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THE LORD OF THE RING
NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE IN HERODOTUS' STORY ON POLYCRATES' RING[1])

BY

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'Ανθρώποις γίνεσθαι ὁκόσα θέλουσιν οὐκ ἄμεινον. (Heraclitus B 110)
'It is not better for Man that he should obtain all he wants.'

The subject of this paper is the downfall of Polycrates in Herodotus III (39-44 and 120-125), more specifically, the question *why* Polycrates is brought down. Most commentators impute some responsibility to Polycrates[2]), others ascribe his fall to divine φθόνος frowning on too much prosperity and not prepared to settle for an agreement with Polycrates[3]). No commentator, however, has as yet noticed the supreme importance of the ring story in this connection. The only explanation given of this episode (if it is explained at all) is that it should show us how inflexible the gods are in their envy,

1) This paper is part of a work leading to PhD on the importance of commoners in the *Histories*. It is a pleasure to thank J.M. Bremer and A. Rijksbaron for their valuable support, as well as the participants of the Third Conference on Narratology and the Classics, held September 18, 1992 in Amsterdam, for constructive criticism. As to the title, I hope to be excused for varying the title of Tolkien's famous book for my purpose.

2) Commentators see this responsibility in the second story (especially in 3.123-125), where indeed it is obvious, or even in Polycrates' prior 'crimes', without any textual support. But in Herodotus conversations between kings and advisers tend to reveal some fatal state of mind in the king and if Polycrates would take the advice of Amasis to heart this would be exceptional. Cf. section 2.

3) Diesner 1959, 216-7 sees some 'eigenes Verschulden', but regards this as secondary: 'der Kausalzusammenhang ist hier ein ausschließlich metaphysischer'. Immerwahr 1957, 316 sees Polycrates trying in vain to 'change fate by human cleverness'. Rijksbaron 1987, 7, Versnel 1977, 22 and 45-6 and Fisher 1992, 362 also hold the view that Polycrates has transgressed acceptable limits of prosperity and is therefore doomed. Legrand 1932, 136 sees 'mauvaise volonté des dieux'; of Polycrates he says: 'son désastre n'est aucunement rattaché à ses fautes'.

repudiating even an earnest attempt at pacification[4]). The main object of this paper, then, is to establish the relevance of the ring story as suggesting the cause of Polycrates' destruction. I will base my conclusions on the data given by the text, as I consider these the only effective means of identifying Herodotus' intentions. Corroboration of my findings derives from the overall image of kings and rulers in the *Histories*, a glance at which concludes this paper.

1. *The causes of Polycrates' undoing*

At the beginning of the ring story, Polycrates is sole master of Samos, having killed one brother and having sent another into exile after a short period of shared power. His military expeditions, against foe and friend alike, all meet with success; his success is designated by a derivative of εὐτυχίη (39.3 ὅκου γὰρ ἰθύσειε στρατεύεσθαι, πάντα οἱ ἐχώρεε εὐτυχέως)[5]).

Evidently, by εὐτυχίη successes on the battlefield are meant. Herodotus has not referred to anything else apart from Polycrates' expansionist activities; we have not been told anything, for

4) Von Fritz, Diesner, Hart, Evans, Gould, Waters give no explanation at all of the ring's returning; Versnel and Rijksbaron are explicit in their interpretations mentioned in note 3. Legrand, in a note appended to his translation (*ad* III 41.2) remarks that the ring is, apparently, 'bien mince pour désarmer la jalousie des dieux', but he does not elucidate his remark and, as we have seen, holds that 'mauvaise volonté des dieux' is the cause of the events. The exception is Lateiner's interpretation. "The attempt at greater humility was superficial; he remained too fortunate and aggressive", he says, explaining this phenomenon by noting that "human power, by its very increase, if not by an internal necessity, tends to destroy itself. Individuals cannot realize appropriate limits" (194). Although Lateiner seems to speak of the Oroetes-episode (3.120 sqq.), I will take his observation as my starting-point and try to show that the remark is appropriate in the context of the ring as well.

5) For this word and similar terms for 'happiness', cf. C. de Heer, **ΜΑΚΑΡ-ΕΥΔΑΙΜΩΝ-ΟΛΒΙΟΣ-ΕΥΤΥΧΗΣ** (Amsterdam 1968). Apparently, the adverb here is of some importance, as χωρέω does not need adjuncts to convey the notion of 'succeeding' (see in this story 3.42.1; also in 5.89.2, 7.10β.2). The verb is combined with εὐπετέως in 5.49.3 and 8.68β.1; nowhere else with εὐτυχέως. Solon uses εὐτυχής in contrast with ὄλβιος (1.32.7) to denote a state of transient success as compared to a state of permanent happiness. Hence, the word carries ominous connotations, foreboding impendent disaster, as in 1.204.2 (Cyrus on the Araxes shortly before his last fight). There, too, the εὐτυχίη soon to be annihilated is of a military nature (κατὰ τοὺς πολέμους).

instance, about his financial prosperity[6]). Moreover, Amasis' words leave no room for doubt as to his meaning: pointing to the desirability of alternating success with failure he cannot be taken to refer to well-filled treasure-houses.

Evaluating Polycrates' constant success, Amasis sees a definite danger in it, and he tells Polycrates so in a letter which Herodotus presents as follows. Amasis says persistent success is bound to provoke the envy of the gods, and this φθόνος[7])will prove fatal if not averted in good time; no envy will come to those whose luck varies: alternating success and failure is preferable to unvarying victory (40.2 καί κως βούλομαι ...τὸ μέν τι εὐτυχέειν τῶν πρηγμάτων, τὸ δὲ προσπταίειν, καὶ οὕτω διαφέρειν τὸν αἰῶνα ἐναλλὰξ πρήσσων ἢ εὐτυχέειν τὰ πάντα = my own wish ... would be to do well in some things and badly in others, passing through life with alternate success and failure[8])).

Now, how is Polycrates to avert the fatal consequences of φθόνος? Amasis' advice contains two elements; we need to look closely at the wording of this advice, so that we can assess Polycrates' pivotal reaction to this advice correctly. The first element is phrased as follows (40.4): *φροντίσας* τὸ ἂν εὕρῃς ἐόν *τοι πλείστου ἄξιον* καὶ ἐπ' ᾧ

6) See Shipley 1987, 81-99 for a factual account of Polycrates' actions.

7) According to Regenbogen, *Solon und Krösus* 115 (= Marg 392) the word has Old-Testamentary associations and he therefore translates it by 'Eifersucht', not by banal 'Neid'. He says this translation preserves something of the 'Schauer des Numinosen' φθόνος has in Herodotus. On φθόνος in Herodotus: Lang 1984, 62 and Gould 1989, 80-2, who agree in attributing it minor relevance, compared with the importance of human causation, like Lateiner 1989, 197. A similar position is taken by J. de Romilly, *La vengeance comme explication historique dans Herodote*, REG 84, and by Lloyd-Jones 1983, 63. Opposed to this view is the opinion of Dodds 1951, 30, who sees φθόνος as an 'oppressive menace'. My own opinion is, that envy is indeed an 'oppressive menace' in Herodotus, but at first only potentially: man is theoretically able to prevent its fatal outcome. He never does, however, because of 'the assumption that nothing, not even a god, can destroy the power and prosperity of the great' (Gould 80). The fate of Polycrates is a case in point. Waters, 1971 denies all involvement of the supernatural with the human world in Herodotus. This view is rightly criticized by Lateiner 1989, 166. On the concept of envy in general see P. Walcot, *Envy and the Greeks* (Warminster 1978); J. Kroymann, *Götterneid und Menschenwahn*, Saeculum 21 (1970), 166-179. On causation in Herodotus, see, *inter alios*, Lateiner, ch. 9; Lang, Appendix I; Immerwahr 1954 and 1956.

