

RELIGIOUS TRANSGRESSION AND MONARCHY IN HERODOTUS' *HISTORIES*

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## ABSTRACT

Lindsey McCoy: Religious Transgression and Monarchy in Herodotus' *Histories*  
(Under the direction of Emily Baragwanath)

This thesis investigates the role of transgressions of a religious nature in Herodotus' *Histories*, beginning with a consideration of modern and ancient terminology, Herodotus' cultural relativism, and the complicated interplay of fate and the gods within human affairs. The examination of episodes involving such transgressions reveals that these acts are particularly associated with individuals wielding power and authority, and that a transgressive relationship with religion is a symptom of monarchy, rather than of ethnicity or culture. I analyze Herodotus' depiction of several monarchs who commit, or avoid committing, religious transgressions. These figures provide several interpretative options for readers regarding the singular character of Xerxes, and thus contribute to Herodotus' nuanced presentation of this last Persian king, and his motives for engagement against the Greeks.

To my parents, Michael and Tamara McCoy, for all their support.

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## INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITIONS

Herodotus' personal religious beliefs have been a topic of contention among scholars, with the following passage often cited to support a perceived reluctance, skepticism, or lack of sincerity in the historian's treatment of religion:<sup>1</sup>

τὰ μὲν νυν θεῖα τῶν ἀπηγημάτων οἷα ἤκουον, οὐκ εἰμι πρόθυμος ἐξηγέσθαι, ἔξω ἢ τὰ οὐνόματα αὐτῶν μόνον, νομίζων πάντας ἀνθρώπους ἴσον περὶ αὐτῶν ἐπίστασθαι· τὰ δ' ἂν ἐπιμνησθῆω αὐτῶν, ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου ἐξαναγκαζόμενος ἐπιμνησθήσομαι (2.3.2).<sup>2</sup>

Now, I am not ready to tell such stories as I have heard about the gods, except their names alone, for I believe that all men know equally about them: but I will mention those things which the story compels.<sup>3</sup>

At least some degree of reverence, however, can be understood in Herodotus' reticence on certain matters and, whatever his theological opinions may be, religious elements and episodes are recurrent throughout his *Histories*.<sup>4</sup> Despite Herodotus' claim that he mentions τὰ θεῖα only where necessary, the sheer accumulation of religious elements suggests their importance: sacred practices feature prominently in his ethnographic sections, oracles are

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<sup>1</sup> For a review of these basic arguments see Gould, 1994: 91-106 and Harrison, 2000: 11-14. See also Mikalson, 2002: 187-98 for the role of religion in Herodotus.

<sup>2</sup> Greek text from Wilson, 1927 (Oxford Classical Text).

<sup>3</sup> All translations are my own or are adapted from Godley's Loeb.

<sup>4</sup> In 2.171.1-2 Herodotus keeps silent (εὐστομα κείσθω) regarding an Egyptian mystery cult and the Greek Thesmophoria—both of which require secrecy.

often employed to supplement or corroborate his account,<sup>5</sup> and religious episodes are used to provide possible explanations for events or to flavor the character of an individual.

My aim is not to investigate the existence or extent of Herodotus' religious beliefs, however; so, for my purposes, a discussion of the sincerity behind each episode is not pertinent. Rather, my endeavor is to explore the role religious transgressions play in the *Histories*, a project which must begin with a discussion of what, exactly, a religious transgression is. Several factors make definition of "religious transgression" a difficult task. The first complication arises from the confluence of religion and custom. While modern notions see these concepts as distinct, yet related, in Herodotus the practice of religion clearly emerges as a subset of custom.<sup>6</sup> This apparent convergence of (the modern) terms is demonstrated by Herodotus' inclusion of sacred practices within his ethnographic narratives. In such sections, it becomes impossible to separate rites from mores, and an overlap between "religion" and "custom" is inevitable. As Gould observes, Herodotus' description of religion tends to focus on "shared ritual procedure," namely those practices involving sacrifice, death, and burial, but also

the traditional techniques of divination and oracular consultation peculiar to each culture, as well as their rituals of oath-taking and those which serve to create social solidarity. [Herodotus] observes and records the binding importance of rituals connected with xenia and supplication, with purification, and with the cult of ancestors...<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Kindt, 2006: 35, where she argues that Herodotus uses oracles "to establish the authority of his *Histories* as text written in a new genre," asserting that they mirror the authoritative voice of the historian himself. On oracles in Herodotus see also Grethlein, 2013: 203-5, 208-15.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Munson, 1991: 46.

<sup>7</sup> Gould, 1994: 193.

Many of these practices certainly fall under the category of both τὰ θεῖα and νόμος. A discussion of religion—for which Greek had no single term—is therefore complicated by modern terminology and distinctions. In view of this inevitable overlap of categories, I avoid the term “sacrilege”; some of the episodes I will discuss are not specifically connected to the modern idea of religion, though they deal with “shared ritual procedure.” If we accept Gould’s broad description of religion—with its focus on ritual (as opposed to doctrine)—we can perhaps define transgressions as tending to be tangible, that is consisting of physical actions and not moral mindsets. Current trends in scholarship, however, are moving away from such a narrow view of Greek religion.<sup>8</sup> Harrison cautions that the centrality of ritual as presented by Gould must be qualified, and argues that “even if Herodotus chooses when describing foreign peoples’ customs only to do so in terms of the bare bones of what they do rather than what they say, certain assumptions underpin these accounts: that different peoples mean the same by sacrifice, oaths, or divination, for example, even if they perform them differently.”<sup>9</sup> Herodotus does include numerous physical—and therefore ritual-focused—transgressions, however, including especially the violations of sacred spaces and corpses. Scullion points out that the *Histories* is “replete with acts of sacrilege, most commonly violations of sanctuaries, that meet with divine retribution” whereas other forms of wrongdoing, such as the “despotic arrogance and aggression that drives the general course of events is by contrast elusive of religious definition and divine sanction.”<sup>10</sup> Scullion sees this distinction as corresponding to the “contrast between Herodotus’ interest in ritual and his

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<sup>8</sup> Kindt discusses the inclusion or avoidance of Greek theology in scholarship over time (2016: 12-34). Cf. Naiden, 2013: 317-30.

<sup>9</sup> Harrison, 2000: 220-222.

<sup>10</sup> Scullion, 2006: 194.



wariness of theology.”<sup>11</sup> ‘Religion’, then, is a loaded term and although it is a modern, not an ancient, category, it serves as helpful shorthand for those practices which intended to regulate relations between humans and the divine.

A second complication presented by the attempt to define a religious transgression stems from Herodotus’ profound cultural relativism.<sup>12</sup> That is, from whose perspective are we to judge potential violations: from the perspective of the Egyptians? Scythians? Lydians? Greeks? This is an especially difficult question to answer when an individual of one ethnicity violates the customs of another. At first blush one might assume that Herodotus privileges Greek customs and perspectives, but this does not seem to be the case. As Rosaria Munson points out, Herodotus’ discussion of foreign cultures often addresses Greek misconceptions and aims at “refuting or countering Greek stories that perpetuate damaging stereotypes of the *barbaroi*.”<sup>13</sup> Tim Rood likewise sees Herodotus’ treatment of foreign cultures not as “pandering to Greek assumptions of cultural superiority,” but rather as a device for encouraging “readers or listeners to think through and question their own preconceptions.”<sup>14</sup> Herodotus himself famously illustrates the importance of cultural relativism through Darius’ interview with the Indians in book 3:

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<sup>11</sup> Scullion, 2006: 194.

<sup>12</sup> Harrison takes a different view, stating that although Herodotus’ authorial judgments may reveal “a belief that men should not actively mock or violate the sacred customs of others, that they should give the benefit of the doubt to the gods worshipped by foreign peoples, disapproval is still apparently an available option: indeed the designation of a god as local seems itself a mark of disapproval.” He goes on to caution that while Herodotus may encourage respect for other cultures’ traditions, “this should not be mistaken for an all-out cultural relativism” (2000: 216-17). See also Munson, 2004:156-163 for the “limits of relativism” and Thomas, 2000: 102-33 on the intersection of *nomos* and geography in Herodotus’ interpretations of various peoples.

<sup>13</sup> Munson, 2001: 141.

<sup>14</sup> Rood, 2006: 298. He continues: “[Herodotus] encourages Greeks to think about how other cultures view foreign peoples, and so how they as Greeks appear to others in much the same way that foreign peoples appear to Greeks.”

Δαρεῖος ἐπὶ τῆς ἐωυτοῦ ἀρχῆς καλέσας Ἑλλήνων τοὺς παρόντας εἶρετο ἐπὶ κόσῳ ἂν χρήματι βουλοίατο τοὺς πατέρας ἀποθνήσκοντας κατασιτέεσθαι· οἱ δὲ ἐπ’ οὐδενὶ ἔφασαν ἔρδειν ἂν ταῦτα. Δαρεῖος δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα καλέσας Ἰνδῶν τοὺς καλεομένους Καλλατίας, οἱ τοὺς γονέας κατεσθίουσι, εἶρετο, παρόντων τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ δι’ ἐρμηνέος μανθανόντων τὰ λεγόμενα, ἐπὶ τίνι χρήματι δεξαΐατ’ ἂν τελευτῶντας τοὺς πατέρας κατακαΐειν πυρί· οἱ δὲ ἀμβώσαντες μέγα εὐφημέειν μιν ἐκέλευον. οὕτω μὲν νυν ταῦτα νενόμισται, καὶ ὀρθῶς μοι δοκεῖ Πίνδαρος ποιῆσαι νόμον πάντων βασιλέα φήσας εἶναι (3.38.3-4).

When Darius was king he summoned the Greeks who were standing nearby and asked them at what price they would be willing to eat their deceased fathers. They replied that there was no amount that would compel them to do such a thing. Then Darius summoned those Indians called the Callatiae, who eat their parents, and asked them in the presence of the Greeks (who understood what was said through interpreters) at what price they would be willing to burn their deceased fathers in a fire. And they cried out and bid him to keep silent. So firmly did they believe such things; and I think Pindar rightly observes that custom is the king of all.

We will return to this important matter later, but for now it is simply important to note that the meeting of cultures in the *Histories* complicates our picture of transgression: what is taboo in one culture may be permitted in another.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, the idea of a transgression is further complicated by the role of fate and the gods within human affairs. Sometimes transgressions are committed accidentally, or are fated to occur, and sometimes individuals are prompted to commit them through divine interference. Should we consider such actions to be as transgressive as those that are carried out from free will? Can such actions be considered transgressions at all? Once again, we will return to these questions later.

