in separation cannot be remembered. Therefore one fact must be connected with its predecessor; therefore it must be framed in such a way as to recall its predecessor; therefore, while itself a "new" fact, it must nevertheless resemble its predecessor, as an echo resembles its original.[14]

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[12] Tilman Krischer, "Formale Konventionen der Homerischen Epik," *Zetemata: Monographien zur Klassischen Altertumswissenschaft* 56 (1971): 138–39. Translation is my own. Original German texts read:

Hier ist mit der Rückkehr an den Ausgangspunkt das Ziel erreicht…Da der Wendepunkt genau in der Mitte der zwölf Verse umfassenden Darstellung liegt, wird die unverkennbare Symmetrie-wirkung der sog. 'Ringkomposition' erzielt. Diese scheinbar so gekünstelte Zierform poetischer Gestaltung beruht…auf der im epischen Stil so verankerten Regression…
Die Regression ist ein so häufig angewandtes Mittel der epischen Darstellung, daß es schwerer fällt, Beispiele eines nicht-regressiven Eingangs zu finden als eines regressiven.

[13] Eric A. Havelock, *The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 140. Havelock refers to further treatment of these RC patterns in C. H. Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition,* Cambridge, Mass. 1958, pp. 259ff. However, Henry Immerwahr notes that Whitman confuses ring composition with circular or "'pedimental' composition, which is more regular and not based on verbal repetition." See Immerwahr, *Form and Thought in Herodotus*, 54, footnote 28.

[14] Havelock, *The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequences,* 141.

Other functions of RC that may or may not be directly related to oral tradition will be discussed below in section 4: Form and Function of Ring Composition in Herodotus.

## 3. Phenomena Related to Ring Composition in Herodotus

RC is only one of many rhetorical devices used by Herodotus. Among the devices closely related to RC are: anaphoric recapitulation, paratactic anaphora, back references, forward references, framing formulas, and refrain-like verbal repetitions. An example of each as identified by Ingrid Beck[15] follows.

**Anaphoric Recapitulation**

Anaphoric recapitulation is essentially the simple repetition of a word-root in successive phrases. This type of anaphora is found frequently in both Herodotus and Homer. Especially common is the form where a finite verb is followed by a participle of the same verbal root.

*History* 1:8

Οὗτος δὴ ὦν ὁ Κανδαύλης
ἠράσθη τῆς ἑωυτοῦ γυναικός,
ἐρασθεὶς δὲ
    ἐνόμιζέ οἱ εἶναι γυναῖκα πολλὸν πασέων καλλίστην.
    ὥστε δὲ ταῦτα νομίζων,
    ἦν γάρ οἱ τῶν αἰχμοφόρων
    Γύγης ὁ Δασκύλου ἀρεσκόμενος μάλιστα.

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[15] Ingrid Beck, *Die Ringkomposition bei Herodot und ihre Bedeutung für die Beweistechnik*, ed. Hildebrecht Hommel and Ernst Zinn, *Spudasmata: Studien zur Klassischen Philologie and ihren Grenzgebieten: Band XXV* (Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1971).

Now this Candaules
<u>fell in love</u> with his own wife.
And <u>since he was in love</u>[1],
>   <u>he thought</u> he had the most beautiful woman of all.
>   So <u>he was thinking</u>[2] about this.
>   Now he had among his spearman
>   Gyges the son of Dascylus who pleased him most.

Note 1: anaphoric circumstantial participle after finite verb of the same root.
Note 2: anaphoric participle after finite verb of the same root.

[English translation and notes are my own—GM]

*Problem: Modern Translations*

Many modern translations of Herodotus do not capture anaphoric recapitulation. This raises a general issue in regard to identifying structural elements in translated works. A full discussion of translation theory and practice would extend far beyond the scope of this paper, but it should be noted that in order to fully identify structural patterns in Herodotus, one must ultimately refer to the best critical editions of the Greek text.[16] The translations of *History* 1:8 given below show the varying degrees to which modern English translations have reflected the anaphoric structure of Herodotus' Greek:

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[16] In this paper the most recent Teubner editions by Rosén are used for the Greek text, unless otherwise noted. For books 1–4: Herodotus, *Herodoti Historiae*, ed. Haiim B. Rosén, vol. 1, *Libros I-IV continens, Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana* (Leipzig: BSB B. G. Teubner Verlagsgesellchaft, 1987). For books 5–9: Herodotus, *Herodoti Historiae*, ed. Haiim B. Rosén, *Vol. II: Libros V-IX continens, indicibus criticis adiectis; Bibliotheca Scriptorum Grecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana* (Stuttgart and Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1997).

**Greene** (1987)[17] — Both anaphoras captured

This Candaules <u>fell in love</u> with his own wife;
and <u>because he was so in love</u>,
       <u>he thought</u> he had in her far the most beautiful of women.
       So <u>he thought</u>.
       Now, he had a bodyguard named Gyges, the son of Dascylus,
       who was his chief favorite among them.

**Powell** (1949)[18] — Only the first anaphora captured

This Candaules <u>became enamoured</u> of his own wife,
and <u>being enamoured</u>
       he deemed that he possessed the fairest of all wives by far.
       And one of his spearbearers, a certain Gyges the son of Dascylus,
       found most favour in his sight.

**Godley** (Loeb 1926, repr. 1990)[19] — Anaphoras captured, but with different expressions

This Candaules, then, <u>fell in love</u> with his own wife,
<u>so much that</u>
       <u>he supposed</u> her to be by far the fairest woman in the world;
       and <u>being persuaded</u> of this,
       he raved of her beauty to Gyges, son of Dascylus,
       who was his favourite among his bodyguard.

**Rawlinson/Komroff** (1936)[20] — Anaphoras captured, but with different expressions

Now it happened that this Candaules <u>was in love</u> with his own wife;
and <u>not only so</u>,
       but <u>thought</u> her the fairest woman in the whole world.
       <u>This fancy had strange consequences</u>.
       There was in his bodyguard a man whom he specially favoured,
       Gyges, the son of Dascylus.

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[17] Herodotus, *The History*, trans. David Greene (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).