8) De Sélincourt's translation.

σὺ ἀπολομένῳ μάλιστα τὴν ψυχὴν ἀλγήσεις, τοῦτο ἀπόβαλε (*'think* of whatever it is *that you value most* and by the loss of which you would *suffer* most, and throw it away'[9])). Amasis' second advice[10]) contains a proviso: if Polycrates' first attempt at reconciling the gods should miscarry, he is to try again as long as necessary until he has achieved the proposed objective: success and failure alternating in his military endeavours (40.2 ἤν τε μὴ ἐναλλὰξ ἤδη τὠπὸ τούτου αἱ εὐτυχίαι τοι τῇσι πάθῃσι προσπίπτωσι, τρόπῳ τῷ ἐξ ἐμεῦ ὑποκειμένῳ ἄκεο = if, after that, you do not find that success alternates with failure, then go on using the remedy I have advised[11])).

To this advice Polycrates reacts in a telling manner. He thinks the counsel a good one (41.1 νόῳ λαβών, ὡς οἱ εὖ ὑπετίθετο Ἄμασις), and then *ἐδίζητο*, ἐπ' ᾧ ἂν μάλιστα τὴν ψυχὴν *ἀσηθείη* ἀπολομένῳ *τῶν κειμηλίων* (*'he looked around amongst his treasures* for what he would *probably* be most *annoyed* to lose'). It seems as if Herodotus underlines Polycrates' prompt and 'obedient' reaction to Amasis' advice by an almost exact repetition of Amasis' words. There are, however, five crucial changes:

1 'suffering' (ἀλγεῖν) has been changed into 'annoyance' (ἀσᾶσθαι);

2 πλείστου ἄξιον has disappeared;

3 'amongst his treasures' (τῶν κειμηλίων) has been added;

4 the future indicative (ἀλγήσεις) has been changed into the potential optative (ἄν...ἀσηθείη), and, finally,

9) De Sélincourt, but for the translation of μάλιστα τὴν ψυχὴν ἀλγήσεις which he renders 'whatever you would most regret the loss of'; surely ἀλγεῖν is much stronger than 'regret', as I hope to show. Godley has 'what you will most grieve to lose', which is still too weak; Legrand has 'dont la perte affligera le plus ton cœur', but translates the same expression in 43.2 by 'souffrir... dans son cœur', thus overlooking the repetition. Legrand's second translation is the correct one. How and Wells also miss the point when they adduce parallels 'for the attempt to avert great calamities by *small* ones' (ad 3.40.2; my italics). Amasis asks Polycrates to 'suffer', which is not really asking for something 'small'.

10) Commentators overlook the fact that the second counsel is neglected by Polycrates. How and Wells rightly, *ad* ἄκεο in 40.4: "The present implies that the 'remedy' was to be repeated", but they completely disregard the fact that it is not (for example, not a word on the fact that it is factually contravened in 3.122.2). As I hope to demonstrate, the neglect of this second advice, as that of the first, goes a long way towards explaining Polycrates' downfall.

11) De Sélincourt.

5 the element of 'thinking' (φροντίσας) has been replaced by 'searching for' (ἐδίζητο, διζήμενος).

What is the meaning of these changes? To fathom this, we must look at the main alteration, which appears to signify a momentous development in the story: the change from ἀλγεῖν to ἀσᾶσθαι.

In Homer, the stem ἀλγ- is used to render the effect of "phénomènes qui bouleversent la vie humaine" as Rijksbaron puts it; the notion of 'pain' and 'suffering', usually considered the primary meaning, according to Rijksbaron is less prominent; when referring to mental pain it is usually combined with θυμός[12]). The verb is rarely used: Gehring's Index lists only four instances[13]), as against numerous examples of the nominal forms. After Homer, ἀλγ- customarily means pain caused by physical or mental injury. In the Hippocratic writings derivatives of the stem are used to denote various painful symptoms (ἄλγος κεφαλῆς, καρδιαλγέω etc.). Its high degree of intensity is evident from the fact that in, e.g., paradoxical statements we find ἀλγεῖν and its derivatives paired with opposite notions like 'sweetness', 'pleasure' and the like, so as to express the despondent extreme in the emotional spectre[14]). Ἀλγεῖν thus seems to be appropriately rendered by 'to go through an ordeal', 'to suffer'[15]).

In Herodotus, the intensity of the affliction is stressed by the fact that in all cases ἀλγεῖν denoting mental pain[16]) results in drastic measures; it makes the persons involved change their habitual conduct. Thus Oroetes is said to desire Polycrates' death because of the 'pain' he felt when he was being insulted on his account[17]). Lycophron severs all ties with his father, 'suffering' from the (cor-

12) Rijksbaron 1992, 190. In the Herodotean passage under discussion the verbs ἀλγεῖν and ἀσᾶσθαι are coupled with τὴν ψυχήν, which is unique in Herodotus.

13) ἀλγήσας: B 269, Θ 85, M 206; ἀλγήσετε: μ 27.

14) As in Aeschylus, *Pr.* 260-1 (ἡδονή) and 699 (γλυκύ); Sophocles *Ant.* 12 (ἡδύς), 436 sqq., 551; Eur. *Med.* 1035-6 (γλυκεῖα); *Hipp.* 348; *Alc.* 926 sqq.

15) LSJ s.v. 1 feel bodily pain, suffer 2 feel pain of mind, grieve. The translation 'to go through an ordeal' reflects Rijksbaron's rendering of ἄλγεα, 'épreuves' (1992, 190 and *passim*).

16) Apart from denoting mental pain, ἀλγ- in Herodotus can point to physical pain (9.22.1) and to illness (4.68.2 and 6.229.2 [v.l. ἀλογήσαντα]).

17) 3.120.4 ἀλγήσαντα τῷ ὀνείδεϊ ἐπιθυμῆσαι...πάντως ἀπολέσαι.

rect) suspicion that this man killed his mother[18]). Demaratus is so 'hurt' by an offensive question that he decides to desert to the Persians[19]). 'Suffering' from the death of his only child, king Mycerinus decides to bury her in a manner described as περισσότερόν τι τῶν ἄλλων[20]). Finally, Aristagoras explains his 'anxiety' to visit Sparta by pointing out that the Ionians' loss of freedom is a source of ἄλγος μέγιστον to them[21]), that is to say, they cannot continue living with it. We are, I think, justified in inferring from these instances that on the emotional level ἀλγεῖν in Herodotus closely resembles the Homeric usage: it denotes trauma, caused by deprivation[22]) and entails a radical change of behaviour. And now we realize what Amasis asks Polycrates to do: not only should he suffer in order to avoid punishment, but he is to bring about a fundamental change in his way of life: he should give up success and suffer in the process.

We find a quite different denotation in ἀσᾶσθαι (noun ἄση)[23]). This word, like its cognate ἄω, is derived from the root *sa-*, as, e.g., in Latin *satis*. Basic to this word, therefore, is the idea of 'satiety'. Now the two words denote different applications of this idea: ἄω renders the notion of consuming *until* one is satisfied[24]), whereas ἀσάω denotes surfeit[25]).