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<sup>15</sup> Christ discusses how Herodotus employs this interview to prove Cambyses’ madness, but also argues that Herodotus “is interested not only in the way Darius’ experiment substantiates his own view, but also in what it reveals about the autocrat who conducts it.” Christ concludes that “Darius’ kingly play with others’ *nomoi* suggests that he, like so many other Herodotean kings, does not fully appreciate that *nomos* is *king*” (1994: 188). We will return below (pp. 24-33) to the transgressive relationship between monarchy and *nomos* in the Cambyses episode.

In view of such complications—that is, the discrepancy between modern and ancient ideas of religion and custom, the consideration of cultural relativism, and the role of fate and divinity in determining human action—our provisional definition will need to be broad. For my purposes then, a religious transgression will be any violation, whether accidental, fated, or deliberate, of a practice intended to regulate relations between humans and gods, regardless of the ethnicity of either the custom or the agent. Such a broad definition necessarily encompasses numerous examples of religious transgressions throughout the *Histories*. Despite its breadth, however, this definition can still not account for the manifold expressions of religious transgression in Herodotus, since it ignores transgressive mind-sets such as pride. Artabanus explicitly states that pride angers the gods in his advice to Xerxes:

ὁρᾷς τὰ ὑπερέχοντα ζῷα ὡς κεραυνοῖ ὁ θεὸς οὐδὲ ἑᾷ φαντάζεσθαι, τὰ δὲ μικρὰ οὐδὲν μιν κνίζει· ὁρᾷς δὲ ὡς ἐς οἰκήματα τὰ μέγιστα αἰεὶ καὶ δένδρεα τὰ τοιαῦτα ἀποσκήπτει τὰ βέλεα. φιλέει γὰρ ὁ θεὸς τὰ ὑπερέχοντα πάντα κολούειν. οὕτω δὲ καὶ στρατὸς πολλὸς ὑπὸ ὀλίγου διαφθείρεται κατὰ τοιόνδε· ἐπεὰν σφι ὁ θεὸς φθονήσας φόβον ἐμβάλῃ ἢ βροντὴν, δι' ὧν ἐφθάρησαν ἀναξίως ἑωυτῶν. οὐ γὰρ ἑᾷ φρονέειν μέγα ὁ θεὸς ἄλλον ἢ ἑωυτόν (7.10E).

You see how the god strikes prominent creatures with thunderbolts, and does not allow them to show themselves off, while small creatures do not provoke him. And you see how he always hurls down bolts upon the tallest houses and trees: for the god loves to bring low all things prominent. And thus a large army is destroyed by a smaller in the following way: whenever the jealous god casts fear or a thunderbolt among them, by which they perish undeservedly. For the god does not allow anyone but himself to think highly.<sup>16</sup>

My discussion will nevertheless focus on actions, since transgressive mindsets are more difficult to identify (they are not usually explicitly described, and open up an expanse of

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<sup>16</sup> Although this is a Persian perspective that is recounted late in the work, earlier episodes seem to confirm this general opinion as shared by Herodotus and/or the narrator. See for example Croesus, whom Herodotus speculates angered the gods by considering himself the most blessed (1.34), and Apries, who believed not even a god could bring him down and was subsequently punished (2.169).

materials too broad for the present discussion). These performed violations fall under the following categories: transgressions against oracles and portents, whether by blatant disobedience (not misinterpretation) or forgery; transgressions against sacred spaces, either by burning, sacking, mockery, or unlawful entry; and transgressions against the dead, typically by disrespect of a corpse. Even though there is an abundance of such transgressions, however, we will find that numerous other indiscretions do not neatly fit into a category.

The examination of episodes involving religious transgression reveals that such acts are particularly associated with individuals wielding power and authority, and especially with monarchs—regardless of their ethnicity. In this way, a transgressive relationship with religion is portrayed as symptomatic of monarchy, rather than of ethnicity or culture. The accounts of these monarchs' transgressions complicate the picture of causation presented in Herodotus: their indiscretions reveal a complicated web of fate, divinity, and human responsibility, factors which together drive personal actions and lead to greater repercussions. By transposing these patterns onto the final monarch of the *Histories*, Xerxes, Herodotus further underscores the complexity of this character as well as the complicated web of motivation that lies behind his decision to invade Greece.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> For a general discussion of Xerxes' motives, see Baragwanath, 2008: 240-88.

## ALEXANDER AND MENELAUS: INITIAL ACTS

In the opening sections of his *Histories*, Herodotus details a series of abductions claimed by the ‘learned Persians’ to have initiated the Hellenic-Asiatic conflict. According to these Persians, Alexander, the son of Priam, had heard of the thefts of Io, Europa, and Medea and had subsequently “wished to have a wife from Hellas by abduction; for he was entirely certain that he would not pay a penalty” (1.3). In this version, then, the abduction of Helen was yet another crime in a series committed by both Eastern and Greek individuals. Unlike the previous thefts, however, Alexander committed not only an act of vengeful reciprocity but also an act that transgressed the religious<sup>18</sup> custom of *xenia*.<sup>19</sup> Notably, in this telling the element of divine responsibility is downplayed—there is no mention of the beauty contest, or of Helen as Alexander’s promised prize—while Alexander’s own actions are presented as premeditated. Here Herodotus highlights human responsibility, and more clearly designates the act as a transgression, thereby providing an example of religious transgression at the very opening of his account. And although Herodotus ultimately declines to stand behind these semi-mythic abductions as the true cause of the conflict (ἐγὼ δὲ περὶ μὲν τούτων οὐκ ἔρχομαι ἐρέων ὡς οὕτως ἢ ἄλλως κως ταῦτα ἐγένετο, 1.5.3), the inclusion of Helen’s abduction establishes early on in the text that religious transgression may have historical consequences.

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<sup>18</sup> *Xenia* can be considered a religious custom because it is commonly said to be monitored by the gods (especially by Zeus, as Vandiver emphasizes in the title of her essay, “Strangers are from Zeus: Homeric *Xenia* at the Courts of Proteus and Croesus”); moreover, the Egyptians describe its violation as ἀνόσιον, as discussed below.

<sup>19</sup> Although a transgression against *xenia* is not overtly stated in the passage, it would be obvious to Greek readers that the theft of Helen constituted a violation of guest-friendship. Moreover, Alexander’s transgression of *xenia* is explicitly noted by the Egyptians Thonis and Proteus in book 2, as we will see.

Moreover, the account of Alexander is in some ways paradigmatic<sup>20</sup> for upcoming events in the *Histories*, namely the transgressive relationship monarchs often have with religious custom—for although Alexander is not himself a monarch, he is closely tied to monarchy as the son of a king.

A fuller picture of Helen’s abduction is continued in book 2, where it culminates with a much harsher authorial judgment on the significance of Paris’ religious transgression. According to Herodotus, Helen never reached Troy:<sup>21</sup> Alexander had been waylaid in Egypt on his return journey when his men disembarked and fled to an Egyptian temple. There, they explained their situation to its priest, Thonis, and when they had told “the whole story of Helen and the wrong done Menelaus” (πάντα λόγον ἐξηγεύμενοι ὡς εἶχε περὶ τὴν Ἑλένην τε καὶ τὴν ἐς Μενέλεων ἀδικίην, 2.113.3), Thonis sent the following message to king Proteus, seeking his advice:

Ἦκει ξεῖνος, γένος μὲν Τευκρός, ἔργον δὲ ἀνόσιον ἐν τῇ Ἑλλάδι ἐξεργασμένος· ξεῖνον γὰρ τὸν ἐωυτοῦ ἐξαπατήσας τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτὴν τε ταύτην ἄγων ἦκει καὶ πολλὰ κάρτα χρήματα, ὑπὸ ἀνέμων ἐς γῆν τὴν σὴν ἀπενειχθεῖς· κότερα δῆτα τοῦτον ἐῶμεν ἀσινέα ἐκπλέειν ἢ ἀπελώμεθα τὰ ἔχων ἦλθε (2.114.2);

A stranger, a Teucrian, has come, who has committed a profane deed in Hellas: for having deceived his guest-friend he has come bringing that man’s wife and a great deal of wealth, driven to your land by the wind. Should we allow him to sail away unharmed, or should we take away the things he has brought with him?

Proteus asks that this man “who has acted impiously against his guest-friend” (ὅστις κοτὲ ἐστι <ὁ> ἀνόσια ἐξεργασμένος ξεῖνον τὸν ἐωυτοῦ, 2.114.3) be sent to him. Once Alexander

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<sup>20</sup> Saïd sees the whole Trojan War cycle as paradigmatic, with its characters and themes reappearing “at various points in the *Histories*...and each time they add meaning to the historical events” (2012: 98).

<sup>21</sup> See de Jong, 2012: 127-142 for a close reading of the Helen *logos* and its broader implications.

is in his court, Proteus questions the Trojan prince, asking where he had acquired Helen.

Alexander lies about the theft of Helen, but his men reveal the truth. Proteus then chastises

Alexander, saying:

Ἐγὼ εἰ μὴ περὶ πολλοῦ ἡγεύμην μηδένα ξείνων κτείνειν, ὅσοι ὑπ' ἀνέμων ἤδη ἀπολαμφθέντες ἦλθον ἐς χώραν τὴν ἐμήν, ἐγὼ ἂν σε ὑπὲρ τοῦ Ἑλλήνος ἐτεισάμην, τὸν, ὃ κάκιστε ἀνδρῶν, ξεινίων τυχὼν ἔργον ἀνοσιώτατον ἐργάσαιο· παρὰ τοῦ σεωυτοῦ ξείνου τὴν γυναῖκα ἦλθες (2.115.4).

If I did not make it my habit to never kill a stranger who, caught up by the winds, has come to my land, I would have punished you on behalf of the Greeks, you basest of men, who committed the most profane deed when you were in a situation of guest-friendship: you made a pass at your host's wife.