[18] Herodotus, *Herodotus*, trans. J. Enoch Powell, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949).

[19] Herodotus, *Herodotus*, trans. A. D. Godley, 4 vols., *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1926-1938).

[20] Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus*, ed. Manuel Komroff, trans. George Rawlinson (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1936).

**Waterfield** (1998)[21] — First anaphora converted to result clause
Now, this Candaules <u>became enamoured</u> of his own wife
and <u>therefore</u>
       thought she was the most beautiful woman in the world.
       One of the member of his personal bodyguard,
       Gyges the son of Dascylus, was an especial favourite of his.

**Sélingcourt/Burn (1972)[22]** — Neither anaphora captured
Now Candaules conceived a passion for his own wife,
       And thought she was the most beautiful woman on earth.
       So, having in his bodyguard a fellow he particularly liked
       whose name was Gyges, son of Dascylus…

While the *story* is the same in all these translations, the *style* of the story is not. Constant reference to the Greek text of Herodotus is therefore indispensable when it is important to understand the details of Herodotus' style. In this paper, English citations from Herodotus will generally be from the translation by Greene (1987); notes on the Greek text or my own alternate translation will be supplied when needed and noted.

**Paratactic Anaphora**

Paratactic anaphora is a coordinate construction in which the repeated elements are clauses instead of words based on the same verbal root.

*History*  6.107

<u>His reading of the dream's meaning was</u>
       that he would return to Athens and,
       having reestablished his rule there,
       would die in his own country, an old man.
<u>This was how he read the dream</u>.

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[21] Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[22] Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Aubrey De Sélincourt (London: Penguin Books, 1972).

**Back References**

Back references serve more to remind the reader of a person or event mentioned earlier in the text than they do to frame a middle section in the manner of RC.

*Example 1:* Two chapters back

*History* 7.194:
Fifteen of these Persian ships were much later than the rest at putting to sea…
*History* 7.196:
The barbarian fleet, apart from the fifteen ships I have mentioned…


*Example 2:* Sixteen chapters back

*History* 8.79:
While the generals were still debating, there crossed over from Aegina one Aristides, son of Lysimachus, a man of Athens but ostracized by the democracy. I have information of this man's character and am convinced that he was the best and the justest man in Athens.
*History* 8.95:
Now, Aristides, the son of Lysimachus, a man of Athens, whom I mentioned a little while ago as being the best of men, in this general rout at Salamis did as follows.


**Forward References**

The Egyptian city of Buto is mentioned in passing several times. Eventually, Herodotus describes the oracle of Leto in Buto in some detail.

2.59:   The Egyptians hold their assemblies…the fifth is in honor of Leto in the city of <u>Buto</u>
2.63:   Those who go to Heliopolis and <u>Buto</u> perform the sacrifice only. But in Papremis…
2.83:   Their divination is as follows…that of Leto in the city of <u>Buto</u>.
2.133:  There came to him from the city of <u>Buto</u> an oracle to the effect that he would live only six years more…
2.152:  He sent to the oracle of Leto in the city of <u>Buto</u>, where the Egyptians have an oracle that is, of all, the least given to lying, and there came an oracle in answer…
2.155:  This, then, was how Psammeticus got Egypt. <u>I have several times mentioned</u> the oracle in Egypt, and I will now tell you about it, for it is worth the telling. This oracle is a shrine of Leto, and it is established in a great city…<u>Buto</u>, as I called it earlier…

**Framing Formulas (especially used with speeches)**

Framing formulas come very close to the idea of RC in structure, but their purpose is generally limited to our use of quotation marks with the addition the name of the speaker at the end of the quotation.

> *History* 3:80–83:
>
> When the confusion had settled, five days later, the conspirators against the Magians held a debate about the entire condition of affairs. Here speeches were made.
>
> Otanes proposed… [Speech 1 follows]
> Such was the judgment contributed by Otanes.
>
> But Megabyzus…his speech was as follows [Speech 2 follows]
> Such was the judgment of Megabyzus.
>
> Darius gave his judgement as third…[Speech 3 follows]
> These were the three opinions that were put forward.

This is a common feature also in Thucydides, particularly in the earlier portions of his work. One example follows:

> *Thucydides:* 1:31–43
>
> And when an assembly [Ecclesia] was held opposing speeches were made,
> and the Corcyraeans spoke as follows:… [1.32–36]
> Thus spoke the Corcyraeans,
> and after them the Corinthians as follows: [1.37–43]
> Thus spoke the Corinthians.
> And the Athenians, having heard both sides, held a second session of the Ecclesia.

**Refrain-like Verbal Repetitions**

Note the following repetition of the phrases beginning with "he took" and compare my own translation with that of Greene (1987):

*History* 5:26

[Martin]

This, then, was the Otanes who sat upon that seat,
at that time made successor to Megabazus as general.
Byzantium <u>he took</u>, and also Chalcedon,
<u>he took</u> Antandrus in the Troad,
<u>he took</u> Lamponium,
and having gotten ships from the Lesbians,
<u>he took</u> Lemnos, and also Imbros,
both at that time still inhabited by Pelasgians.

[Greene]

This, then, was the Otanes (and this the seat on which he sat)
who now succeeded Megabazus as general.
He <u>captured</u> Byzantium and Chalcedon
and Antrandrus in the Troad and Lamponium.
He also got some ships from the Lesbians,
and with these <u>he took</u> Lemnos and Imbros,
both of which islands were at this time still inhabited by Pelasgians.

Here is another problem of translation. Translators typically view the repeated phrase "he took" as overly redundant and eliminate one or more instances of the phrase to provide a smoother read. But what if it was Herodotus' intention to accentuate his point by means of the repetition? Truncated translations will then miss his emphasis. To illustrate the issue with a modern parallel, consider the following quotation from Winston S. Churchill[23]:

We shall fight on the beaches,
we shall fight on the landing grounds,
we shall fight in the fields and in the streets,
we shall fight in the hills.

Suppose this were to be quoted as follows:

We shall fight on the beaches, landing grounds, in the fields, streets, and hills.

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[23] Source: *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition, Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000 at http://www.dictionary.com under the entry "anaphora." The speech was delivered June 4, 1940 in the House of Commons. The complete text is at: http://www.winstonchurchill.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=393.