In Homer and Hesiod, there is no instance of ἀσάω. It first appears in the poems of Sappho, Alcaeus and Theognis, but only

18) 3.50.3.
19) 6.67.3.
20) 2.129.3.
21) 5.49.2.
22) By 'deprivation' I mean the state of being separated from something or someone dear, i.e. from a beloved person or a good reputation (OED s.v. to deprive: 1 to...dispossess of; 3 to keep a person out of what he would otherwise have; to debar from). This is what Amasis wants Polycrates to experience: a very painful loss. Somewhat more remotely connected with this meaning is 5.18.4, where beautiful women are called ἀλγηδόνας ὀφθαλμῶν. These words are spoken by inebriated Persian guests at Amyntas' court, and their subsequent behaviour (18.5) shows the 'pain' is caused by sexual desire left unfulfilled.
23) The noun is far more frequent than the verb. The adjective ἀσώδης is restricted to medical contexts ('attended with nausea', LSJ s.v.).
24) Ἄω: 1 satiate 2 takes one's fill. LSJ s.v. ἄω points to the root *sa-*.
25) LSJ s.v. 'glut oneself, take a surfeit, but usu. feel loathing or nausea, caused by surfeit...metaph., to be disgusted or vexed at a thing. Never in good Att.; in later Prose'. Ἄση: '1 surfeit, loathing, nausea 2 distress, vexation.'

sparingly; after Theognis it becomes virtually non-existent in literary and philosophical texts.

The only sphere in which ἀσάω and its noun ἄση are frequently used is the medical sphere, which goes some way to explain its scanty existence in philosophy and high-minded literature: probably, it is too commonplace and too vulgar, since, in the Hippocratic writings, the words are employed to denote physical nausea; understandably, they are often bracketed with ἔμετος, 'vomiting'. There are only three instances of the verb, as opposed to numerous examples of the noun; the verb is paired with synonyms like ἀνιᾶσθαι (twice) and λυπεῖσθαι[26]).

This somewhat banal character is also suggested by its appearance in drinking songs. Alcaeus writes (Diehl 91; Bergk 35, Voigt 335):

> Οὐ χρῆ *κάκοισι θῦμον ἐπιτρέπην*,
> προκόψομεν γὰρ οὐδὲν *ἀσάμενοι*,
> ὦ Βύκχι, φάρμακον δ' ἄριστον
> οἶνον ἐνεικαμένοις μεθύσθην.

('We must not *think of unpleasant things*, for we will gain nothing by *being downhearted*, Bucchis; the best remedy is to bring wine and to get drunk'.) Here, too, the sense is clarified by a second expression, in this case κάκοισι θῦμον ἐπιτρέπην, literally, "turn one's mind to bad things", i.e. think about them. 'Ασάμενοι describes the feeling resultant from thinking of unpleasant things. Obviously, the verb refers to a feeling that can be switched off at will. Apart from this, it is not easy to see how 'nausea' can be equivalent to 'pain'—there would seem to be a difference of degree. Thus it seems likely that

26) *De Morbo Sacro* 15.11 (middle; with ἀνιᾶται); *Epistulae* 19.16 (id.), *Int.* 35.8 (id., with λυπέεται). In Sappho 1.3, too, ἄσαισι is coupled with a synonym, ὀνίαισι; referring to the pangs of love it does not suggest irremediable pain and suffering, as Aphrodite's ironical answer makes clear (vss 18 sqq.; especially the threefold δηῦτε has ironic force: 'who left you this time, dear Sappho?'). Statistics may be relevant here. All in all there are some 180 derivatives of ἀλγ- in tragedy, against one of *sa*-: in the *Iliad* the relation is 60:15, in the *Odyssey* 70:0; in the *Hymns* 0:0; in Hesiod 9:1; in Pindar 2:0; in Thucydides 6-0; in the Presocratics (DK) 17:0; even in Aristophanes 14:0. The example of *sa*- mentioned is an instance of ἄω, not of ἀσάω or ἄση.

ἀσᾶσθαι here signifies a melancholical, downcast state of mind, appropriately summarized by 'sadness'[27]).

Synonyms can reveal associations. There are two instances of ἀσᾶσθαι in which synonyms are particularly helpful. *Medea* 245 is the only occurrence of ἀσ- in extant tragedy. Ἄση is here used to depict the feelings of disgust in a man who finds he has seen enough of his family and slips his moorings to find pleasure elsewhere:

> Ἀνὴρ δ', ὅταν τοῖς ἔνδον ἄχθηται ξυνών,
> ἔξω μολὼν ἔπαυσε καρδίαν ἄσης.

Here, the synonym is ἄχθεσθαι. Theognis 989 offers another:

> Πῖν' ὁπόταν πίνωσιν· ὅταν δέ τι θυμὸν ἀσηθῇς,
> μηδεὶς ἀνθρώπων γνῷ σε βαρυνόμενον.

('Drink whenever people drink; when you *feel downhearted*, don't let anyone notice that you *feel depressed*'). Now ἄχθεσθαι and βαρύνεσθαι resemble each other closely in that both signify 'being overburdened', which is a notion readily associated with the feeling of nausea. One does not feel well, physically or mentally, that is the gist of all instances of ἀσ- and its derivatives. On the emotional level, the words of this root do not suggest fierce distress but a burden one can shake off at a moment's notice. In this connection it is illuminating to take note of Rijksbaron's observation concerning ἄλγεα in Homer: 'il s'agit d'une espèce de fardeau, *que l'homme doit porter et qu'il ne peut pas manipuler*' (my italics). The difference of ἀσᾶσθαι with ἀλγεῖν is clear: ἀσᾶσθαι is to ἀλγεῖν as nausea is to pain, as 'being in low spirits' is to experiencing grave mental agony.

Returning to the significance of Polycrates' ἀσᾶσθαι, I think the point has been made: Polycrates, although agreeing that his predicament is serious and in need of therapy, shrinks from implementing the suffering this therapy involves, and decides in favour of something less painful: a little therapeutic unpleasantness will do, he thinks. He tries to soften the pain needed to neutralize divine envy, and so does not neutralize it at all, as is evident from the bare fact that his ring is returned to him.

27) 'Sadness' would seem to be an appropriate rendering, since, according to the New Webster's Dictionary (1991 Edition, s.v. 'sad'), this word is itself derived from OE *soed*, meaning 'sated, weary'.

The other changes can now easily be explained. Given the fact that Polycrates recoils from 'suffering', we are not surprised to find πλείστου ἄξιον ejected: disposing of his most valued possession would indeed make him suffer. The potential optative points to the same conclusion: Polycrates looks for something that *might* make him feel uneasy. The potential seems to suggest a certain reluctance in Polycrates' search.

The fourth alteration consists of the addition of τῶν κειμηλίων. Evidently, his valuables do not constitute his most prized possession and so the addition takes the place of πλείστου ἄξιον. Not that this offer is all charade: in 3.123.1 we hear of his 'passionate desire for money' and his reaction to losing his valuable ring, though falling short of 'suffering', is not one of lighthearted acceptance. So Polycrates certainly offers something valuable to himself—but the object he offers is not what he values *most*; therefore in this connection it has no value at all.

At this point I would like to signalize one of the means by which Herodotus draws attention to relevant parts of his story: the use of uncommon phrasing. We have seen examples: ἀσᾶσθαι is a very uncommon word, as is κειμήλια. Apart from the fact that it is not a very ordinary word, τῶν κειμηλίων is also rather curiously placed: widely separated from the ᾧ with which it is connected, it attracts attention.

I submit that the function of these linguistic peculiarities is to emphasize, much like modern italics and underlining. It is important for our understanding of the story to realize that Polycrates wants to ἀσᾶσθαι instead of ἀλγεῖν, and that he chooses to part with one of his κειμήλια instead of yielding πλείστου ἄξιον. Curious phrasing thus seems to be an important element of Herodotus' technique of story-telling: it is used to highlight significant developments.

The last change I noticed was the replacement of φροντίζω by δίζησθαι. I think this change supplies crucial information: there is a hint that Polycrates' decision of choosing the 'second best' option has not been taken on a rational level. It is significant that Herodotus *does* mention the rational level when he says that Polycrates 'understood' the appropriateness of the advice (νόῳ λαβών, 41.1).

The text, I think, suggests an irrational drive in Polycrates.