Although Alexander's men acknowledge that the theft of Helen is an injustice (ἀδικίην), both Proteus and Thonis confirm that a transgression of *xenia* is at once a transgression of humans and the divine: both emphasize the condition of guest-friendship,<sup>22</sup> and both call its violation “unholy” or “profane” (ἀνόσιον, ἀνόσια); in his rebuke to Alexander, Proteus even uses the superlative form ἀνοσιώτατον, “most profane, most unholy.” That this confirmation comes from a pair of Egyptians thereby suggests that the principles of *xenia* extended beyond the realm of Greece, and Egyptians at the very least appear to have shared in this practice.<sup>23</sup> Indeed Proteus' rebuke offers an especially authoritative view on the importance of *xenia* for, as Mathieu de Bakker argues, Proteus is

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<sup>22</sup> See Vandiver, 2012: 148: “The frequency of the *xenia* term indicates how central the concept is for this *logos*. There are nine uses of *xenos*, *xenia*, or a compound in rapid succession; nowhere else in the *Histories* do *xenia*-words cluster so thickly together. Proteus makes it clear that the main source of his outrage and horror at Paris' action is precisely the violation of *xenia* that those actions entail... This point is highlighted by the emphatic repetitions of the reflexive pronouns...”

<sup>23</sup> In fact, Herodotus claims that much of Greek religion came originally from the Egyptians (see, for example, 2.50.1-2).

staged as a Herodotean mouthpiece, who teaches Greeks correct religious observance.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, in an attempt to right the situation, Proteus seizes Helen and the other stolen goods for safekeeping until Menelaus might retrieve them.

Proteus further solidifies his role as a moral exemplar by displaying the correct sort of hospitable behavior (ξενίων ἤντησε μεγάλων, 2.119.1) upon Menelaus' arrival, greeting him as a guest and immediately returning his wife and property. Having successfully retrieved his belongings Menelaus tries to sail home, but he finds that the weather conditions do not allow for departure. In circumstances reminiscent of Iphigenia, Menelaus sacrifices two Egyptian children so that he can be on his way. Herodotus explicitly labels this action as a sacrilege, describing it as πρῆγμα οὐκ ὅσιον (2.119.2-3), "a deed not sanctioned by divine law." Moreover, Menelaus' solution goes against regional custom, as outlined by Herodotus in his ethnographic detail of Egypt. While discussing the worship and antiquity of Heracles, Herodotus mentions an unfounded rumor Greeks tell of the Egyptians, that is, that the Egyptians had once attempted to sacrifice Heracles to Zeus.<sup>25</sup> Herodotus dismisses this story as a demonstration of ignorance:

ἐμοὶ μὲν νυν δοκέουσι ταῦτα λέγοντες τῆς Αἰγυπτίων φύσιος καὶ τῶν νόμων  
πάμπαν ἀπείρως ἔχειν οἱ Ἕλληνες· τοῖσι γὰρ οὐδὲ κτήνεα ὅσῃ θύειν ἐστὶ  
χωρὶς ὄϊων καὶ ἐρσένων βοῶν καὶ μόσχων, ὅσοι ἂν καθαροὶ ἔωσι, καὶ χηνῶν,  
κῶς ἂν οὗτοι ἀνθρώπους θύοιεν (2.45.2);

Now by saying such things the Greeks seem to me to be entirely ignorant of the character and customs of the Egyptians: for it is a profanity for them to sacrifice animals, except swine and bulls and calves, if they are pure, and geese, so how would such people sacrifice men?

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<sup>24</sup> De Bakker, 2012: 113-17.

<sup>25</sup> See Munson, 2001: 141-2.



This ethnographic detail precedes the story of Menelaus' human sacrifice, and thus readers are fully aware of the profanity of his deed prior to its execution. After this crime Menelaus is μισηθείς τε καὶ διωκόμενος (2.119.3), "hated and pursued" by the Egyptians, just as Alexander was pursued by the Greeks after his theft of Helen.

Herodotus was not obliged to include this alternative version of Helen's abduction, so he presumably did so for a reason. The effect of the Menelaus episode in Egypt is to provide a parallel to Alexander's transgression: both royals commit a crime against someone who has provided guest-friendship and both are subsequently pursued. The alternative tale of Helen's abduction and the account of Menelaus' human sacrifice enables Herodotus to provide a Greek equivalent to the Asiatic/Persian crime. By having monarchs (or a near-monarch, in Alexander's case) of differing cultures commit similar crimes, Herodotus demonstrates that religious transgression is not dependent upon ethnicity—Greeks are just as prone to commit such crimes as Persians. Although both Alexander and Menelaus transgress against *xenia*, however, they do so in very different ways. Alexander transgresses *xenia* by stealing Menelaus' wife, an action that seems to be especially offensive to Greeks.<sup>26</sup> Menelaus transgresses *xenia* by sacrificing Egyptian children, an offense which has been previously and explicitly denounced as profane in Egypt.

It seems that for Herodotus, no religion or custom should be violated, although he does not guarantee equal retribution. It is worth noting that Menelaus is not punished beyond that "hatred and pursuit", while Alexander's transgression resulted in the eventual defeat of his people after a long and arduous war. In fact, Herodotus himself claims that the Trojans'

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<sup>26</sup> In the proem Herodotus has the Persians claim that, although they think the theft of women is unjust, they find it particularly foolish to avenge rape—they are referring to the Greeks' retaliation for the theft of Helen: τὸ μὲν νυν ἄρπάζειν γυναῖκας ἀνδρῶν ἀδίκων νομίζειν ἔργον εἶναι, τὸ δὲ ἄρπασθεισέων σπουδὴν ποιήσασθαι τιμωρέειν ἀνοήτων, τὸ δὲ μηδεμίαν ὥρην ἔχειν ἄρπασθεισέων σωφρόνων· δῆλα γὰρ δὴ ὅτι, εἰ μὴ αὐταὶ ἐβούλοντο, οὐκ ἂν ἥρπάζοντο (1.4.2).

defeat was a punishment for their injustice, in one of only two explicit authorial judgments about divine vengeance:

ἀλλ' οὐ γὰρ εἶχον Ἑλένην ἀποδοῦναι, οὐδὲ λέγουσι αὐτοῖσι τὴν ἀληθείην ἐπίστευον οἱ Ἕλληνες, ὥς μὲν ἐγὼ γνώμην ἀποφαίνομαι, τοῦ δαιμονίου παρασκευάζοντος ὅκως πανωλεθρίῃ ἀπολόμενοι καταφανὲς τοῦτο τοῖσι ἀνθρώποισι ποιήσωσι, ὥς τῶν μεγάλων ἀδικημάτων μεγάλαι εἰσὶ καὶ αἱ τιμωρίαι παρὰ τῶν θεῶν. καὶ ταῦτα μὲν τῇ ἐμοὶ δοκέει εἶρηται (2.120.5).

But since they did not have Helen to give back, and since the Greeks did not believe them, although they spoke the truth, I hold this opinion—divine power contrived that [the Trojans], perishing in utter destruction, should make this clear to mankind: that for great injustices there is also great retribution from the gods. These things, which I have stated, seem true to me.

Thus Herodotus has established early on in the text that religious transgressions warrant retribution from the gods, and that they can have serious historical consequences.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> For a discussion on divine retribution in Herodotus, see Harrison, 2000: 102-121.

## MYCERINUS: TRANSGRESSION, FATE, AND HUMAN CULPABILITY

Both Menelaus' and Alexander's transgressions were firmly in the realm of human responsibility, although in both cases Herodotus could just as easily have laid the blame on divine interference. Alexander's crime could have been construed as the result of the beauty contest, but Herodotus instead presented it as a premeditated plot. Likewise, Menelaus' situation mirrors that of his brother Agamemnon, who had to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia to appease Artemis and gain favorable weather. No mention is made in Herodotus' account of appeasing a god, although it can be assumed that this was Menelaus' goal.

But what can we make of transgressions that are somewhat out of human control? There are a handful of "accidental" transgressions in the *Histories*: an inadvertent fire burns down a temple (1.19); Darius is persuaded to open Nitocris' tomb by her tricky inscription (1.187); and several individuals forget or misinterpret an oracle and end up disobeying its advice. It is important to note that although these actions are "accidental" the transgressors are not free from blame. The inadvertent fire from book 1 causes Alyattes to be struck with illness until it is repaired. Although Darius is tricked, his action is still considered reprehensible since it stems from greed.<sup>28</sup> The inability to properly decipher an oracle does not release one from the consequences of not following its advice.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> For a discussion of this episode and a possible religious defense for Darius' actions see Dillery, 1992: 30-38.

<sup>29</sup> See Hollmann, 2001: 94-117 for an examination of the riddle-like quality of nearly half the oracles related by Herodotus, as well as the difficulty of interpretation. See also Harrison, 2000: 122-57, where he discusses the problem of oracular misinterpretation, and who is to be held responsible.

The most detailed account of an accidental transgression and its unexpected repercussions is found in the story of Cheops, Chephren, and Mycerinus (2.124-134). Cheops was an Egyptian king who closed all the temples, effectively barring his people from all religious practice, and subjected them to slave labor. After his death, he was succeeded by his brother Chephren, who conducted himself in a similar way. The result is an extended period of suffering for the Egyptian people:

ταῦτα ἕξ τε καὶ ἑκατὸν λογίζονται ἔτεα, ἐν τοῖσι Αἰγυπτίοισι τε πᾶσαν εἶναι κακότητα καὶ τὰ ἱρὰ χρόνου τοσούτου κατακληισθέντα οὐκ ἀνοιχθῆναι. τούτους ὑπὸ μίσεος οὐ κάρτα θέλουσι Αἰγύπτιοι ὀνομάζειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰς πυραμίδας καλέουσι ποιμένος Φιλίτιος, ὃς τοῦτον τὸν χρόνον ἔνεμε κτήνεα κατὰ ταῦτα τὰ χωρία (2.128).

Thus, they reckon that for a hundred and six years there was great misery in Egypt and the temples, shut so long ago, were not opened. Due to their intense hatred [for the two kings], the Egyptians are not even willing to speak their names, but call the pyramids after the shepherd Philitis, who pastured his flocks in this place.