The content is identical with the original quotation, but the rhetorical impact in the truncated version is greatly attenuated. Especially in such cases translators should attempt to capture as much of the original text as possible if the non-specialist reader is to be given the opportunity of experiencing Herodotus' rhetorical intention.

## 4. Form and Function of Ring Composition in Herodotus

In the most general sense RC serves alongside other narrative devices as a unit delimiter in the *History,* however long or short the unit may be. Irene de Jong has identified the following devices used by Herodotus to define a unit: (1) repetition of words, (2) presentation markers of the type 'as follows' (pointing forward) and 'thus' (pointing backward), (3) headlines and conclusions, (4) ring-composition, (5) cross-references, (6) repeating prolepses and analepses, (7) interaction of speech and narrator-text, and (8) narrative integration of descriptions.[24] As we will see, much more is accomplished through the use of RC than a mere demarcation of narrative units.

Hermann Fränkel believes one of the primary functions of RC, especially in the works of Homer and Herodotus, is to close an argument (essentially equivalent to Q.E.D.).[25] This idea forms the basis of an entire monograph by Ingrid Beck in her comprehensive analysis of RC in

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[24] Irene J. F. de Jong, "Narrative Unity and Units," in *Brill's Companion to Herodotus*, ed. Egbert J. Bakker, Irene J. F. de Jong, and Hans van Wees (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 259–63.

[25] Fränkel, *Wege und Formen frühgriechischen Denkens*, 71. "Es is klar, daß die Wiederaufnahme des programmatischen Anfangs den Eindruck eines Abschlusses machen kann: Quod erat demonstrandrum, ergänzt man unwillkürlich."

Herodotus.[26] Beck sees the use of RC especially in Herodotus as a means of signaling the conclusion of an argument. Perhaps in this regard it is one of the structural methods by which Herodotus brings about his history's (ἱστορίης, "inquiry's") ἀπόδεξις — a word that can mean display, demonstration, or proof.[27]

The following examples of RC in Herodotus demonstrate both the similarities and variations of forms, functions, features, and purposes with and for which Herodotus employs the device in his *History.* The examples certainly do not, of course, exhaust the range of possibilities.

## RC serves to set off a proleptic excursus and to link one excursus with another.

Herodotus frequently uses RC to set off an excursus.[28] The various purposes for this framing pattern are not clearly identified by authors who have at least recognized this feature of RC. One important role of RC is to set off a proleptic or foreshadowing statement. In the example that follows, the "fulfillment" section also happens to occur within an excursus; thus two middle sections in the form of an excursus are linked to each other.

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[26] Beck, *Ringkomposition bei Herodot*.

[27] See the entry on pp. 38–39 in J. Enoch Powell, *A Lexicon to Herodotus*, 2 ed. (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1977). See also the recent discussion of the word in Chapter 8, "Performance, competitive display and *apodeixis*" in Rosalind Thomas, *Herodotus in Context: Ethnography, Science and the Art of Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 249–69.

[28] "'Ringkomposition' ist es, die Herodot zur formalen Abrundung seiner Exkurse verwendet." Max Pohlenz, *Herodot: Der erste Geschichtschreiber des Abendlandes*, 2 ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1961), 63.

*History* 4:143.1–3

> Darius then marched through Thrace to Sestos in the Chersones.
> From there he crossed, himself along with his ships, into Asia,
>
> A    and left as his general in Europe Megabazus, a Persian
>
> B        To him Darius had once granted honor, saying the following thing about Megabazus when among the Persians.:
>
> C            Darius was eager to eat some <u>pomegranates</u>, and when he opened the first of them [lit. the first of the <u>pomegranates</u>], his brother, Artabanus, asked him what, if he had his choice, he would choose to have in such number as the seeds in a <u>pomegranate</u>. Darius said that if he could have as many Megabazuses, he would prefer that to having Greece as his subject.
>
> B'        That is what he said and so honored the man when he was among the Persians.
>
> A'    On this occasion he left him as commander-in-chief of his own army, composed of eighty thousand men…

Herodotus notes in *History* 7.4: "…it befell Darius to die…and so it was never his lot to punish either the Egyptians or the Athenians." Now Darius possessed many noble men, but he died without "having Greece as his subject." The excursus in 4.143 thus serves a *proleptic* function.

There is an additional foreshadowing element in 4.143. It is connected with the word "pomegranate" which is found in Herodotus only in 4.143 and 7.41, three times in each section. In 7.40–41 we have a description of Darius' son and successor Xerxes marching out of Sardis. The description also has an RC form, with an excursus, set off below in square brackets.

> the army filed through. In the van came the baggage train and its pack animals and, after them, a mingled host of every nation, with no divisions…
>
> Ahead of the King came a thousand horsemen, the elect of all the Persians.
>
> After them, a thousand spearmen, these also the elect from all, carrying their spears with the points reversed to the ground
>
> After them came the ten sacred horses called Nesaean, splendidly arrayed…
>
> Behind these ten horses came the sacred chariot of Zeus…
> Behind this came Xerxes himself
>
> in a chariot drawn by Nesaean horses…
>
> Behind him came spear-bearers, a thousand of the best and noblest of the Persians, carrying their spears in the ordinary position, and
>
> Behind, another thousand horse, also chosen out of all the Persians, in this case to the number of ten thousand.

> [These were infantry
> One thousand of then had on their spears, instead of points, golden <u>pomegranates</u>,
> and these thousand men encircled the rest, which nine thousand men,
> inside the circle, had silver <u>pomegranates</u> on their spears.
> Those who turned their spears to the ground also had golden <u>pomegranates</u>,
> and those who followed Xerxes most closely had apples.]
>
> After the ten thousand infantry followed an orderly body of ten thousand horse.
>
> After the horse was a break of two furlongs and then the rest of the army, not in divisions.