From the conversation he has with the fisherman we learn that he is 'pleased' with the admiration this humble commoner has for him and his power[28]), his reaction being described by ἡσθείς (42.2; Polycrates himself speaks of a χάρις διπλή, ib.). This 'pleasure' is rather surprising in view of the insistent warnings against great power he has just assented to on a rational level. Pleasure and reason are thereby shown to be at variance; pleasure here explicitly overrules Polycrates' rational awareness of danger. At a later moment his 'passionate desire for money' (123.1) will make for another case of ἡδονή overruling reason. It causes Polycrates not to take into account the advice given him (πάσης συμβουλίης ἀλογήσας, 125.1)[29]).

Now, if pleasure is stronger than reason and reason counsels the opposite of pleasure (pain, that is), the advice is not likely to be implemented. This likelihood is corroborated by the fact that in the description of Polycrates' reaction φροντίζειν is ignored, or rather replaced by conduct identified as maintaining 'pleasure'. His 'pleasure' makes him 'look around'—but in the wrong direction. It distorts his view.

What we have found, so far, can be summarized as follows. Polycrates rationally agrees that his persistent success on the battlefield provokes φθόνος and must therefore be alternated with defeat. Φθόνος, he agrees, will only be pacified by his suffering. Since suffering *per se* is not compatible with pleasure and pleasure is prominent in his mind, he decides not to suffer but to be 'annoyed'. Accordingly, he does not throw away his πλείστου ἄξιον.

The obvious question to ask now is: what *is* his πλείστου ἄξιον? To my mind, there can only be one answer: his power[30]). For one thing, in the introductory chapter 39 Polycrates is exclusively presented from the viewpoint of his attaining and enlarging power. All details reported in connection with Polycrates show him striving for this aim—even the connection with his brothers and friends is

28) The fisherman sees the fish as σεῦ τε εἶναι ἄξιος καὶ τῆς σῆς ἀρχῆς (42.2). It is described by Herodotus as ἰχθὺν μέγαν τε καὶ καλόν in 42.1.

29) De Sélincourt, Godley and Legrand miss the conflict between reason and ἡδονή.

30) Most scholars see the ring as Polycrates' πλείστου ἄξιον and so as meeting the requirements of Polycrates' dangerous situation, which it is not.

seen from this angle (39.2,4)[31]). At the same time, however, there is only a vague indication as to the extent of his triumphs: he took 'numerous islands' and 'many cities' (39.4), but only the Milesians and Lesbians are explicitly mentioned— just enough to make us realize that Polycrates' victory march was impressive indeed. That is all: we are meant to regard Polycrates as one for whom πάντα ἐχώρεε εὐτυχέως; details detracting attention from this observation are left out. Polycrates is depicted as solely concerned with power, and by the same token the identification of his πλείστου ἄξιον is suggested.

The wording of Amasis' letter concurs. We hear that φθόνος awaits εὐτυχίη and that occasional loss of εὐτυχίη is remedial. Then we hear that φθόνος can only be soothed by the loss of πλείστου ἄξιον. This seems to imply the identification of πλείστου ἄξιον with εὐτυχίη,—with power, that is.

The third indication for identifying πλείστου ἄξιον with power is revealed by a case of repetition. At the end of the ring episode (44.1), the baleful phrase εὐτυχέειν τὰ πάντα is repeated. The tyrant there defends his power fiercely, taking drastic measures so as not to be dethroned. The repetition of the ominous words thus shows Polycrates defending the same εὐτυχίη he agreed would prove fatal when continued. Apart from depicting Polycrates as again acting against his νόος, and complying with ἡδονή, this scene permits of an obvious conclusion. If, in the light of threatening φθόνος, Polycrates is prepared to relinquish his ring, but is determined to stick to his power, it is evident that he values his power more than his ring. This again strongly suggests that power is his πλείστου ἄξιον.

Of course, one may wonder why Amasis says: 'Abandon your most valued possession', instead of simply stating: 'Your power is dangerous, give it up'. The identification, I submit, is delayed for two reasons: first, we need to see Polycrates identify πλείστου ἄξιον himself, in order to understand his conduct. Furthermore, when we

31) In 39.2 he kills his brother Pantagnotus and exiles the other brother, Syloson. In 39.4 he is said to rob friends and enemies alike of their land, cynically stating that he will please his friends more by giving back what he has taken from them than by not taking anything at all. Thus both his friends and his brothers are seen solely from the viewpoint of Polycrates' power.

see Polycrates make his choice in defiance of rational guidance, we acknowledge that here hedonistic attachment to power overrides rational insight. Amasis making the identification for Polycrates would rule out both possibilities.

On what element of power is the emotional attachment based? To answer this question, we must 'look at the end' and note that in 125.2 Herodotus ends his treatment of Polycrates by recalling his μεγαλοπρεπείη, 'magnificence'[32]). When he summarizes Polycrates by this word, obviously the notion is meant to guide our perception of the man. The notion seems to suggest that it is especially the *trappings* of power, the admiration and wealth consequent upon it, that fascinate Polycrates.

This impression is strengthened by some details at first sight superfluous. For example, the way he disposes of the ring. To Amasis' ἀπόβαλε (40.4) Polycrates adds a telling detail (41.2): 'having filled a penteconter[33]) with men' he throws away the ring, whilst 'all men on board were looking on' (πάντων ὁρώντων τῶν συμπλόων). Since the presence of onlookers is entirely irrelevant to the execution of Amasis' advice, the function of this detail seems to be that it characterizes Polycrates as a man who loves to be in the public eye. The scene is repeated in the second story, when Polycrates again boards a penteconter with 'many friends', among whom Democedes, the best physician of his time (125.1), another seemingly redundant detail (the purpose of the voyage not exactly requiring medical expertise), that depicts Polycrates as trying to impress. The ostentation of power, then, the 'magnificence' it

32) This word is a rarity in Greek before Plato; it does not appear in our texts before Herodotus, who uses it twice (the other instance is 1.139). According to the theory proposed here, this would point to its significance in narrative (not ethnographic) parts. How and Wells see a contemporaneous allusion here (to Pisistratus), which suggestion does not explain anything and distracts from the point which is at stake here.

33) This detail is interesting, because, as How and Wells remark, in another passage (44.2) he makes use of the then modern trireme. I am not sure as to the hermeneutic relevance of this conservative choice; it may stress Polycrates' self-important manner by an element of sollemnity: Polycrates is intent on making a show of his sacrifice. Cp. [Plato], *Hipparchus* 228C, where Hipparchus takes Anacreon to Athens with much pomp and circumstance: here, too, a pentekonter is used.

brings, seems important to Polycrates; it triggers his ἡδονή. In this connection it is of some importance that his attempts at mere expansions are phrased as a matter of rational deliberation: in 122.1-3 his territorial ambitions are styled τὸν νόον, ἐπενοήθη and διανοεύμενον. I conclude that, according to Herodotus, Polycrates is emotionally attached, not so much to expansionism *per se* as to the grandeur associated with power.

The point of the story thus turns out to be that, of the two powers operating in Polycrates' mind, the irrational impetus (here, ἡδονή) exerts decisive influence on his conduct, outweighing by far the control of rational deliberation. It drives him to replace ἀλγεῖν by ἀσᾶσθαι and, by so doing, he leaves the danger of φθόνος intact.

To revert to the story of the ring. How does Polycrates react to the loss of his ring? His reaction is worded by the formula συμφορῇ ἐχρᾶτο (3.41.2). This formula appears six times in all in Herodotus: it is not found in other authors, except one passage in Hippocrates.