After Chephren's death, his nephew Mycerinus (Cheop's son) ascended to the throne. Since Mycerinus did not approve of his father's and uncle's policies, he reopened the temples and allowed the people to cease their slave labor and resume religious practice. He was known for being just, generous, and mild, and was highly praised by his subjects (2.129). Despite his apparent piety and the adoration of his people, however, Mycerinus experiences great misfortune: first his daughter dies, and then he receives an oracle from Buto stating he will only live six more years (2.133). Outraged, Mycerinus rebukes the oracle:

τὸν δὲ δεινὸν ποιησάμενον πέμψαι ἐς τὸ μαντήιον τῷ θεῷ ὀνειδισμα ἀντιμεμφόμενον ὅτι ὁ μὲν αὐτοῦ πατήρ καὶ <ὁ> πάτριος ἀποκληίσαντες τὰ ἱρὰ καὶ θεῶν οὐ μεμνημένοι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους φθείροντες, ἐβίωσαν χρόνον ἐπὶ πολλόν, αὐτὸς δ' εὐσεβῆς ἐὼν μέλλοι ταχέως οὕτω τελευτήσῃν (2.133.2).

He took this badly, and sent to the oracle a reproach, blaming the god that even though his father and uncle had shut up the temples, and disregarded the gods, and destroyed men, they had lived for a long time, but that he who was pious was going to die so soon.

The oracle responds in turn, revealing that Mycerinus had erred:

ἐκ δὲ τοῦ χρηστηρίου αὐτῷ δεύτερα ἐλθεῖν λέγοντα τούτων εἵνεκα καὶ συνταχύνειν αὐτῷ τὸν βίον· οὐ γὰρ ποιῆσαί μιν τὸ χρεὸν ἦν ποιέειν· δεῖν γὰρ Αἴγυπτον κακοῦσθαι ἐπ’ ἔτεα πεντήκοντά τε καὶ ἑκατόν, καὶ τοὺς μὲν δύο τοὺς πρὸ ἐκείνου γενομένους βασιλέας μαθεῖν τοῦτο, κεῖνον δὲ οὐ (2.133.3).

But a second oracle came, stating that for this reason his life was hastening on its course, for he had not acted according to fate: it was necessary for Egypt to have been afflicted for a hundred and fifty years, and the two kings before him knew this, but he did not.

Although Mycerinus’ actions appeared pious while his father’s and uncle’s had not, they were in reality a transgression of sorts: by restoring religious practice and freeing the Egyptians from their labor Mycerinus hindered fate, τὸ χρεὸν—“that which must be.” The fact that he was ignorant of the need for one hundred and fifty years of Egyptian suffering does not forgive his actions in the eyes of the oracle. In short, although Mycerinus did not choose to transgress—but indeed actively sought to act with utmost piety—he is nevertheless held responsible for his ignorance. But what is Mycerinus’ punishment? Perhaps the passing of his daughter and his own imminent death are penalties for his actions, but this point is not made explicit. After Mycerinus demands to know why the gods would allow such a pious man to die young, the oracle simply states that perhaps his actions were less pious than he thought: his death is not necessarily a punishment, but neither do his actions, well-

intentioned as they are, warrant him dispensation (the gods will not intercede on Mycerinus' behalf, and his death will soon arrive, as predicted).<sup>30</sup>

Mycerinus is not the only character to be held responsible for his ignorance, as Croesus also finds himself in a similar situation. Croesus demands answers from the Delphic oracle after his misinterpretation of its prophecy leads to his defeat (1.90). Like Mycerinus, Croesus cites his piety as justification for why his fate is unjust (1.90.3), and the oracular response is similar, too, in its focus on fate and its assertion that Croesus' ignorance does not absolve him of blame (1.91.1-4). Unlike Mycerinus, however, Croesus does not perform a religious transgression; his misinterpretation leads to natural consequences, but his ignorance does not equate to sacrilege.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps, then, this is the reason why Croesus is granted divine dispensation—Apollo saves him from the pyre at the last moment—whereas Mycerinus is not given a reprieve from his own foreshortened life.

Yet even for Croesus, whose actions reveal ignorance rather than transgression, the ultimate outcome is not pleasant. Although his piety does prompt Apollo to delay the capture of Sardis for three years, nevertheless the outcome must eventually be fulfilled. Neither Mycerinus nor Croesus retain their status as kings—Mycerinus due to his death, and Croesus, once saved from the pyre by Apollo, by being reduced to the role of Cyrus' adviser.<sup>32</sup> For

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<sup>30</sup> However, as Harrison points out, Mycerinus “manages to delay his fate and prove the oracle wrong—if only by sophistry: he drank and partied night and day, so that, making his nights into days, he should live twelve years rather than six” (2000: 227).

<sup>31</sup> Kindt, 2006: 34-51 demonstrates how Croesus' testing of the Delphic oracle “transgressed the pattern of normal oracle consultations and turned the whole procedure upside down...” Cf. Christ, 1994: 189-93. From this perspective, Croesus may well have committed a religious transgression. If so, it may seem surprising that Apollo would save Croesus from the pyre, but in fact he does not go unpunished: Kindt sees Croesus' fall as the result of his testing and misreading of oracles.

<sup>32</sup> He is treated well by Cyrus, but is not so fortunate under Cambyses. We last see Croesus fleeing from Cambyses as the king attempts to shoot him (3.36).

both Croesus and Mycerinus, their transgressions and subsequent fortunes are complicated, and Mycerinus in particular is not wholly liable. Mycerinus' story illustrates the complicated relationship between culpability and destiny: the involvement of fate does not diminish human choice and responsibility, but rather these elements combine to form a complex view of motive and causation.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Lateiner 1989, 202. For a discussion on the various factors of causation, see Harrison, 2000: 223-242.

## ARISTODICUS AND SABACOS: ESCAPING DIVINE ENTRAPMENT

Our view of transgression is further complicated by the interference of the divine in human affairs. The most pointed way in which gods intervene is through their practice of entrapment, that is, their purposeful attempt to engage an individual in transgressive acts. Such entrapment first occurs in book 1 and involves the Cymaeon Aristodicus and the suppliant Pactyas.<sup>34</sup> Pactyas had incited the Lydian revolt against Cyrus, but became fearful at the approaching Persian army, and fled to Cyme to seek asylum (1.154-157). Cyrus then demanded that Pactyas be turned over to him, thereby putting the Cymaeans in the troubling position of either removing the suppliant or defying the Persian king. They sought advice from the oracle of Apollo at Branchidae, who instructed the envoy to give up Pactyas to the Persians (1.158). When this answer was reported in Cyme, however, Aristodicus doubted its authenticity and made his own party repeat the question to the oracle. Although the same answer was repeated Aristodicus was still not convinced, so he decided to test the oracle: he walked around the shrine and removed all the birds from the nests they had built there (1.159). As he was doing this, the voice of Apollo spoke to him directly, calling him most unholy (ἀνοσιώτατε) and demanding to know why he was removing suppliants from the temple (1.159.3). The following exchange ensues:

Ἀριστόδικον δὲ οὐκ ἀπορήσαντα πρὸς ταῦτα εἰπεῖν· Ὡναξ, αὐτὸς μὲν οὕτω τοῖσι ἰκέτησι βοηθείς, Κυμαίους δὲ κελεύεις τὸν ἰκέτην ἐκδιδόναι; τὸν δὲ αὖτις ἀμείψασθαι τοῖσιδε· Ναὶ κελεύω, ἵνα γε ἀσεβήσαντες θᾶσσον ἀπόλησθε, ὥς μὴ τὸ λοιπὸν περὶ ἰκετέων ἐκδόσιος ἔλθητε ἐπὶ τὸ χρηστήριον (1.159.4).

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<sup>34</sup> For a very thorough treatment of this episode, see Brown, 1978: 64-78.



But Aristodicus was not without a response: “Lord,” he said, “do you save your own suppliants, yet order the Cymaeans to surrender theirs?” And [Apollo] replied, “Yes, I command them, so that they might carry out this sacrilege and perish sooner, and never again come to my oracle asking about the surrender of suppliants.”

Apollo’s intention is very clearly laid out: he wants the Cymaeans to act profanely (ἀσεβήσαντες) so that they might be destroyed (ἀπόλησθε). For Apollo, the Cymaeans are already guilty, simply by asking to do what they know they shouldn’t; he therefore encourages them to carry out their guilt to completion, so that he may punish them. There emerges in this episode the idea of guilty thoughts and intentions, which were discussed briefly in the introduction. Here, thoughts (even sacrilegious ones) are not enough to incite divine retribution, and thus Apollo pushes the Cymaeans toward a more tangible transgression.

A similar idea is presented several books later through the cautionary tale of Glaucus (6.86). The Spartans tell the story of a man named Glaucus who had the reputation of being just. Based on his good repute, a Milesian man entrusts a portion of his property to Glaucus for safe-keeping, asking him to return it whenever his sons should come and display the correct tokens. When his sons do come, however, Glaucus pretends to have forgotten the arrangement and asks the Delphic oracle if he can foreswear his oath in order to keep the money. The oracle responds that even if Glaucus should profit from his perjury, his descendants would pay for it. Glaucus then begs forgiveness for even asking to do such a thing, but the priestess informs him that “to tempt the god and to do the deed have the same effect” (τὸ πειρηθῆναι τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὸ ποιῆσαι ἴσον δύνασθαι, 6.86c). Indeed, although Glaucus then promptly returns the money to the Milesians, his crime has already been committed and his fate has been sealed. The Spartan narrator sums up the moral of the story thus:

Γλαύκου νῦν οὔτε τι ἀπόγονον ἔστι οὐδὲν οὔτ' ἰστίη οὐδεμία νομιζομένη εἶναι Γλαύκου, ἐκτέτριπταί τε πρόρριζος ἐκ Σπάρτης. οὔτω ἀγαθὸν μηδὲ διανοέεσθαι περὶ παραθήκης ἄλλο γε ἢ ἀπαιτεόντων ἀποδιδόναι (6.86d).

Even now there is no descendant of Glaucus nor is there any house bearing his name; he has been rubbed out, root and branch, from Sparta. Thus it is good not even to think anything concerning a trust other than giving it back on demand.

For Glaucus, thinking and asking are equated to action and thus his guilty intentions warrant his punishment. For Aristodicus, however, thought alone is not enough—Apollo rather encourages follow-through so that he can carry out his punishment. Although thoughts can be guilty and may lead to wrongdoing, then, intention alone does not *necessarily* constitute a transgression. It does spark divine anger, however, and those engaging in inappropriate thoughts must therefore be on the lookout for divine tricks.