There are many interesting features of the extended RC structure here. Notice, for example, how the mid-point is formed by joining "the sacred chariot of Zeus" with "Xerxes himself." Of particular interest is the fact that the three-fold reference to pomegranates in the *excursus* of 4.143 as an image of a large number of honored men is paralleled in the *excursus* of 7.41 with a three-fold reference to pomegranates in connection with large number of elect men. Now it can hardly be thought that the pomegranate sections of 4.143 and 7.41 themselves form the introductory and concluding portions of a large RC structure containing everything between as *their* excursus. Nevertheless, one should be on the watch for other significant links between the middle sections of RC structures across wide stretches of the *History*.

**RC serves to aid memory.**

*History* 6:121.1 – 123.1

> 121. It is a wonder to me—indeed, I do not accept the story—that the Alcmaeonidae ever showed that shield by arrangement with the Persians or that they were willing to subject the Athenians to the barbarians and Hippias,
>> inasmuch as they can be clearly seen to be at least as much haters of despots as Callias or even more. Callias was the son of Phaenippus and father of Hipponicus, and he was the only one of all the Athenians who dared to buy at public auction the goods of the despot Pisistratus when he was expelled from Athens, and in other ways he showed the bitterest enmity to the despot.
>>> [122. Everyone should remember Callias on many grounds. First, as I said before, he was a man who had a chief share in freeing his country; and second for his wins at Olympia, where he won the horse race, ridden, and was second with the four-horse chariot, and for his earlier victories at the Pythian games. He made a great show before all the Greeks for his immense spending. And then again, what a man he proved himself to be in the matter of his three daughters! For when they were all ripe for marriage, he gave them the most

magnificent present: their free-will choice of any man in Athens that each of them wanted!]

123. The Alcmaeonidae were certainly no less against despots than this man.

As I said, it is a wonder to me, and I do not admit the charge, that they showed that shield as a signal. Why, they were banished all the time of the despots' government, and it was by their contrivance that the Pisistratidae were driven out of power, and so it is they who freed Athens far more than Harmodius and Aristogiton, in my judgment!

The function of the excursus is explicitly stated by Herodotus at its beginning: "Everyone should remember Callias." One of the functions of RC structure according to Herodotus himself, and postulated by modern authors, is to aid the memory.

Note also the internal structure of the excursus itself. There are three reasons why people should remember Callias: "First" (τοῦτο δὲ τὰ ἓν), because he was a man who had a "chief share" (ὡς ἀνὴρ ἄκρος); secondly, he was "second" at Olympia; and thirdly, on account of his "three" daughters.

**RC serves to introduce and demarcate something new, and to reflect a historical reality.**

The middle section of an RC structure may serve to embed or wrap something "new" within the "familiar" and thus make what is new from that point forward part of that which may be referred to as known. The example below shows how far-reaching RC structure can be.

*History* 2.1 to 3.1

2.1 He [Cambyses] considered the Ionians and Aeolians as slaves inherited from his father, and prepared an expedition against Egypt, taking with him, with others subject to him, some of the Greeks over whom he held sway.

[Excursus: All of Book 2 (ca. 1/8th of the entire *History*!)]

3.1 It was against this Amasis that Cambyses led an army of his subjects, Ionian and Aeolian Greeks among them.

Egypt is thus incorporated into the larger picture of Herodotus' account. What was unknown to the Greeks about Egypt is now known, and Egypt can now be referred to frequently throughout the rest of the *History,* as is in fact the case.[29]

But surely there is more to the RC structure than merely to demarcate the section on Egypt. The Persians and the Greeks have surrounded Egypt, as it were, not only in Herodotus' narrative, but also in the historical setting. The RC form of the narrative thus serves to mirror historical reality or historical intention.

**RC serves to frame the entire work of Herodotus' *History*.**

Note the following phrases from the first and last sentences of the *History:*

End of 1.1:       …the reason why they fought <u>one another</u>
End of 9:122:     …rather than…to be slaves <u>to others</u>

The ending phrases of these first and last sentences of Herodotus' *History* form a sentence of their own with a play on the words "one another" (ἀλλήλοισι) and "to others" (ἄλλοισι). (One does note, however, that the subject of the first sentence is both Greeks and Persians [barbarians], whereas the subject of the last sentence is the Persians only.)

καὶ δι᾽ ἣν αἰτίην ἐπολέμησαν <u>ἀλλήλοισι</u> (1.1)
μᾶλλον ἢ πεδιάδα σπείροντες <u>ἄλλοισι</u> δουλεύειν. (9.122)

And this is the reason they fought one another rather than...to be slaves to others.

---

[29] This excursus as part of a large RC structure was noted by Pohlenz, *Herodot: Der erste Geschichtschreiber des Abendlandes*, 64. It is also noted in Roger Brock, "Authorial Voice and Narrative Management in Herodotus," in *Herodotus and his World: Essays from a Conference in Memory of George Forrest*, ed. Peter Derow and Robert Parker (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 6. Brock, however, sees no particular significance to ring composition beyond its reflection of Herodotus' "concern not to leave his audience behind at any point" (p. 6; the same idea is repeated on p. 14).

The entire *History* is thus embedded within the ideal that it is better to fight for internal national freedom than to be enslaved by an external power. Surely Herodotus intends both his listening and reading audience to see this ideal as a major, if not *the primary,* theme that runs throughout his *History* literally from beginning to end.

**RC places specific examples of a general statement in the center position.**

Note especially the multi-level nature of the following RC structure. The text is abbreviated with thematic statements of the referenced sections.