Συμφορή is one of numerous abstracts nouns combined with (δια)χρᾶσθαι; in this connection, the verb means 'to have to deal with', 'to apply'. Powell lists some thirty of these nouns in connection with (δια)χρᾶσθαι, which range from δικαιοσύνῃ to δολερῷ νόῳ, from φθόνῳ to ἐπαίνῳ and κοινῷ λόγῳ[34]). Humbler applications are possible: εὐμαρείῃ χρᾶσθαι means 'to relieve oneself' (2.35.3). Now these are examples of man-governed activities, but we find the locution can also imply the working of forces beyond human control. Thus we have a reference to 'change' in a neutral (τύχῃ, συντυχίῃ, μόρῳ, θείῃ πομπῇ) and a positive (θείῃ τύχῃ, εὐτυχίῃ) sense[35]). If 'chance' has unpleasant implications for those involved, their plight is rendered by συμφορῇ (δια)χρᾶσθαι.

In 1.42.1 τοιῇδε is added to συμφορῇ, summarizing what we have been told earlier: Adrastus has inadvertently killed his brother. Here, the expression most likely alludes, not so much to Adrastus' emotional status as to the predicament he finds himself in: because he is συμφορῇ τοιῇδε κεχρημένον, he says, he should (οὔτε...οἰκός ἐστι)

34) δικαιοσύνῃ: 2.151.1; δολερῷ νόῳ: 2.151.3; φθόνῳ: 4.104, 6.61.1; ἐπαίνῳ: 3.3.1; κοινῷ λόγῳ: 1.166.1, 2.30.3, 7.229.1.

35) τύχῃ: 6.70.3;συντυχίῃ: 1,68.1, 5.41.1; μόρῳ: 1.117.5; θείῃ πομπῇ: 1.62.4, 3.77.1, 4.152.2; θείῃ τύχῃ: 3.139.3; εὐτυχίῃ: 8.87.4.

have no dealings with peers who are εὖ πρήσσοντας. Adrastus cannot be referring to his emotional state here: the idea of someone saying 'I do not feel happy, and therefore I am under a moral obligation not to associate with my peers', is absurd.

In 3.117.4, too, the expression is qualified (συμφορῇ *μεγάλῃ* διαχρέωνται) and can only refer to the fact that people are in a severely distressing *situation*: each summer the peoples in the Aces basin are deprived of water because of a dam the Persians have built to block the river. As Herodotus is describing a recurrent event the reference is very likely to be to the periodic difficulties these peoples experience, not to recurring emotions. It would be somewhat strange to hear that these peoples 'are deeply unhappy each summer, not having any water left', whereas 'each summer they are in dire straits, not having any water left' makes perfect sense.

In 7.134.2, again, the reference is to a distressing situation; we notice that the intensity of the experience is made clear by the context and the use of a qualifying element, in this case a second verb, ἄχθεσθαι[36]). This verb, as we have seen, suggests mere annoyance; here the Spartans are troubled by the fact that they do not longer receive any favourable omens. The two verbal elements of the genitive absolute, ἀχθομένων and συμφορῇ χρεωμένων, taken together, tell us that the Spartans 'experienced the accident' (συμφορῇ χρᾶσθαι) as 'burdensome' (ἀχθ-).

In 7.141.1 the Athenians have received an oracle which seemingly portends their utter destruction (140). Their reaction: συμφορῇ *τῇ μεγίστῃ* ἐχρέωντο. *Προβάλλουσι δὲ σφέας αὐτοὺς* ὑπὸ τοῦ κακοῦ τοῦ κεχρημένου Τίμων...συνεβούλευέ σφι... The formula is linked with προβάλλειν ἑωυτούς, an indication of deep despair (LSJ: 'they gave themselves up for lost'[37])). Here the accident is experienced, not as burdensome but as disastrous. Our perception is guided by the insertion of μεγίστῃ and by the use of the second verb.

The phrase is similarly used in 8.20.2. The Euboeans have neglected an oracle that warned them to bring their goats to safety

36) Ἀχθομένων δὲ καὶ συμφορῇ χρεωμένων Λακεδαιμονίων...

37) S.v. προβάλλω A III ('expose, give up'); as a parallel LSJ quotes Sophocles *OT* 745.

if ever the 'barbarians' should put to sea. Now they are faced with grave danger as the Greeks take to slaughtering Euboean cattle, in order to prevent the oncoming Persians from taking possession of it. As to the wretched farmers, Herodotus grimly remarks: 'they had the opportunity to (παρῆν σφι) *face catastrophe* (συμφορῇ χρᾶσθαι *πρὸς τὰ μέγιστα*)'. How desperate their situation is, is indicated by the addition. Evidently, in all these cases, the additions impart a meaning which the phrase itself does not have.

The only instance of this expression in extant Greek apart from Herodotus is a passus in Hippocrates (*De Art.* 52); its use there is entirely in keeping with its application in Herodotus. There is a qualification (ταύτῃ τῇ συμφορῇ) and its point of reference is not emotion but circumstance: a dislocation of the hip.

When he wants a phrase containing συμφορή to convey the *emotion* of distress after an unfelicitous occurrence, Herodotus employs συμφορὴν (μεγάλην) ποιέεσθαι, and he does so frequently (sixteen times). We can readily perceive that this locution indicates an emotion in cases like 8.10.2 and 69.1, where it is contrasted with ἥδεσθαι and τέρπεσθαι, and 8.100.2, where its meaning is clarified by the synonym λυπέεσθαι. The difference between the two phrasal combinations can easily be inferred from the basic meaning of the two verbs, χρᾶσθαι signifying 'to use/undergo', ποιέεσθαι 'to make for oneself'. Accordingly, in combination with χρᾶσθαι, συμφορή indicates the accident itself, whereas the combination with ποιέεσθαι shows the subject '*considering* something an accident', i.e. grieving.

If we now apply these conclusions to the description of Polycrates after the removal of his ring, it is evident that we are not being told anything about Polycrates' feelings on the matter. All συμφορῇ ἐχρᾶτο intimates is, that Polycrates 'finds himself in an unpleasant situation', the expression itself giving no indication as to exactly how afflicted he was. So, in the conspicuous absence of any qualification whatsoever to the expression, what we have here is a noncommittal statement not suggestive of 'suffering' on the part of Polycrates[38]).

As I have already indicated, the sequel warrants this interpreta-

38) De Sélincourt, Legrand and Godley fail to render the fact that no statement is made about Polycrates' feelings concerning his loss.

tion. The return of the ring obviously is a refusal of Polycrates' offer, indicating that φθόνος still exists; Polycrates' subsequent fate shows that indeed it does. Now 'envy' was to be neutralized by 'suffering' on Polycrates' part, and if 'envy' proves unabated it is clear that Polycrates has not suffered.

All in all, it seems clear that the ring is returned to Polycrates because the loss of it has not made him suffer. It is therefore inadequate as a means of pacifying the gods; by having chosen this item among his many possessions and by having made such a show of his sacrifice Polycrates is responsible for the fact that φθόνος has not been neutralized[39]).