In the second case of entrapment, no inherent guilt is present. Just a few sections after the story of Mycerinus, Herodotus relates the account of Sabacos, an Ethiopian king who invaded Egypt and subsequently ruled there for fifty years (2.137). His eventual departure from the Egyptian throne is described by Herodotus:

τέλος δὲ τὴν ἀπαλλαγὴν τοῦ Αἰθίοπος ὧδε ἔλεγον γενέσθαι· ὄψιν ἐν τῷ ὕπνῳ τοιγόνδε ἰδόντα αὐτὸν οἴχεσθαι φεύγοντα· ἐδόκее οἱ ἄνδρα ἐπιστάντα συμβουλεύειν τοὺς ἱρέας τοὺς ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ συλλέξαντα πάντας μέσους διαταμεῖν· <...> ἰδόντα δὲ τὴν ὄψιν ταύτην λέγειν αὐτὸν ὡς πρόφασιν οἱ δοκέοι ταύτην τοὺς θεοὺς προδεικνύναι, ἵνα ἀσεβήσας περὶ τὰ ἱρὰ κακὸν τι πρὸς θεῶν ἢ πρὸς ἀνθρώπων λάβοι· οὐκ ὦν ποιήσιν ταῦτα...(2.139.1-2).

And they say that the final departure of the Ethiopian came about in this way. He fled after seeing a vision in a dream: a man seemed to stand over him, urging him to gather together all the priests in Egypt and cut them in half. Seeing this vision, he said he supposed that the gods sent it as a provocation, so that he might commit a sacrilege and be punished by gods and men; he therefore said he would not do such things.

A previous oracle regarding the length of his rule also contributes to Sabacos' decision to depart from Egypt: the Ethiopian oracle had said he would reign for fifty years in Egypt (2.139.3). In this case, not only did Sabacos identify the potential sacrilege of the action prompted by his dream, he also recognized the authority of the previous oracle foretelling the length of his rule. In this way he presents a contrast to Croesus. In book 1, after the account of Gyges and Candaules, Herodotus mentions that although Gyges' rule was confirmed by the Delphic oracle, the priestess also forewarned the Lydians about the impending Heraclid vengeance; the Lydian kings, however, "paid no regard until it was fulfilled" (λόγον οὐδένα ἐποιεῦντο, πρὶν δὴ ἐπετελέσθη, 1.13.2). Thus, Sabacos has succeeded where Croesus had failed: by remembering and heeding the oracle's warning, Sabacos has fulfilled his fate, but avoided misfortune. Thomas Harrison describes the Herodotean conception of fate as "a plot with a number of alternative endings, one that allows for (a limited number of) different contingencies, for human error and for human choice, as well as divine intervention."<sup>35</sup> Indeed the story of Sabacos suggests that there are multiple ways for one's destiny to be realized (τι πρὸς θεῶν ἢ πρὸς ἀνθρώπων λάβοι), but it also presents the gods as potentially tempting one to sacrilege as a means of achieving it.

These accounts of divine entrapment invite one to question to what extent dreams, portents, and oracles should be believed or trusted. In the case of Sabacos in particular, the sinister purpose of the dream is never confirmed, as was the case for Aristodicus; on the other hand it is also never denied, and the reality of its intent to provoke transgression is implied as likely. Dreams seem to be constant sources of misinterpretation in Herodotus, and

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<sup>35</sup> Harrison, 2000: 227.

are thus likely vehicles for confusion, if not intentional deception.<sup>36</sup> But cases where individuals successfully avoid profane action indicate that the presence of divine persuasion does not annul human responsibility.<sup>37</sup> For example, a dream that involves the doubling of the name 'Smerdis' confuses Cambyses and causes him to murder his own brother. The misinterpretation and its consequences, however, are entirely upon his own shoulders (3.30-31; 64-65).

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<sup>36</sup> See Hollmann, 2001: 75-93.

<sup>37</sup> Harrison, 2000: 228-9 points out two instances in which divine interference absolves human culpability, namely the cases of Timo and Miltiades (6.134) and of Euenius the negligent night watchman (9.93-4).

## CAMBYSES: THE INSANITY OF TRANSGRESSION

Many characters in Herodotus' *Histories* engage in religious transgression, but Cambyses transgresses the most frequently and perhaps the most severely.<sup>38</sup> His religious offenses eventually cause his madness,<sup>39</sup> thereby begetting further religious offense, as we will see. Through Cambyses, then, Herodotus presents madness as both a symptom, and agent, of religious transgression, but a further factor contributing to Cambyses' madness may be his position of power. The tendency of autocracy to push men beyond their customary mindsets is emphasized during the constitutional debate, which takes place after Cambyses' death.<sup>40</sup> Otanes reflects upon Cambyses' reign, and lays out his argument against monarchy:

Ἔμοι δοκέει ἓνα μὲν ἡμέων μούναρχον μηκέτι γενέσθαι· οὔτε γὰρ ἡδὺ οὔτε ἀγαθόν. εἶδετε μὲν γὰρ τὴν Καμβύσειω ὕβριν ἐπ' ὅσον ἐπεξῆλθε, μετεσχίκατε δὲ καὶ τῆς τοῦ μάγου ὕβριος. κῶς δ' ἂν εἴη χρῆμα κατηρημένον μοναρχίῃ, τῇ ἔξεστι ἀνευθύνῳ ποιέειν τὰ βούλεται; καὶ γὰρ ἂν τὸν ἄριστον ἀνδρῶν πάντων σπάντα ἐς ταύτην τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐκτὸς τῶν ἐωθότων νοημάτων στήσειε (3.80.2-3).

It seems to me that there can no longer be a single monarch ruling over us, for that is neither pleasant nor good. For you all saw how far the insolence of Cambyses went, and you all had a share in the insolence of the Magus. How can monarchy be a fit thing, when the ruler can do whatever he wants with impunity? For such power would set even the best of men beyond his customary thoughts.

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<sup>38</sup> For a detailed examination of Herodotus' presentation of Cambyses see Truesdell, 1982: 387-403.

<sup>39</sup> See Munson, 1991: 43-65 for a detailed analysis of Cambyses' madness.

<sup>40</sup> For a discussion on Herodotus' treatment of tyranny, including the constitutional debate, see Dewald, 2003: 25-58.

Otanes goes on to state that one of the worst things a monarch does is “disturb the ancestral customs” (νόμαιά τε κινέει πάτρια, 3.80.5)—a charge of which Cambyses, as we shall see, is certainly guilty.<sup>41</sup> For Otanes, reviewing the trajectory of Cambyses’ reign, madness (or at least an uncustomary frame of mind) is a condition of autocracy. Madness, monarchy, and religious transgressions all combine to form a complicated web of cause and effect throughout the Cambyses narrative. Let us, then, assess each of Cambyses’ transgressions, examining the evolution of the vocabulary that is used to describe both the individual and the deed.

Cambyses is first mentioned in two brief passages in book 2. In the first, he is given a cursory introduction: he is listed as Cyrus’ heir, his mother is named, and he said to have prepared an expedition against Egypt (2.1). In the second, Herodotus relates an episode that presents Cambyses in a fairly positive light, and depicts him as exhibiting some degree of religious respect (2.181). The passage tells the story of Ladice, a Greek woman married to the Egyptian king Amasis, who found himself unable to have intercourse with her. Amasis accused Ladice of casting a spell on him and threatened her with harm. To avoid punishment, Ladice prayed to Aphrodite and vowed a statue in exchange for her assistance. Immediately thereafter Amasis successfully had intercourse with his wife, and Ladice fulfilled her vow to Aphrodite. After recounting this tale, Herodotus adds that when Cambyses “had conquered Egypt and learned who Ladice was, [he] sent her away to Cyrene unharmed” (ταύτην τὴν Λαδίκην, ὡς ἐπεκράτησε Καμβύσης Αἰγύπτου καὶ ἐπύθετο αὐτῆς ἥτις εἶη, ἀπέπεμψε ἀσινέα ἐς Κυρήνην, 2.181.5). This statement, directly following the account of Ladice’s piety, suggests that it was her religious observance that motivated Cambyses to return her home

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<sup>41</sup> Dewald notes that Cambyses “most completely fulfills all the items in Otanes’ picture of the despotic template” (2003: 34).

safely. Although Cambyses' involvement in the tale is brief and tenuous, his participation belies a predisposition towards religious intolerance. Rather, Cambyses here expresses some appreciation for religious devotion. Beyond this, he honors a display not simply of piety, but of piety displayed towards Greek religion, and therefore to a religion that is foreign from his perspective.

Cambyses' delicate treatment of Ladice is even more striking when compared to his behavior toward her husband, which is described several sections later in book 3. This book opens with an analysis of Cambyses' possible motives for invading Egypt, one of which involves king Amasis.<sup>42</sup> According to the Persian account, Cambyses had been persuaded to seek Amasis' daughter in marriage; but Amasis knew that she would only become Cambyses' concubine, and therefore sent the daughter of his predecessor in her place. When Cambyses discovered this deception, he was so enraged (μεγάλως θυμωθέντα, 3.1.5) that he resolved to invade Egypt and meet Amasis face to face. Before Cambyses could make it to Egypt, however, Amasis died peacefully in his sleep, thus thwarting Cambyses' plans of revenge (3.10). Cambyses therefore makes his way to Amasis' tomb in Sais, and he is "fully resolved on what he would do when he got there" (βουλόμενος ποιῆσαι τὰ δὴ καὶ ἐποίησε, 3.16.1). Upon his arrival Cambyses immediately orders Amasis' body to be removed from its tomb. The corpse is then desecrated in every possible way (καὶ τὰλλα πάντα λυμαίνεσθαι, 3.16.1) and to such an extent that those desecrating it become worn out with the effort. Then,

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<sup>42</sup> According to the second motive (told briefly at 3.3), Cambyses was fulfilling a boyhood promise to defend his mother's honor. This explanation suggests that Cambyses was motivated by filial piety, but Herodotus rejects its credibility. As Baragwanath, 2008: 110 points out, Cambyses' motivation to invade Egypt stems from a series of selfish, trivial grievances, and the "juxtaposition of personal causes with a serious military effort aimed at conquest underlines the disproportionate nature of the response." From almost his very introduction, then, Cambyses is presented as excessive—a quality which will soon increase into madness.

as if this excessive mutilation was not enough, Cambyses takes his sacrilege to a further extreme:

ἐκέλευσέ μιν ὁ Καμβύσης κατακαῦσαι, ἐντελλόμενος οὐκ ὅσια. Πέρσαι γὰρ θεὸν νομίζουσι εἶναι πῦρ. τὸ ὧν κατακαίειν γε τοὺς νεκροὺς οὐδαμῶς ἐν νόμῳ οὐδετέροισί ἐστι, Πέρσησι μὲν δι' ὃ περ εἴρηται, θεῷ οὐ δίκαιον εἶναι λέγοντες νέμειν νεκρὸν ἀνθρώπου· Αἰγυπτίοισι δὲ νενόμισται <τὸ> πῦρ θηρίον εἶναι ἔμψυχον, πάντα δὲ αὐτὸ κατεσθίειν τὰ περ ἂν λάβῃ, πλησθὲν δὲ {αὐτὸ} τῆς βορῆς συναποθνήσκειν τῷ κατεσθιομένῳ. οὐκ ὧν θηρίοισι νόμος οὐδαμῶς σφί ἐστι τὸν νέκυν διδόναι· καὶ διὰ ταῦτα ταριχεύουσι, ἵνα μὴ κείμενος ὑπὸ εὐλέων καταβρωθῇ. οὕτω δὴ οὐδετέροισι νομιζόμενα ἐνετέλλετο ποιεῖν ὁ Καμβύσης (3.16.2-4).