*History* 5:55–5.62

```
A   [5.55] Athens freed of tyrants
    B   [5.55] Hipparchus killed by Gephraeans
        C   [5.55–56] Vision/dream of Hipparchus
            D   [5.57] Gephraeans were Phoenicians, expelled by Argives & Boeotians, came to Athens
                E   [5.58] Phoenicians taught Ionians alphabet; similar forms
                E'  [5.59] Engraved Cadmean letters akin to Ionic letters
                    F    [5.59] Inscription 1
                    F'   [5.60] Inscription 2
                    F"   [5.61] Inscription 3
            D'  [5.61] Gephraeans, expelled by Argives & Boeotians, came to Athens
        C'  [5.62] Vision/dream of Hipparchus
    B'  [5.62] Murders of Hipparchus came from Gephraeans
A'  [5.62] Athens freed of princes
```

Note especially the middle of the three inscriptions (F', 5.60):

| | |
|---|---|
| Σκαῖος πυγμαχέων με ἐκηβόλῳ ᾿Απόλλωνι | Scaeus has dedicated to you, Far-Darter Apollo, |
| νικήσας ἀνέθηκε τεῖν περικαλλὲς ἄγαλμα. | Me, the all-beautiful Statue, boxer victorious he. |

Thus, according to Herodotus (5.60) reads the middle of <u>three</u> inscriptions found in a shrine of Boeotia, each of which was written on a "<u>tripod</u>" in Cadmean letters, brought to Greece by Phoenicians. The inscription is noted to be written in hexameter. The inscription is balanced (five words per line, with the shortest word of each line in the middle position) and contains

several parallel alliterative pairs. Herodotus thus presents the inscription (1) in the middle of an elaborate chiasmus (ring structure) that spans from 5.55 to 5.62, (2) as the middle of three inscriptions (a ring within a ring), and (3) with its own internal acoustic ring structure (a ring within a ring within a multi-level ring!).

## RC serves to highlight a principle of human behavior:

"What Goes Around Comes Around" or "One Reaps What One Sows"

*History* 8.103–107

A    103. Xerxes was delighted with her counsel, for she really said exactly what he thought himself. For if all the men and women in the world had counseled him to remain there, I personally believe that he would not have done so, he was so completely in the grip of fear.

  B    But he praised Artemisia and sent her off to take his children to Ephesus; for there were certain bastard children of his that followed the army. 104. He sent along with the children, to guard them, Hermotimus.

    C    This man was by race a Pedasian and of all the eunuchs in the King's court was the one whom the King regarded most highly.

      [X1]    The Pedasians live above Halicarnassus, and among these Pedasians it happens that whenever, within a certain period, ill is threatened to all those who dwell around the city, the priestess of Athena there grows a great beard. This has already happened to them twice.

    C'    105. From these Pedasians was Hermotimus,

      D    and he was a man who, being wronged, achieved, of all the people I have known, the greatest vengeance.

        E    He was captured by enemies, who sold him, and he was bought by a man of Chios called

          F    Panionius. This man made a living from the most infamous of actions. He would get boys of great beauty, castrate them, and then take them to Sardis and Ephesus and sell them for great sums;

            [X2]    for among the barbarians eunuchs are held in higher value than whole men because of the entire trust they put in them.

          F'    Panionius castrated many others in the course of making a livelihood from these practices, and among them castrated Hermotimus.

            G    Yet Hermotimus was not utterly unlucky as a result of this; for he came from Sardis to the court of the King, along with other gifts given to the King, and as time went on he was honored more than all the other eunuchs by Xerxes.

            G'    106. Now when the King was launching the Persian armament against Athens and was, at that point, in Sardis,

        E'    Hermotimus came down on some business to the Mysian land that the Chians live in, which is called Atameus, and there he found Panionius.

          H    He recognized him and made him various friendly propositions.

      I    First of all, he said how many great benefits he had had, thanks to Panionius;

      I'   and secondly he promised that, in return, he would do all the good he could for Panionius if the latter would bring his whole household and live there.

    H'  Panionius accepted his offer very gladly and brought there his children and his wife. And when he had caught him with his entire household,

      J   Hermotimus spoke as follows:

          K   "You are of all mankind the one who has got a livelihood from the most infamous of actions.

          K'  What harm did I, either in my own person or in any of my people, do to you or to any of your people, that instead of a man you made me into a nothing?

          K"  You thought that the gods would not notice what you did then.

          K'" You have acted vilely, and they in the justice of their law have brought you into my hands, so that you cannot complain of the vengeance that will come to you from me."

      J'   After these taunts,

   F"  he had the children brought into their father's sight, and Panionius was compelled there to cut off the testicles of his four children. He did this under compulsion, and then, when it was done, the children were forced to do the same to their father.

  D'  So it was that vengeance and Hermotimus overtook Panionius.

 B'  107. After entrusting his children to Artemisia, to take them to Ephesus,

A'  Xerxes summoned Mardonius and bade him take whatever men he pleased out of his army and to try to match deeds to the things he had professed. That was as far as things went during that day; but that night, at the King's command, his admirals put out to sea from Phalerum, making for the Hellespont as quickly as each could, to guard the rafts for the King to cross over.


In this complex RC structure, or combination of RC structures, there is no single "middle" point. The "central" theme is nonetheless clear and can be identified above by observing the series F, F', and F". (1) Panionius castrates boys (F); (2) Panionius castrates the man Hermotimus (F'); so (3) the boys of Panionius, and the man Panionius himself, are castrated by each other (F"). As Panionius did to others and their children, so it was done to him and his children.

There are numerous other interesting aspects of the RC structures in this section; only a few are noted here. Deep inside the RC structure we find the enumerated examples I and I', a pattern we have already observed. After the "friendly propositions" are "accepted" (H and H'), Hermotimus "speaks" his "taunts" (J and J'). These are four, presented like an enumerated series

of four charges given in K, K', K", and K'''. The four taunts are paralleled by mention of Panionius' *four* children, one charge, now elevated to "conviction", per child.

The two excursuses[30] (labeled above as [X1] and [X2]) should also be noted. They represent another function of RC, as stated below:

**RC serves to highlight something particularly strange or bizarre**

The first excursus mentions a beard-growing priestess of Athena, the second excursus notes that among "barbarians" eunuchs are of more value than whole men. One may compare the rather large collection of bizarre items reported in connection with India in *History* 3.98–106. Framed within believable descriptions of clothing made from plants (end of 3.98, end of 3.106), the middle chapter (3.102), for example, contains the unbelievable and bizarre account of oversized gold-digging ants.

**RC serves to highlight ethical necessity in a chain of human events**

Framed between the first sentence of *History* 3.1, "Against this Amasis, then, Cambyses, the son of Cyrus, made war…the reason for his invasion was this" and the last sentence of 3.1, "and this was the occasion, created thus, that brought Cambyses against Egypt in mighty wrath" is a chain of events leading the reader to an ethical justification for a Persian invasion of Egypt. It is followed, however, by a slight distancing on the part of Herodotus in 3.2 when he adds, "This is how the Persians tell the story."