Polycrates' responsibility is underlined by several stylistic elements; I will conclude this section by mentioning two of these. The first is: bringing out contrast by, e.g., the use of exceptional words. In 42.1-3 we see Polycrates meeting a fisherman. This man has caught an extraordinarily big fish and deems it 'right'[40]) to give it to his sovereign. His speech to Polycrates makes clear how much

39) Versnel sees tragedy in the fatal return of the ring. I think it will not do to define a tragic character by the sheer fact that an inflexible fate destroys him. According to Aristotle, in tragedy the hero's ἁμαρτία, and his comportment in general, makes him tragic; about fate Aristotle does not say anything in this connection. Versnel's view would make Polycrates into an atypical tragic hero (see on the meaning of ἁμαρτία, *inter alios*, Bremer 1969, 4-65 and T.C.W. Stinton, *AMAPTIA in Aristotle and Greek Tragedy*, CQ 25 (1975), 221-254; S. Saïd, *La Faute Tragique* (Paris 1978). On tragedy's aim of 'human intelligibility', see J. Gould, *Dramatic Character and 'Human Intelligibility' in Greek Tragedy*, PCPS, NS 24 (1978), 43-67. To my mind, making his stories 'humanly intelligible' is one of the major purposes and achievements of Herodotus as well, as is evident from the fact that there is not one story in the *Histories* in which attention is focused on fate alone. Candaules and Croesus are among the more obvious examples. It is significant that Versnel (46) takes for his motto 9.16.4 (ὅ τι δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀμήχανον ἀποτρέψαι ἀνθρώπῳ), but omits the motivation that strongly suggests 'double motivation' in Herodotus: οὐδὲ *γὰρ* πιστὰ λέγουσι ἐθέλει πείθεσθαι οὐδείς. Fisher 1992, 363 says the ring story is "too cruel and unfair" to be tragic on Aristotle's account and that, if his death is attributed to his crimes, "it involves too little sympathy and admiration to evoke tragic pity". Diesner 218 sees Polycrates' tragedy in the fact that his fall is "mindestens teilweise unverschuldet". It would make a poor tragedy indeed if the tragic hero were 'mindestens teilweise' tragic.

40) 42.2ᵀΩ βασιλεῦ, ἐγὼ τόνδε ἑλὼν οὐκ *ἐδικαίωσα* φέρειν ἐς ἀγορήν. Δίκη: Lloyd-Jones 1983; H. Frisch, *Might and right in antiquity*, New York 1976; V.A. Rodgers, *Some Thoughts on Dike*, CQ 21 (1971), 289-301; E.A. Havelock, *The Greek Concept of Justice*, Cambridge, Mass. 1978; M. Gagarin, *Dike in Archaic Greek Thought*, CP 69 (1974), 186-97; D. Loenen, *Dike*, Amsterdam 1948.

the fish means to him: normally, he would have sold it in the market-place as this is his way of earning a living. It is this feature of the fisherman Herodotus emphasizes: he makes the man describe himself as ἀποχειροβίοτος, 'one whose life depends on his hands', a word used only here in Herodotus, never before and very seldom after him[41]). Apparently we are expected to give attention to the fact that this fisherman is ἀποχειροβίοτος: his conduct is thus set off from the way his king operates, in that he is willing to bring a substantial sacrifice in order to achieve his purpose, wheras Polycrates is not.

Amasis is contrasted with Polycrates, too. He is the only king who does not conform to the pattern of royal behaviour in Herodotus; in fact, he is portrayed as the very counterpart of a Herodotean king. In 2.173.2 he is reproached for doing οὐδαμῶς βασιλικά and for failing to look like a 'great man' to his subjects: he should 'sit all day in state upon a stately throne' but instead he is an οὐδαμῶς κατεσπουδασμένος ἀνήρ (174.1; 173.4). When attending to his royal duties he goes about his work 'seriously' (προθύμως, 173.1) but he takes time for relaxation. For him, life is more than being a king. As we have seen, the portrayal of Polycrates focuses exclusively on his powerful position. This contrast is underlined by the fact that Amasis has an open eye for limits: he stops building when he thinks he has received an omen (175.5 ἐνθυμητὸν ποιησάμενον), although the buildings constructed were enormous (175.1 πάντας ὑπερβαλόμενος τῷ τε ὕψει τε καὶ τῷ μεγάθεϊ; λίθους..ὑπερφυέας τὸ μέγαθος; 2 ὑπερμεγάθεας). So here again it is clear that power and its splendour do not blink Amasis for possible dangers as they do Polycrates. Amasis thus is the right person to admonish Polycrates[42]).

41) The only example I have been able to find is Xenophon, *Cyr.* 8.3.37, where, too, it contrasts a commoner (the exemplary Pheraulas) with the powers that be.

42) Hohti 1976 (27-28) remarks on the fact that Amasis has had no untoward experience; therefore his advice is useless, Hohti seems to imply. This is like disregarding the advice of a doctor because he has not actually experienced one's own disease. Apart from this, Hohti simply is wrong: in 3.10.2 Herodotus says Amasis has experienced οὐδὲν *μέγα* ἀνάρσιον πρῆγμα. On Amasis' exceptional position among Herodotean kings, cp. Rijksbaron 1987, 7-8; von Fritz I 304, Lateiner 1989, 194; Gould 1989, 80. Note that in the chapters on Amasis crucial words are *rarae aves*: βασιλικά and κατεσπουδάσθαι occur only here in Herodotus, of the words

The second stylistic instrument is: repetition of important features[43]). The prominent notion in the meeting with the fisherman is the idea of 'giving': in 42 no less than five references to 'giving' appear. As we have seen, emphasis is laid on the contrast between Polycrates and the fisherman in this respect. The feature leading up to Polycrates' undoing is thus indicated by repeating the crucial notion.

Polycrates has been told to throw away his πλείστου ἄξιον; he does not do that; the fisherman presents him with something 'worthy of him and his power' (σεῦ...ἄξιος καὶ τῆς σῆς ἀρχῆς, 42.2), that is to say, it is in accordance with the personality and position of Polycrates. In fact, Polycrates has offered too little and finds his offer rejected. The result is, that he dies in a way οὐκ ἀξίως ἀπηγήσιος[44]) and οὔτε ἑωυτοῦ ἀξίως οὔτε τῶν ἑωυτοῦ φρονημάτων, φρονήματα being specified as 'magnificence' (μεγαλοπρεπείη)[45]). The repetition suggests that the notion of ἄξιος is relevant: Polycrates refusing to part with 'magnificence' invites destruction in a manner far from magnificent.

Another example of meaningful repetition is εὑρίσκω. This verb is found five times in 39-45[46]). In the first and second case, it

describing expected royal behaviour (ἐν θρόνῳ σεμνῷ θωκέοντα, 173.2), θωκέω is a *hapax* and σεμνός occurs only once more (7.6); of the words denoting his actual behaviour, παιγνιήμων (173.1) is a *hapax*, παιγνίη (173.4) occurs only in 1.94. His scruple at the omen is also worded by a *hapax* (175.5 ἐνθυμητὸν ποιησάμενον). Another contrast with Polycrates should be noted: he gains the cooperation of his citizens by σοφίῃ, not by ἀγνωμοσύνῃ (1.172.2), whereas Polycrates counters opposition with violence (3.39.2;45.4).

43) Long 1987, following H.-P. Stahl (*Herodots Gyges-Tragödie*, Hermes 96, 1968), has recognized repetition and its counterpart, variation, as a stylistic means in Herodotus, but has not gone much further than signalling the fact in short stories of the first book. He has not drawn systematic conclusions.

44) 125.3 'in some way not fit to be told' (Godley).

45) 125.2. Godley correctly translates the second φρονήματα with 'pride', de Sélincourt with 'high ambition'', Fisher 1992, 362 with 'high thoughts'. This shift of meaning is a somewhat surprising variation , as in Oroetes' message φρονήματα means 'expansionist ambitions' (122.3) and the two passages in this story are the only instances of φρονήματα (plural) in Herodotus. I take the hermeneutic meaning of this variation to be that it focuses attention on the fact that Polycrates aspired not so much to expansion as to the magnificence of power. The relation between ἄξιος and μεγαλοπρεπείη is further stressed by 125.2 ('no Greek tyrant was ἄξιος to be compared with Polycrates *qua* magnificence').