Cambyses ordered it to be burned—a sacriligious command, for the Persians believe that fire is a god. In fact, neither nation is accustomed to burning the dead, the Persians on account of the reason given, for they say that it is wrong to offer a human corpse to a god; but the Egyptians believe that fire is a living creature, devouring everything it catches, and that once glutted with food it dies along with that which it eats. It is by no means customary for them to hand their dead over to beasts, and it is for such reasons that they embalm corpses—so that they may not lie buried and be consumed by maggots. In this way, Cambyses gave commands that opposed the customs of both nations.

Herodotus specifically explains how, by ordering the corpse to be burned, Cambyses has violated not only a foreign religion but also his own. This account presents a jarring reverse to Cambyses' apparent appreciation of Ladice's piety. That he has acted in such a drastically different way towards Ladice and Amasis perhaps highlights Cambyses' mental unsteadiness. Indeed his excessive anger has caused him to commit a transgression, but it is a premeditated transgression, not one born merely from passion—for Cambyses knows exactly what he wants to do to Amasis' corpse, and travels all the way to Sais to carry it out. So even as Cambyses' anger is excessive in its duration and force,<sup>43</sup> it is not yet indicative of

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<sup>43</sup> Baragwanath, 2008: 111 notes that Cambyses continues on the campaign (which had been directed at Amasis) even after his death, although we might have supposed his rival's passing would have dispelled his rage.



madness. For it is only after his decision to burn the corpse that Cambyses transforms from merely excessive to out of his mind.

Immediately after this incident with Amasis' body, Cambyses sends spies to Ethiopia under the pretext of bearing gifts to the king (3.17-19). When the spies return and give an unfavorable report Cambyses becomes so furious (ὀργὴν ποιησάμενος, 3.25.1) that he instantly begins marching to Ethiopia without making plans or ordering supplies. Once again Cambyses' action is fueled by anger, but here Herodotus adds that he is "not in his right mind but mad" (οἷα δὲ ἐμμανὴς τε ἐὼν καὶ οὐ φρενήρης, 3.25.2). A few lines later Herodotus mentions that during his parallel campaign against the Ammonians, Cambyses ordered the oracle of Zeus at Thebes to be burned (3.25.3). Baragwanath notes that this may have divine repercussions: "The mysterious disappearance of the entire division, according to one account buried in sand by a violent wind, hints at divine displeasure provoked presumably by Cambyses' sacrilegious command to burn the oracle of Zeus."<sup>44</sup> Herodotus then returns to the Ethiopian campaign, reporting the ultimate consequence of Cambyses' anger: because he has reacted so rashly and set out without preparing for the journey, Cambyses' men have run out of food and are resorting to cannibalism. Religious transgression does feature briefly in his campaigns, but, more importantly, these episodes establish Cambyses' deepening madness while providing an interlude between his two most egregious transgressions.

Forced to abandon the campaign due to his men's cannibalism, Cambyses returns to Memphis, where he finds all the Egyptians celebrating. Convinced that they are rejoicing at his misfortune Cambyses demands the reason for their festivities (3.27). The Egyptians then inform him that they are celebrating the birth of Apis, a god born from a cow that had been

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<sup>44</sup> Baragwanath, 2008: 115.

impregnated by light from heaven (3.28-9). Certain that he is being either mocked or deceived, Cambyses orders Apis to be brought to him:

ὥς δὲ ἤγαγον τὸν Ἄπιν οἱ ἱερεῖς, ὁ Καμβύσης, οἷα ἐὼν ὑπομαργότερος, σπασάμενος τὸ ἐγχειρίδιον, θέλων τύψαι τὴν γαστέρα τοῦ Ἄπιος παίει τὸν μηρόν· γελάσας δὲ εἶπε πρὸς τοὺς ἱερεῖς· ὦ κακαὶ κεφαλαί, τοιοῦτοι θεοὶ γίνονται, ἔναιμοί τε καὶ σαρκώδεις καὶ ἐπαῖοντες σιδηρίων; ἄξιός μὲν γε Αἰγυπτίων οὗτός γε ὁ θεός· ἀτὰρ τοι ὑμεῖς γε οὐ χαίροντες γέλωτα ἐμὲ θήσεσθε (3.29.1-2).

But when the priests led in Apis, Cambyses (being somewhat mad in such respects) drew his dagger and, though intending to strike Apis in the stomach, pierced his thigh; and he laughed and said to the priests, “idiots, such are your gods—creatures of flesh and blood who can feel iron weapons? This is a god worthy of the Egyptians, but you will be sorry for having made me a laughing-stock.”

Even before he commits his crime Cambyses is described as ὑπομαργότερος, “half-mad,” but after he carries it out he is entirely overcome by madness (3.29.1). Apis eventually dies from the wound inflicted upon him, and the Egyptians confirm that “on account of this unjust deed, [Cambyses] immediately went mad, although he was hardly sane before” (αὐτίκα διὰ τοῦτο τὸ ἀδίκημα ἐμάνη, ἐὼν οὐδὲ πρότερον φρενήρης, 3.30.1). This linking of his madness to his murder of Apis strongly implies a divine origin for Cambyses’ frame of mind, and his subsequent misdeeds. Munson finds confirmation of the Apis episode as a turning point for Cambyses’ madness in the fact that, after this episode, Cambyses’ “actions appear immediately self-damaging in a way that his previous misdeeds against a foreign people do not.”<sup>45</sup> Indeed, Cambyses’ madness and sacrilege beget more of the same, and hereafter he commits a string of crimes against members of his own family and other close associates.

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<sup>45</sup> Munson, 1991: 50.

The first evil thing (πρῶτα μὲν τῶν κακῶν, 3.30.1) that Cambyses does is to kill his brother Smerdis due to a misinterpretation of a prophetic dream (confusion which, as discussed previously, would not have lessened his own culpability). Additionally, he treats many others “like a lunatic” (ἐξεμάνη, 3.34.1): he marries and murders his sister; he kills Prexaspes’ son to prove (ironically) his sanity; and he shoots at Croesus for advising him to control himself (3.31-6). While these crimes serve to corroborate his madness,<sup>46</sup> Cambyses’ insanity is further linked to transgression by the string of religious offenses he then commits: he mocks the cult statue of Hephaestus; he enters a forbidden temple, mocks other divine images, and burns them; and he breaks open ancient tombs to examine<sup>47</sup> the bodies (3.37). After this catalogue of profanities, Herodotus personally interjects to declare that Cambyses was indeed mad:

πανταχῇ ὧν μοι δῆλόν ἐστι ὅτι ἐμάνη μεγάλως ὁ Καμβύσης· οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἰροῖσιν τε καὶ νομαίοισι ἐπεχείρησε καταγελαῖν. εἰ γάρ τις προθείη πᾶσι ἀνθρώποισι ἐκλέξασθαι κελεύων νόμους τοὺς καλλίστους ἐκ τῶν πάντων νόμων, διασκεψάμενοι ἂν ἐλοίοντο ἕκαστοι τοὺς ἐωυτῶν· οὕτω νομίζουσι πολλόν τι καλλίστους τοὺς ἐωυτῶν νόμους ἕκαστοι εἶναι. οὐκ ὧν οἶκός ἐστι ἄλλον γε ἢ μαινόμενον ἄνδρα γέλωτα τὰ τοιαῦτα τίθесθαι (3.38.1-2).

In every way, then, it is clear to me that Cambyses was very much insane, for otherwise he would not have attempted to deride those things which are consecrated and customary. For if someone should propose a contest to all nations, bidding them to choose the best of all customs, each, examining it well, would select its own: thus does each nation believe that its own customs are by far the best. So then it seems that only a madman would make a mockery of such things.

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<sup>46</sup> Munson, 1991: 51.

<sup>47</sup> Christ cites this episode as an example of Cambyses’ “mockery of the historian’s role” and his “very un-Herodotean disregard for others’ *nomoi*...” (1994: 187).

For Herodotus, transgressions against even foreign religion and custom (ἱποῖσι τε καὶ νομαίοισι) are indicative of insanity.<sup>48</sup> Transgressions against one's own culture are, however, all the more symptomatic of it. Rood argues that "Cambyes' mocking of Egyptian cult could have been taken not as a proof of his madness, but simply as a sign that people regard their own customs as best" and sees the burning of Amasis' corpse as "far easier proof of Cambyes' madness."<sup>49</sup> Cambyes has indeed transformed from being an individual who appreciates devotion (even) to foreign religion toward one who transgresses against both foreign custom and his own; his descent into madness seems to correlate with this change of behavior. It is important to note, however, that while the Egyptians confidently ascribe a religious causation to Cambyes' madness, Herodotus himself seems more reluctant to do so.<sup>50</sup> He sums up Cambyes' mad acts thus:

ταῦτα μὲν ἐς τοὺς οἰκηιοτάτους ὁ Καμβύσης ἐξεμάνη, εἴ τε δὴ διὰ τὸν Ἄπιν εἶτε καὶ ἄλλως, οἷα πολλὰ ἔωθε ἀνθρώπους κακὰ καταλαμβάνειν· καὶ γὰρ τινα ἐκ γενεῆς νοῦσον μεγάλην λέγεται ἔχειν ὁ Καμβύσης, τὴν ἱρὴν ὀνομάζουσί τινες. οὗ νύν τοι ἀεικὲς οὐδὲν ἦν τοῦ σώματος νοῦσον μεγάλην νοσέοντος μηδὲ τὰς φρένας ὑγιαίνειν (3.33).