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[30] According to the online *Oxford English Dictionary,* the plural of "excursus" is "now usually excursuses." The purist who would rather use the Latin form for the plural will have to reckon with the awkwardness of this fourth declension Latin noun, whose nominative plural form is excursūs, with the macron over the final u. The plural ending would be pronounced *–oos.*

**RC with a pun.**

"No reader of Herodotus can escape 'the irresistible impression of gentle irony which Herodotus leaves on every reader…'."[31] Thus begins chapter 5, "The Uses of Humour" in Binyamin Shimron's work *Politics and Belief in Herodotus,* citing J. E. Powell's article "Puns in Herodotus."[32]  Powell's introductory remarks reveal the early date and place (Trinity College, Cambridge) of his writing, when he says about the use of the pun:

> To our modern taste this figure is generally abhorrent, and in history we should not look for it from a writer with any pretensions to style. Yet Greek, which had delighted to pun on names every since Homer said Ὀδυσσεύς…τί νύ οἱ τόσον ὠδύσαο, Ζεῦ (*a* 60), can show undoubted examples in an author as grave as Thucydides himself.[33]

One example (of many!) will suffice. A characterisation of nomads is based on a three-word pun, framed within an RC structure in *History* 4.106 (Godley [Loeb] for Greek and English texts):

> Ἀνδροφάγοι δὲ ἀγριώτατα πάντων ἀνθρώπων ἔχουσι ἤθεα,
>         οὔτε δίκην νομίζοντες
>         οὔτε νόμῳ οὐδενὶ χρεώμενοι.
>             νομάδες δέ εἰσί,
>         ἐσθῆτά τε φορέουσι τῇ Σκυθικῇ ὁμοίην,
>         γλῶσσαν δὲ ἰδίην,
> ἀνθρωποφαγέουσι δὲ μοῦνοι τούτων.

> The Man-eaters are of all men the most savage in their manner of life;
>         They know (νομίζοντες) no justice
>         and obey no law (νόμῳ).
>             They are nomads (νομάδες),
>         wearing a dress like the Scythian,
>         but speaking a language of their own;
> they are they the only people of all these that eat men.

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[31] Binyamin Shimron, *Politics and Belief in Herodotus*, ed. Heinz Heinen, vol. 58, *Historia, Einzelschriften* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH, 1989), 58.

[32] J. Enoch Powell, "Puns in Herodotus," *The Classical Review* 51, no. 3 (1937): 103. Note that Shimron's bibliography in *Politics and Belief* (p. 123) mistakenly gives the volume as CR 31 instead of CR 51.

[33] Powell, "Puns in Herodotus," 103.

**Acoustic RC.**

*History* 1.1

> Ἡροδότου Ἁλικαρνησσέος ἱστορίης ἀπόδεξις ἥδε...

In the very first phrase of the *History,* a good place to capture an audience with some kind of acoustic device, the first and last words before the purpose clause begin with an aspirated eta (sounding thus: *hey...hey*). The three middle words end in a vowel plus sigma. Other acoustic patterns to note are: All words begin with a vowel, four of them with aspiration. The second and third words contain medial rho and multiple sigmas (nice sounding continuants, found also, interestingly enough, in the Hebrew title to the *Song of Songs*).[34] Read aloud, slowly, and with appropriate stress, one can begin to sense what an audience *heard* in an age when much value was placed precisely on the *hearing.*

## 5. Ring Composition in Other Texts from Antiquity

RC is found not only in the oral tradition and written literature of the Greeks. John Welch has edited a volume of examples from Sumero-Akkadian, Ugaritic, Biblical Hebrew narrative and poetry, Aramaic contracts and letters, Talmudic-Aggadic narrative, Book of Mormon, New Testament, and ancient Greek and Latin literature.[35] Indeed, some of the earliest written literature that has come down to us shows RC structure. A couple examples from periods preceding

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[34] Superscript to *Song of Songs* reads: שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים אֲשֶׁר לִשְׁלֹמֹה, *šîr haššîrîm ʾăšer lišlōmōh.*

[35] John W. Welch, ed., *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1981).

Herodotus by centuries show that Herodotus' use of RC is by no means a feature unique either to him or to the Greeks.

## RC in Sumero-Akkadian (ca. 21st cent. BCE)

*Dumuzi and Enkimdu: The Wooing of Inanna*[36]

|    |                                                                       |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 12 | O my sister, let the shepherd marry you!                              |
| 13 | O maid Inanna, why are you unwilling?                                 |
| 14 | *His oil is good,* his milk is good;                                  |
| 15 | The shepherd, everything his hand touches is bright;                  |
| 16 | O Inanna, let the shepherd Dumuzi marry you!                          |
| 17 | O full of jewels and precious stones, why are you unwilling?          |
| 18 | *His good oil* he will eat with you,                                  |
| 19 | O protector of the king, why are you unwilling?                       |

Emphasis often falls in the center as well as at the beginning and end of a unit. Many other examples from the extant corpus of Sumero-Akkadian literature can be given. It is interesting that while the Sumerian "Descent of Inanna" is not RC, the Akkadian version "Descent of Ishtar" is. The Gilgamesh Epic also shows RC structures.

## RC in Ugaritic (14th–12th cent. BCE)

*Anat Visits Springs (?) [lines 5–13]*

| A  | She faces       the spring of sex (?)                                   |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    | The spring of sex (?)    she faces                                      |
| B  | The spring of the market                                                |
| C  | The spring of the assembly                                              |
| D  | The spring of the gate                                                  |
| D' | To the spring of the gate from the gate she turns                       |
| C' | To the spring of assembly from the assembly she turns                   |
| B' | To the spring of the market from the market she turns                   |
| A' | To the spring of sex (?) from the place of sex (?)       she turns      |
|    | To the spring of sex (?) from the place of sex (?)       [she turns]    |

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[36] Text and layout as presented in Robert F. Smith, *Chiasm in Sumero-Akkadian*, ed. John W. Welch, *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1981), 23.