46) Εὑρίσκω: 40.4; 41.1; 42.3,4 and 43.1.

designates the search for the proper means of appeasing φθόνος. In the other three cases the verb denotes the 'finding *back*' of the ring. In the last of these three instances Amasis takes this 'finding back' as a hint that Polycrates' end will not be pleasant. The suggestion is obvious: because Polycrates does not *find* the right means for pacifying φθόνος he *finds back* the inadequate means and this forebodes his undignified death. There is something wrong with Polycrates' 'finding': this is what the repetition of the element 'finding' suggests.

Amasis proposed 'mental suffering', ἀλγεῖν τὴν ψυχήν, as a remedy. At the end of the first story, Amasis breaks off the alliance—ἵνα μὴ αὐτὸς ἀλγήσειε τὴν ψυχήν, 'to avoid *mental suffering himself*' in view of Polycrates' impending collapse (43.2). The repetition of the formula (used only here, as Immerwahr remarks[47])) suggests that we have to look into the (absence of) 'suffering' for an explanation.

The notion of 'success' (as expressed by the stem εὐτυχ-) appears ten times in 39-40[48]). In 40.2, Amasis identifies εὐτυχέειν τὰ πάντα as the basis of 'envy' and he suggests two ways of dealing with it. Now, when at the end (43.1 and 44.1) the same formula marks Polycrates, it is evident that all attempts at remedy have been in vain. The repetition makes it clear, that no 'suffering' has found place. As before, the repetition in its new context suggests the cause of the turn events have taken: here, εὐτυχέειν τὰ πάντα itself would seem to be the source of Polycrates' not carrying out Amasis' advice. Its grip on his conduct is stronger than that of his rational conclusions and so makes him incur disaster.

I have already indicated the importance of εὐτυχέειν τὰ πάντα in making us see that Polycrates does not implement the second piece of Amasis' advice—'go on using the remedy I propose'. Polycrates

47) Immerwahr 1957, 318, who does not say what we are to make of this repetition. The repetition has escaped von Fritz 116 who explains Amasis' action by saying 'er [will] nicht in seinen Untergang mit hineingezogen werden', whereas the text gives another motive.

48) Versnel explains: 'the author wanted to indicate as emphatically as possible that *good fortune* was to be the theme of the episode' (25; his italics). That is true, but Versnel has neglected to look at the end of the episode, where a repetition occurs without the thematic value.

has never even felt the need to start applying the remedy in the way envisaged by Amasis and there is nothing to suggest a change of heart. I stress this point of Polycrates' neglecting the second counsel, because it has been ignored by all commentators. Still, the fact is unmistakable and significant: when those requiring therapy waive it, prognostication is fairly secure.

2. *The place of Polycrates in the Histories*

Traditionally, the story of the ring is regarded as showing that Polycrates is so prosperous as to be *ipso facto* beyond redemption. The return of the ring, so we hear, shows that the gods do not accept Polycrates' attempt at appeasement. We have seen that commentators are virtually unanimous in agreeing that Polycrates' endeavour to soothe 'envy' is wholehearted; Versnel takes the godly refusal as making Polycrates a tragic figure, as if tragedy did not stress personal responsibility under fated circumstances. I hope to have made it clear that a strong case can be made for imputing responsibility to the lord of the ring, for its recovery. In this section my aim is to show that the interpretation by which fate would be responsible for the retrieval of the ring implies two conclusions that are improbable in the light of comparable episodes in Herodotus. Without going into this matter very deeply I want to point to some illogicalities involved in the traditional interpretations so as to support the interpretation offered here.

Let us take the cases of Xerxes and Croesus as a starting-point, since the wording and philosophy of Amasis' advice suggest close resemblance between the views of Artabanus, Solon and Amasis[49]).

Xerxes and Croesus resemble each other on account of the fact that neither is prepared to take a step back voluntarily. This *modus operandi* is not regarded as idiosyncrasy; the phenomenon is stated in general terms by Xerxes' adviser, Artabanus (7.49.4): εὐπρηξίης

49) The views of Artabanus are expounded in 7.10, 16, 18, 46, 49 and 51; those of Solon in 1.32. On advisers in Herodotus, see H. Bischoff, *Der Warner bei Herodot* (Marburg 1932, = Marg 302-19; 681-7); R. Lattimore, *The wise advisor in Herodotus*, CP 34 (1939), 24-35.

δὲ οὐκ ἔστι ἀνθρώποισι οὐδεμία πληθώρη ('nobody, however much he succeeds, can ever feel that he has enough'[50]).

The truth of this statement is demonstrated by two utterances of Xerxes. Concerning the question whether the Persians must attack the Greeks, Artabanus first remarks that it is by far the most profitable proposition to 'deliberate carefully' (εὖ βουλεύεσθαι, 4.10δ2). Φθόνος, he says, takes care of 'all things standing out', causing disaster in stark contrast to former greatness (10ε)[51]) and he therefore counsels 'holding back' (ἐπισχεῖν, 10ζ). This counsel makes Xerxes 'angry' (θυμωθείς, 11.1), but reason prevails and, in spite of a dream ordering him to do otherwise, Xerxes cancels the expedition[52]). Xerxes is indeed faced with the concurrent effects of reason and irrational impulse here: his anger (ἡ νεότης ἐπέζεσε, 13.2) he explains by pointing to a loss of self-control owing to temporarily defective 'thinking' (φρένες, 13.2); this made him 'foolishly' cast aside good advice (οὐκ ἐσωφρόνεον εἴπας ἐς σὲ μάταια ἔπεα χρηστῆς εἵνεκα συμβουλίης, 15.1).

Now a second dream appears, spurring him on to attack; failing the expedition, the apparition states, Xerxes will become 'insignificant' again in just as short a time as he has become 'great and powerful' (14)[53]). This remark decides the matter. Notice that nothing else is predicted but loss of power; yet the remark leaves Xerxes 'very scared' (περιδεής, 15.1) and he regards it as a 'threat'

50) De Sélincourt. After the capture of Athens Xerxes sends a triumphant message to Artabanus in Susa, apprising him of τὴν παρεοῦσάν σφι εὐπρηξίην (8.54). The participle and the repetition of εὐπρηξίη are ominous. This is an excellent example of Herodotus' habit of suggesting interpretation implicitly *via* his choice of (rare) words, εὐπρηξίη appearing only in these two places in Herodotus. On maxims in Herodotus: Lang 1984, Ch. 4 and Gould 1989, 81-2.

51) Ὁρᾷς τὰ ὑπερέχοντα ζῷα ὡς κεραυνοῖ ὁ θεὸς οὐδὲ ἐᾷ φαντάζεσθαι, τὰ δὲ σμικρὰ οὐδέν μιν κνίζει...ἐπεάν σφι (= a big army) ὁ θεὸς φθονήσας φόβον ἐμβάλῃ ἢ βροντήν, δι' ὧν ἐφθάρησαν ἀναξίως ἑωυτῶν. Note the formal resemblance to Polycrates dying 'not ἑωυτοῦ ἀξίως' (125.2).

52) On Xerxes' dreams, see G. Germain, *Le songe de Xerxès et le rite babylonien du substitut royal*, REG 69 (1956), 303-313; R.G.A. van Lieshout, *A dream on a* καιρός *of history*, Mnemosyne 23 (1970), 225-49; J.A. Evans, *The dream of Xerxes*, CJ 57 (1961), 109-111. On dreams in Herodotus: P. Frisch, *Die Träume bei Herodot* (Meisenheim 1968). On dreams in general: Dodds 1951, Ch. 4, and 1973, Ch. 9.

53) ὡς καὶ μέγας καὶ πολλὸς ἐγένεο ἐν ὀλίγῳ χρόνῳ, οὕτω καὶ ταπεινὸς ὀπίσω κατὰ τάχος ἔσεαι.