In such ways did Cambyes rage against his household, either because of Apis or otherwise, from the many sorts of misfortunes that wont to befall men; for Cambyes is said to have been born with some terrible disease, which some call "sacred." It is not unlikely then that while his body suffered a terrible disease, his mind should also be unwell.

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<sup>48</sup> See Rood, 2006: 299: "Herodotus' argument about Cambyes' madness does not show that he was a strict cultural relativist. He does not claim that all customs are equally valid, but rather that recognition that one's own perspective on others' customs is culturally determined should lead to tolerance."

<sup>49</sup> Rood, 2006: 299.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Baragwanath, 2015: 29.

Herodotus does include the Apis episode as a possibility for Cambyses' insanity, and it is noteworthy that even Cambyses' potential medical affliction is given a divine connection—some call it “sacred”.<sup>51</sup> But while Cambyses' madness is linked to his religious transgression (especially by the Egyptians), it also seems to be dependent upon his continued position of power,<sup>52</sup> just as Otanes claims. For, as we shall see, Cambyses' lucidity coincides with the loss of his kingdom.

The consequences of Cambyses' mad acts include the murder of his brother, the loss of his empire, and even his own death. It is particularly striking that the injury leading to Cambyses' death mirrors the one he inflicted upon Apis; this parallel suggests that his demise was indeed a punishment for the god's murder. But perhaps an even harsher punishment can be found in Cambyses' sudden lucidity.<sup>53</sup> Three factors contribute to his eventual clarity of mind: Cambyses' observation that his own wound matched Apis', his discovery of another Smerdis, and his recollection of a prophecy foretelling the location of his death. Moreover, these three realizations occur simultaneously: Cambyses is told of the existence of another Smerdis, and immediately leaps onto his horse to march against him. In the process of mounting his horse, however, his sword pierces his thigh in the same place where he had previously wounded Apis. Thinking it to be mortal, Cambyses then inquires what town he is in,

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<sup>51</sup> Munson, however, argues that “the so-called ‘sacred disease’ is no more or less sacred than any other” since all diseases were generally thought to occur both by divine will and by their own distinct natural causes (1991: 52).

<sup>52</sup> Dewald argues that in the case of each of the eastern despots, “their actions are substantially defined by their positions as autocratic rulers, at the head of large imperial governments, and their repeated acts as autocrats create the onward movement of the despotic theme in the *Histories*” (2003: 43).

<sup>53</sup> As Baragwanath notes, Herodotus “again raises the possibility of a physical explanation” for Cambyses' illumination, just as he did for the deterioration of his mind (2015: 29).

καὶ δὴ ὥς τότε ἐπειρόμενος ἐπύθετο τῆς πόλιος τὸ οὔνομα, ὑπὸ τῆς συμφορῆς τῆς τε ἐκ τοῦ μάγου ἐκπεπληγμένος καὶ τοῦ τρώματος ἐσωφρόνησε, συλλαβὼν δὲ τὸ θεοπρόπιον εἶπε· Ἐνθαῦτα Καμβύσεια τὸν Κύρου ἐστὶ πεπρωμένον τελευτᾶν (3.64.5).

And when he inquired and learned the name of the city, struck by the misfortune that came from the Magus and from the wound, he was brought to his senses, and he understood the prophecy and said, “here Cambyses the son of Cyrus is destined to die.”

This soundness of mind (ἐσωφρόνησε) returns just before his death, and thus Cambyses is compelled to be aware of the consequences of his actions without being capable of changing them or recompensing for them. Notably, Cambyses’ right frame of mind returns to him at a moment when his kingdom is slipping from his grasp. His loss of power seems to allow him to think clearly again, and once again we are reminded of Otanes’ analysis on the dangers of monarchy: Cambyses’ mental instability vanishes when he is no longer ruling.

## ANACHARSIS, SCYLES, AND CLEOMENES: THE MADNESS CONTINUES

Cambyes is a somewhat exceptional figure in the *Histories*, as his portrayal is almost wholly negative.<sup>54</sup> A transgressive relationship with religion is one of the ways by which Herodotus emphasizes Cambyes' negative character, but other monarchs are also depicted unfavorably in this way. Herodotus includes similar characterizations in his Scythian ethnography through the examples of Anacharsis and Scyles, who likewise transgress against their own customs and ultimately pay with their lives.

While journeying back to Scythia one day, Anacharsis stops in Cyzicus and witnesses a celebration in honor of the Mother of the Gods. He is so impressed with the rites that he vows to worship the goddess if he is delivered home safely (4.76). When he returns to Scythia unharmed, Anacharsis keeps his promise and performs the proper rituals. Thus far, Anacharsis' story is vaguely reminiscent of Ladice's: both seek help from a goddess, vow something in return, and follow through with their promises. While Ladice's actions demonstrated piety, however, Anacharsis' prove more problematic. For Herodotus had opened the account of Anacharsis by explaining that the Scythians do not allow foreign customs to be practiced, and are especially opposed to Greek ones (Ξεινικοῖσι δὲ νομαίοισι καὶ οὗτοι αἰνῶς χρᾶσθαι φεύγουσι, μήτε τεῶν ἄλλων, Ἑλληνικοῖσι δὲ καὶ ἥκιστα, 4.76.1).

When Anacharsis performs the foreign rituals, then, he may be demonstrating piety to one

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<sup>54</sup> His one positive quality seems to be that he sent home Ladice without harming her, as discussed in the previous section. As Munson points out, Cambyes' campaign against Egypt is downplayed, and his *logos* begins abruptly with his failures and misdeeds. She goes on to assert that "nowhere else does the pattern of the reversal of fortune realize itself with such imbalance. No one else corresponds so exactly to the theoretical portrait of the tyrant" (1991: 45). Dewald confirms this sentiment, stating that Cambyes alone is cast as almost a "cartoon despot", while the other eastern despots "appear as reasonably distinctive personalities making occasional idiosyncratic moves" (2003: 43).

religion but he is transgressing against his own. Unfortunately for Anacharsis, his rituals are observed by two of his fellow countrymen, who report his crime to the king. When the king comes in person and witnesses Anacharsis performing the rites, he shoots him dead with an arrow. The story of Scyles immediately follows, and it builds upon the type of transgression presented by Anacharsis in three main ways: (1) Scyles himself is the king of Scythia, (2) he adopts Greek custom, and (3) he performs these practices habitually as they pervade every aspect of his life.

Although Scyles was Scythian, his mother was foreign-born and had taught him to speak and read Greek.<sup>55</sup> As Scyles matured he grew dissatisfied with the Scythian way of living, and became more inclined toward Greek custom (διαίτη μὲν οὐδαμῶς ἠρέσκετο Σκυθικῇ, ἀλλὰ πολλὸν πρὸς τὰ Ἑλληνικὰ μᾶλλον τετραμμένος, 4.78.3). Therefore, Scyles would lead his army to the nearby Greek settlement of the Borysthenites and, leaving his soldiers at the outskirts, he would enter the town alone, put on Greek dress, participate in Greek religious festivals, and generally behave as a Greek. Scyles often stayed a month or longer, and thus built a house there for himself, and even took a Greek woman as a second wife. He was able to get away with his double life for some time, “but when things had to turn badly for him, they did so for this reason: he longed to be initiated into the rites of the Bacchic Dionysus” (ἐπείτε δὲ ἔδεέ οἱ κακῶς γενέσθαι, ἐγένετο ἀπὸ προφάσιος τοιῆσδε· ἐπεθύμησε Διονύσῳ Βακχείῳ τελεσθῆναι, 4.79.1). This event proves fatal for two reasons, and they are the same two factors that push this episode beyond just the realm of *nomos* and into the realm of religious violation. First, Scyles had received a divine portent (φάσμα μέγιστον, 4.79.1), which had warned against his participation in the Mysteries:

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<sup>55</sup> Strong identifies Scyles as a “mule,” or “half-breed,” and discusses the role of cultural sensitivity in the Anacharsis and Scyles episodes (2010: 455-64). Scyles’ ethnic mixture would also provide another point of comparison to Cambyses.



ἦν οἱ ἐν Βορυσθενειτέων τῇ πόλι οἰκίης μεγάλης καὶ πολυτελέος περιβολή, τῆς καὶ ὀλίγω τι πρότερον τούτων μνήμην εἶχον, τὴν πέριξ λευκοῦ λίθου σφίγγες τε καὶ γρῦπες ἔστασαν· ἐς ταύτην ὁ θεὸς ἐνέσκηψε βέλος. καὶ ἡ μὲν κατεκάη πᾶσα, Σκύλης δὲ οὐδὲν τούτου εἵνεκα ἦσσαν ἐπετέλεσε τὴν τελετὴν (4.79.2).

He had in the city of the Borysthenites a spacious house, grand and costly (the same house I just mentioned) which was surrounded all around by white marble sphinxes and griffins; the god hurled a thunderbolt at this house. And although it had completely burnt down, Scyles nonetheless performed the rite to the end.

Scyles ignores this clear divine warning, and continues to participate—his direct disobedience could in itself be construed as a religious transgression. Secondly, like Anacharsis before him, Scyles takes part in a foreign religious ritual, but rather than learning from Anacharsis' mistake, Scyles amplifies it: the Bacchic rites in particular were, to the Scythians, perhaps the most offensive of Greek customs:

Σκύθαι δὲ τοῦ βακχεύειν πέρι Ἕλλησι ὀνειδίζουσι· οὐ γάρ φασι οἶκός εἶναι θεὸν ἐξευρίσκειν τοιοῦτον ὅστις μαίνεσθαι ἐνάγει ἀνθρώπους. ἐπεῖτε δὲ ἐτελέσθη τῷ Βακχεῖῳ ὁ Σκύλης, ἥ διεπρήστευσε τῶν τις Βορυσθενειτέων πρὸς τοὺς Σκύθας λέγων· Ἡμῖν γὰρ καταγελάτε, ὦ Σκύθαι, ὅτι βακχεύομεν καὶ ἡμέας ὁ θεὸς λαμβάνει· νῦν οὗτος ὁ δαίμων καὶ τὸν ὑμέτερον βασιλέα λελάβηκε, καὶ βακχεύει τε καὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μαίνεται (4.79.3-4).