**RC in the Hebrew Bible and Greek New Testament**

A substantial portion of John Welch's *Chiasmus in Antiquity* is devoted to the Hebrew Bible (pp. 50–182). In *Leviticus as Literature* Mary Douglas finds that "in Leviticus and Numbers the ring form denominates the whole composition" and that "Leviticus has a single overall pattern. It is a ring composed of rings."[37] Douglas makes an important contribution to the discussion of the *role* of RC beyond its mere external *form*. She explores connections between RC and the symmetry one finds in nature and cosmic models of various cultures.

Hundreds of pages of examples of RC in the New Testament are presented and analyzed by Nils Lund in his dissertation *Chiasmus in the New Testament*.[38]

The field is not yet exhausted. Rhetorical criticism of the Bible and the role RC plays in that discipline continues to receive justified attention.

# 6. Ring Composition from Antiquity to Today

RC is found not only in antiquity, and it is especially not to be viewed primarily as a leftover from periods of oral tradition. In 1991 Albert Lord published a short article on RC in *The Battle of Maldon,* an Old English poem written shortly after a Viking raid in 991 C.E. along the Essex coast.[39] In footnote 1 to that article, Lord references numerous works on RC, chiasm,

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[37] Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 50, 52.

[38] Wilhelm Nils Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament* (Chapel Hill, N. C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1942).

[39] Albert B. Lord, "Ring Composition in *Maldon;* or, a Possible Case of Chiasmus in a Late Anglo-Saxon Poem," in *The Ballad and Oral Literature*, ed. Joseph Harris, *Harvard English Studies, 17* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1991).

and other structural elements in *Beowulf,* written in Old English sometime before the 10<sup>th</sup> century

C.E.

The English writer Samuel Butler (1835–1902) not only possessed a penchant for

symmetry and chiasm in his writing, he seems to be possessed by the structure. Ralf Norrman,

who wrote an entire work on Butler's use of chiasm, calls it an obsession: "There are some

authors whose fondness for chiasmus is so extreme that it deserves to be called obsession."[40]

Norrman says of Butler's fascination with chiasm as an expression of dualism or the principle of

antithesis:

> He was, accordingly, very fond of reading such authors as Homer — since there are *two* works, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*! But, as we know, if there are two of anything, the principle of antithesis demands that they should also preferably be in opposition to one another.

Butler's use of chiasm reflects a complex way of looking at things, but it always serves to force

the issue that there is "another side."

Simon Slings says simply that ring composition "is not a typical propensity of the archaic

mind…but a very common phenomenon in spoken discourse."[41]

# 7. Concluding Thoughts

**Poetry or Prose?**

RC and related rhetorical structures are typically thought of as chiefly "poetic" features.

While on the one hand we can differentiate Greek poetry from prose on one level as writing that

occurs in form in strict hexameter meter, it is clear that what we call "prose" may contain

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[40] Ralf Norrman, *Samuel Butler and the Meaning of Chiasmus* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1986), 3.

[41] Slings, "Oral Strategies in the Language of Herodotus,"73.

numerous poetic features, and perhaps all the more during a period of transition between oral and written history. Tony Lentz notes that "Gorgias was famous for moving all the elements of the poetic style into the realm of prose…respectively, contrasting phrases, clauses with equal number of syllables, parallel structure, and two or more clauses ending with the same rhyming words."[42] It is then certainly possible for writing to show *both* prosaic *and* poetic structures.

**Visual or Acoustic?**

In a brief treatment of RC structure in Homer, Eric Havelock contests the idea that thematic symmetries of Homeric poetry can be "explained as exhibiting a geometric design corresponding to that of the visual art of the period."[43] Havelock believes such a connection is impossible and concludes that RC structures in Homer can only be explained acoustically and not visually. Could there not be room for *both* visual *and* acoustic influences?

**RC and non-RC in Herodotus' Inquiry: Wheels of Fortune or Inevitable Human Progress?**

Like the previous two sections, the above question again asks the reader to decide between one of two alternatives. But this time embedded within the two alternatives there are four variables that can be paired in four ways. The variables are (1) wheel, signifying a cyclical view of history, (2) inevitable progress, signifying a linear view, (3) fortune, indicating events lie largely outside of human control, and (4) human, indicating the opposite of fortune. It should also be noted that such a question does not indicate the possibility of the existence of additional options the reader should take into consideration. Authors covering the subject of inquiry in

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[42] Tony M. Lentz, *Orality and Literacy in Hellenic Greece* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), 139.

[43] Havelock, *The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequences*, 140.

Herodotus frequently guide the reader's thinking in just this way: There are two alternatives; only one is correct. For example, in his article "Why Things Happen" John Gould[44] criticizes Mabel Lang[45] for viewing Herodotus as concerned "with a kind of personal motivation that is useful from a narrative point of view *rather than* with historical causes." The Greeks of Herodotus' day also became increasingly engaged in a variety of either-or propositions. Does Herodotus take sides in his inquiry? Is that reflected in his use of RC?

Consider first the nature of the alternative question in general. Such a question is generally meant to place two opposing and mutually exclusive phrases on both sides of the "or". Yet sometimes, what may seem to be opposing ideas can be thought of instead as complementary and mutually dependent pairs. For example, in a tug-of-war one sees a "left" team and a "right" team applying completely opposite forces on the rope, and there can only be one winner. However, if one considers the propelling of a row boat in a straight direction, "left" and "right" hand forces are entirely complementary and mutually dependent. Likewise the ideas of "circular" and "linear" may be thought of as mutually exclusive types of motion. But when one considers a wheel on a vehicle in motion, both circular and linear motions are inextricably combined. From the viewpoint of any given point of the wheel, motion is entirely circular. From the viewpoint of the point of contact with the ground, motion is entirely linear. It would thus be a complete *non sequitur* to ask whether the kind of motion most responsible for the forward movement of a wheel on the ground is *either* circular *or* linear.

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[44] John Gould, *Herodotus* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1989), 63.

[45] Mabel L. Lang, *Herodotean Narrative and Discourse* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1984).