(διαπειλῆσαν, 15.2). And now, Xerxes still thinks Artabanus gave him 'good advice' (χρηστῆς...συμβουλίης, 15.1), but he decides to act against it[54]). The suggestion is clear: his eagerness to preserve his power makes Xerxes ready to act against his better judgment. What happens here has been foreshadowed by Artabanus in 10ε: 'the god' punishes the exceedingly prosperous by implanting 'panic' (φόβον) or, more generally, 'lapse of reason' (βροντή, literally, 'thunderbolt') in them. Xerxes panics at the prospect of losing power.

Another reaction of Xerxes shows the truth of Artabanus' εὐπρηξίη remark. Like Amasis, Artabanus observes that 'the god' is φθονερός (7.45.4), a statement based on the observation that real happiness is unattainable for human beings (46.3). Xerxes explicitly agrees with Artabanus on the threat of φθόνος to human happiness (7.47.1) and has succumbed to misgivings on the matter in a general manner (46.2). Yet the influence of promising circumstances is so strong that he will not be guided by this observation of which he acknowledges the truth: μηδὲ κακῶν μεμνώμεθα *χρηστὰ ἔχοντες πρήγματα ἐν χερσί*, as he expresses it ('let us put aside these gloomy reflections, *for we have pleasant things in hand*', 47.1[55])). He simply refuses to have an eye for unpleasant truths, as was evident already from his anger at Artabanus' levelheaded analysis.

Xerxes allows for the *general* truth of Artabanus' warnings, only he does not apply them to his particular case; he is prepared to take some loss, he says, in order to achieve great profit (7.50.1)[56]). He never allows the possibility of a major setback to influence his thinking and so he has no doubt that he will defeat the Greeks and return victoriously without having experienced anything untoward at all (7.50.4). Influenced by his success he does not regard φθόνος as seriously threatening *him*. He admits that it may strike others.

54) The same phenomenon occurs in 7.50.1 sqq., where Xerxes agrees with Artabanus' saying 'chance governs man' (49.3 αἱ συμφοραὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἄρχουσι, a variant of Solon's opinion, 1.32.4: πᾶν ἐστι ἄνθρωπος συμφορή), but then delivers himself of an opinion diametrically opposed to Artabanus' statement.

55) De Sélincourt.

56) κρέσσον δὲ πάντα θαρσέοντα *ἥμισυ τῶν δεινῶν πάσχειν μᾶλλον ἢ* πᾶν χρῆμα προδειμαίνοντα *μηδαμὰ μηδὲν παθεῖν*. He summarizes his position by an aphorism (7.50.3): Μεγάλα γὰρ πρήγματα μεγάλοισι κινδύνοισι ἐθέλει καταιρέεσθαι.

Xerxes ends the *Historiae*; they begin with Croesus, as Dionysius Halicarnassensis puts it[57]). Solon tells Croesus not to focus on his current prosperity and to have an eye for the fact that "man is all chance". But Croesus, too, refuses to have an eye for the relative status of his wealth in view of all-governing chance. He, too, is 'angered' (σπερχθείς, 1.32.1) by an unadmiring attitude and dismisses Solon's opinion as 'very stupid' (χάρτα ἀμαθέα, 33). His reason: he 'is not pleased' by Solon's words (τῷ Κροίσῳ οὔτε ἐχαρίζετο, 1.33). He gives them no rational consideration (οὔτε λόγου ποιησάμενος οὐδενός, ib.). For this one-sided, non-rational stance there is instant νέμεσις when his son is killed, and 'suffering' results in passivity (ἐν πένθεϊ μεγάλῳ κατῆστο, 1.46.1)—no need for φθόνος now, for Croesus evidently no longer feels himself the luckiest man of all. However, it all starts anew at Cyrus' rise to power. Croesus does not appear to have learned anything from his sobering experience: again he closes his eyes to the possibility of a drawback as is evident from the way he misinterprets ambiguous oracles[58]). His misguided confidence in the continuity of his success is emphasized by his total neglect of sensible advice (71.2-4). As before, ἡδονή controls his behaviour after a rational start when he did not yet feel safe but threatened[59]) (ἐνέβησε ἐς φροντίδα, τὴν διάνοιαν ταύτην, 1.46.1-2, giving way to ὑπερήσθη, 54.1, and πολλόν

57) *Comp.* 4. He introduces 1.6.1 by: λήψομαι δ' ἐκ τῆς Ἡροδότου λέξεως τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς ἱστορίας, ἐπειδὴ καὶ γνώριμός ἐστι τοῖς πολλοῖς. On the Solon-Croesus episode, cf. O. Regenbogen, *Die Geschichte von Solon und Krösus*, in *Kleine Schriften* (München 1961 = Marg 375-404); C.C. Chiasson, *The Herodotean Solon*, GRBS 27 (1986), 249-262; M. Miller, *The Herodotean Croesus*, Klio 41 (1963), 58-94; H.-P. Stahl, *Learning through suffering?*, YCS 24 (1975), 1-37; von Fritz I 217-23. For the relationship of the ring episode with the Solon-Croesus episode, cf. von Fritz I 305, Immerwahr 1957, 318.

58) 1.54 and 56.

59) At the beginning of his career ἡδονή is also reported (1.27.5). He refrains from attacking the islands, having been persuaded by Bias or Pittacus (a wise man, in short). His adviser tells him he will be at an enormous disadvantage against the seafaring Ionians and Croesus' reaction is reported as: χάρτα ἡσθῆναι. So at this point 'pleasure' does not yet drive him to expansion, but it is already associated with (consolidation of) power. The fact that ἡδονή at this stage does not wreak havoc is perhaps not entirely unrelated to the fact that reason still plays a part in Croesus' mind; his plans against the islanders are described as ἐπενόεε...ἐπιχειρέειν (27.1) and he acknowledges that the advice is 'suitable' (προσφυέως γὰρ δόξαι λέγειν, 27.5).

τι μάλιστα πάντων ἥσθη, 56.1). The irrational impulse is again expressly contrasted to the rational alternative when the Pythia ascribes Croesus' fall to a lack of εὖ βουλεύεσθαι (1.91.4). As we see, the Pythia's rational alternative is put into the same words as Artabanus'.

The point of all this, then, is, that in Croesus and Xerxes success contains the seeds of its own destruction. It provokes φθόνος but will not be voluntarily terminated by the successful since it has addictive force, owing to its association with ἡδονή (provoking anger when obstructed) and the illusions of invulnerability it generates. Having perceived Polycrates' ἡδονή at his position, *a priori* we do not expect him to follow the admonition of his νοῦς, for in Herodotean rulers the influence of 'pleasure' eclipses rational considerations. Their fall is a matter of reason giving way to ἡδονή.

There is yet another typological feature of the *Histories*, exemplified by the conduct of Croesus and Xerxes, to suggest *a priori* that the return of the ring is caused, not by fate curbing too much prosperity, but by Polycrates' failure to follow Amasis' advice.

When in Herodotus highly successful kings are on the eve of disaster, they receive philosophically coloured advice pointing out to them that the human condition is subject to chance, and that, therefore, they would be well advised to proceed warily. The kings discount the philosophical wisdom contained in the advice, and pursue the course identified as giving 'pleasure'. The refusal informs the reader of the philosophical issue in hand. We see this happen in Croesus and in Xerxes, both blinded by 'pleasure' and their illusion of invulnerability, turning a deaf ear to their adviser's counsel. Therefore, if Polycrates were to give heed to the admonitions of his adviser he would be the only king to do so. If Polycrates (very near to the end of his career) is being counseled to 'suffer' in order to avert disaster, we expect him, *a priori*, not to obey, as speeches commending moderation tend to be rejected in the *Histories*. Polycrates would have been a striking exception if he had taken an advice to heart. In Herodotus great men are seldom cured; not because they are past remedy, but because they fail to take the rigorous and painful measures that would have saved them.

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