Ancient and modern thinkers struggle with the language of opposites. At the end of the section entitled "Historical Time" Chester Starr leaves the reader to ponder the way in which Herodotus' combination of "chains of events…along a straight line" along with his "involutions and inversions" "have sometimes baffled modern observers."[46] In discussing Greek pottery, Starr notes both the rapid change in style as well as the potters' "ties to the past." The latter phrase is in a sentence he begins with the contrasting word "Yet", i.e. on the other hand, in contrast to, as though at any point in time both "change" and "sameness" somehow conflict and cannot be thought of in combination as a perfectly natural description of the way developments typically occur. Starr shows how the Greeks themselves struggled with the concept of time as *either* a "theory of human progress"[47] *or* the way in which "human affairs form a circle."[48] Herodotus, however, is able to combine both elements in his *History*.

C. M. Bowra also frames the discussion of life and thought in Herodotus' day in either-or propositions. There was a struggle "between science and religion" as well as one "between science and philosophy."[49] Either-or propositions can extend beyond a mere binary choice; sometimes there is at least a third option, and that is precisely where Herodotus lands. First, one notes the opposing and mutually exclusive views as follows: (1) Heraclitus possessed knowledge of the *Logos* via a direct communication link with a goddess[50]; but (2) Thucydides "allows no

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[46] Chester G. Starr, *The Awakening of the Greek Historical Spirit* (New York: Knopf, 1968), 77.

[47] Starr, *The Awakening of the Greek Historical Spirit*, 73.

[48] Starr, *The Awakening of the Greek Historical Spirit*, 75.

[49] C. M. Bowra, *The Greek Experience* (New York: New American Library, 1957), 195.

[50] Bowra, *The Greek Experience*, 184.

part for supernatural forces."[51] Herodotus, according to Bowra, "undeniably saw the gods

actively at work in the minds and passions of men, but had also a keen interest in scientific

inquiry and accepted scientific explanations for inanimate nature."[52] How shall this be assessed:

Was Herodotus attempting to frame an increasingly polarizing discussion of his day in terms of

mutual compatibility, or was he, as Bowra says, "dodging the issue"[53]?

The interplay of RC with an overall forward movement as a structural feature of

Herodotus' *History* is well described by Deborah Boedeker:

> Herodotus frequently uses ring composition or 'epic regression' as a way of supplying
> background information for something discussed in the narrative. First an event is mentioned
> briefly, then its precedents are reviewed in reverse chronological order as far back as necessary;
> at that point then narrative reverses itself and moves forward in chronological order until the
> event in the main narrative line is reached again.[54]

Herodotus attempted to weave multiple threads into a single narrative. His frequent use of

RC alongside non-RC structures can be thought of as the external structure that mirrors his

internal thinking. Embedded within the strictly linear string of words that comprise his *History*

one finds circular patterns of narrative, the "involutions and inversions" mentioned by Starr. Yet

no two "rings" are *exactly* alike—they are not found to be mathematically crafted, precise

mirror-images of corresponding pairs of thoughts. They vary in length, in number of levels, in

structure, in purpose. They do not occur at predictable intervals. The "wheels" they represent are

wheels that change their size along the journey, and sometimes the rims are dented making for a

rough ride. The path along which they travel is also far from smooth; it is not linear in the sense

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[51] Bowra, *The Greek Experience*, 192.

[52] Bowra, *The Greek Experience*, 193.

[53] Bowra, *The Greek Experience*, 193.

of straight. A line can be ragged and curve suddenly in any of the directions of space, back and

forth, up and down. Henry Immerwahr summarizes cyclical movement in Herodotus as follows:

> Herodotus does not work with large cycles in universal history; he is not a cyclical historian. The unity of history does not, for him, consist in the overlapping of individual cycles to form larger patterns. The only connection between individual cycles is the fact that action corresponds to reaction, and victory to defeat…Apart from this linking at individual points, however, there is no overall patterning except for the observation of constantly recurring irregular cycles. It is not to be thought that Herodotus contrasted an earlier period of cooperation with a later overall increase in hostility. Wherever he contrasts cooperation with hostility, he does so on a purely individual basis. Herodotus' picture of the world is thus not comparable to the Empedoclean, with its overall increase in strife for a whole period of world history, but rather to the Heracleitan, in which strife and cooperation would coexist at all times, combining in manifold individual patterns.[55]

Mabel Lang describes Herodotean narrative as follows:

> [T]he way in which the narrative moves is not within a preconceived structure of logic and causality but, as Herodotus' own word "path" suggests, is very like putting one foot after the other toward some destination already glimpsed. And as one may in traversing a path stop to examine some wayside wonder or even turn off temporarily to explore a tangential byway that enhances the view of one's goal, so the Herodotean narrative invites digressions both for their own sakes and for corroboration or verisimilitude.
>
> Significant for this kind of narrative progression is the way in which even movement backward in time is made in a forward direction.[56]

The conclusion is: Herodotus does not subscribe to a simple theory of human existence.

The content and structure of his *History* reflect complexity via combinations of prosaic *and*

poetic elements, visual images *and* acoustic devices, ring *and* non-ring formations, and many

other rhetorical devices. His inquiry is rich in contrasts without being irrational. Herodotus

employs ring composition frequently, but not always predictably, and in manifold lengths,

varieties, forms and functions to present a realistic, complex world view. It is a tool he uses to

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[54] Deborah Boedeker, "Epic Heritage and Mythical Patterns in Herodotus," in *Brill's Companion to Herodotus*, ed. Egbert J. Bakker, Irene J. F. de Jong, and Hans van Wees (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 104–05.

[55] Immerwahr, *Form and Thought in Herodotus*, 132.

[56] Lang, *Herodotean Narrative and Discourse*, 4.

avoid simplistic alternative "either-or" reductions that may rally the masses, but stifle the intellect. This was the real genius of Herodotus: The ability to write in such a way that nearly two-and-a-half millennia later intellectuals in modern western societies still debate whether Herodotus meant this, *or* that, without necessarily charging him (though some do) with being intentionally ambiguous or hopelessly self-conflicting. It is this—still rare—combination of personal reflection, objective reporting, but ultimately letting the reader decide for which Herodotus most deserves to be known as "the father of history." Ring composition plays a significant role as a vehicle that got him there.

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