And the Scythians reproach the Greeks concerning Bacchic frenzy, for they say that it is not fitting to establish a god who leads men to madness. So when Scyles had been initiated into the rites of Bacchus, one of the Borysthenites went off on the Scythians saying, "You laugh at us, Scythians, because we worship Bacchus and the god seizes us; but now this deity has seized your king, and he worships Bacchus and is maddened by the god."

In view of Herodotus' previous discussion of custom, Scyles could be considered mad simply due to this transgression against his own culture's religious practices. It should be noted, however, that Scyles is himself part Greek, and thus may be more entitled to

practice Greek custom than a typical Scythian. But although his mixed ethnicity certainly complicates matters, Scyles' actions are nevertheless clearly marked as misconduct. The inclusion of the portent suggests that he was indeed committing an injustice by taking part in a Greek religious rite, and it therefore situates him more fixedly as Scythian than Greek. For this reason Scyles can be said to have transgressed his own custom, and thus to have veered toward madness. But here Herodotus cleverly promotes a further association between the breaking of custom and the onset of madness through Scyles' participation in the Dionysian festival in particular. Celebrants of Dionysus were often said to be out of their minds, and thus Herodotus can employ words indicating madness (*μαίνεσθαι*, *μαίνεται*) to link this story to the account of Cambyses in the previous book. Indeed Scyles' demise is oddly reflective of Cambyses': he alienates his brother, loses his throne, and dies ignobly.<sup>56</sup> Whereas Cambyses had transgressed against foreign and domestic religion, however, Scyles has transgressed one religion by observing another. The "madness" induced by Bacchic worship is of a different nature than the madness Cambyses exhibited, but Herodotus' decision to depict Dionysian rites as the catalyst for Scyles' downfall is a striking variation on the theme of madness and religious transgression.<sup>57</sup>

Herodotus employs one final episode—the account of king Cleomenes—to strengthen the connection between madness and violations of religion. Cleomenes' status as a monarch marks a similarity to Cambyses and Scyles, but while these two rulers were Persian and

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<sup>56</sup> More specifically, the Scythians discover his crimes and revolt, establishing Scyles' brother, Octamasades, as king; Scyles attempts to flee, but Octamasades catches him and has him beheaded (4.80).

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Munson: "The Scythians reject Dionysus for reasons that are strikingly similar to those of the god's opponents in the Greek resistance myths. [...] Described in these terms, the Dionysiac cult appears as un-Greek—or, as Herodotus himself elsewhere acknowledges, not "consistent" (*ὁμότροπον*) with the rest of Greek culture—as it is un-Scythian" (2001: 120).

Scythian, respectively, Cleomenes is a Spartan. Thus we see examples of monarchs of differing ethnicities engaging in transgressive—and maddening—behavior. Like his predecessors, Cleomenes transgresses and pays with his life, but his account contains a somewhat complicated back-story. Cleomenes and his co-king, Demaratus, were engaged in a bitter contest, with each slandering the other (6.61).<sup>58</sup> Cleomenes hatched a plot to depose Demaratus by bribing the Delphic oracle<sup>59</sup> to call his heredity into question,<sup>60</sup> but when this scheme was discovered by the Spartans Cleomenes fled to Aegina, where he attempted to incite a rebellion against Sparta (6.74). The Spartans received word of Cleomenes’ betrayal and recalled him to Sparta with the intention of allowing him to remain king. But when Cleomenes, who had always been “somewhat crazy” (ὕπομαργότερον, 6.75.1), returned to Sparta, he was overcome by “a maddening sickness” (μανίη νοῦσος, 6.75.1). Since it was clear that Cleomenes was out of his mind (παραφρονήσαντα, 6.75.2), the Spartans threw him in jail, where the following event transpired:

ὁ δὲ δεθεὶς τὸν φύλακον μουνωθέντα ἰδὼν τῶν ἄλλων αἰτέει μάχαιραν· οὐ βουλομένου δὲ τὰ πρῶτα τοῦ φυλάκου δίδοναι ἀπέειλε τά μιν λυθεὶς ποιήσει, ἐς ὃ δείσας τὰς ἀπειλὰς ὁ φύλακος (ἦν γὰρ τῶν τις εἰλωτέων) δίδοι οἱ μάχαιραν. Κλεομένης δὲ παραλαβὼν τὸν σίδηρον ἄρχετο ἐκ τῶν κνημέων ἐωυτὸν λωβώμενος· ἐπιτάμνων γὰρ κατὰ μῆκος τὰς σάρκας προέβαινε ἐκ τῶν κνημέων ἐς τοὺς μηρούς, ἐκ δὲ τῶν μηρῶν ἕς τε τὰ ἰσχία καὶ τὰς λαπάρας, ἐς

<sup>58</sup> Dewald notes that Cleomenes’ feud with Demaratus has far-reaching repercussions: Demaratus flees to Persia and becomes the Persian king’s “extremely valuable new advisor” (2003: 42).

<sup>59</sup> See Kindt, 2016: 36-7. She notes that by naming the Pythia in this encounter, Herodotus “draws attention away from the divine and towards the human side of oracles, thus preserving the divine voice which speaks as an authority elsewhere in the work.” Even if Herodotus emphasizes the human in this episode, however, Cleomenes’ actions are nevertheless transgressive against a religious institution.

<sup>60</sup> See Mikalson, 2003:17-8, where he points out that, although the Alcmaeonidae similarly bribe an oracle, Herodotus “offers no condemnation or punishment of the Alcmaeonidae’s behavior. This is our first instance in which Herodotus downplays an impiety by a group he admired against a tyrant or despotic power.”

ὁ ἐξ τὴν γαστέρα ἀπύκετο καὶ ταύτην καταχορδεύων ἀπέθανε τριούτῳ (6.75.2-3).

But once Cleomenes, when he was bound, saw that his guard was left alone, he demanded a dagger. At first the guard was not willing to give him one, but Cleomenes threatened him with all the things that he would do, until the guard became terrified (for he was a helot) and gave him a dagger. And Cleomenes, taking the weapon, began mutilating himself at his shins; for he moved from the shins to the thighs, cutting his flesh lengthwise, then from the thighs to the hips and sides, until he reached the belly, and mincing it he died in this way.

Like Cambyses, Cleomenes is described as moving from semi-mad to fully out of his mind, although the stages here are condensed.<sup>61</sup> But while Cambyses' actions led steadily toward his consequences, in Cleomenes' account Herodotus has jarringly placed the punishment before the crime. Based on the ties he has already established between religion and madness, however, a religious offense can likely be expected, and indeed Herodotus provides us with three. According to "most Greeks" Cleomenes' self-butchery was retribution for his involvement in the forgery of Demaratus' oracle (6.75.3). The Athenians, however, claim it was a punishment for invading and ravaging the sacred precinct of Eleusis, and the Argives cite Cleomenes' slaughter of suppliants in the temple of Argus and his arson of a sacred grove (6.75.3). Herodotus provides a detailed account of the Argives' claim, and adds that Cleomenes had also entered a forbidden temple and physically assaulted a priest (6.81).

After these three religious accounts are given, Herodotus finally reports the opinion of the Spartans themselves, who claim that Cleomenes' "madness arose from no divine agent" (ἐκ δαιμονίου μὲν οὐδενὸς μανῆναι, 6.84.1), but rather from drinking too much "Scythian" (i.e. unmixed) wine. Herodotus quickly dismisses this perspective, however, and

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. Munson, 1999: 50.

ends the account of Cleomenes with his own opinion on the matter: “but to my thinking it was for what he did to Demaratus that he was punished thus” (ἐμοὶ δὲ δοκεῖ τίσιν ταύτην ὁ Κλεομένης Δημαρήτω ἐκτεῖσαι, 6.84.3). It is unclear whether Herodotus is including the bribery of the oracle against Demaratus or merely the unjust treatment of him in general; that is to say, it is unclear whether Herodotus is himself ascribing a religious causation or merely a moral one.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, this opinion is quite delayed and is voiced only after a piling up of religious factors (one of which being a long, drawn-out account). Herodotus’ own difficulties in pinning down a cause for Cleomenes’ self-mutilation reflects the present challenges involved in isolating religious transgressions. Herodotus considers several religiously-charged factors from several different groups of people to identify Cleomenes’ crime—a process which is strikingly similar to our own. But whatever Herodotus’ personal opinion on the matter, it is clear that the established connections among monarchs, religion, and madness still stand; these connections are emphasized through the incessant use of the vocabulary of madness, the jarring and graphic punishments, and the accumulation of possible religious causes.

The episodes of Scyles and Cleomenes gain meaning through their similarities to the account of Cambyses,<sup>63</sup> and each presents a monarch who transgresses against his own custom and becomes mad. Not only do these rulers go mad, however, but they are among the few in the *Histories* to do so: Munson points out that, aside from two references to Dionysian madness (of which Scyles is one) Cleomenes and Cambyses are the only two people “to

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<sup>62</sup> For morality and causation in Herodotus see Fisher, 2002: 199-224.

<sup>63</sup> This is a narrowed-down application of the idea presented by Immerwahr: “Framing sentences stress the interrelationships of events by external connections, but within a single *logos*, events may also acquire meaning by their similarity to those described in other accounts—a similarity expressed through the repetition of *logos*-structure and *logos*-pattern” (1966: 149).

whom the *histor* in his own voice will apply μαν- words.”<sup>64</sup> Thus Scyles, Cambyses, and Cleomenes each support Otanes’ argument during the constitutional debate that monarchies cannot be a fit thing, since a single ruler “upsets the ancestral ways” (νόμια τέ κινέει πάτρια, 3.80.5) and is pushed beyond customary mindsets (3.80.3).<sup>65</sup> Otanes obviously had Cambyses in mind when he made this statement, and says as much at the beginning of his speech. Scyles and Cleomenes serve to reinforce this idea, proving Cambyses to be the rule, not the exception, while simultaneously deflecting any arguments that such religious transgressions are typical of one particular ethnicity. By depicting a Persian, a Scythian, and a Spartan all engaging in similar behavior, Herodotus highlights the fact that it is monarchy, not ethnicity, which is to blame.

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<sup>64</sup> Munson, 1999: 50.

<sup>65</sup> Although Cleomenes is not, strictly speaking, a monarch—as a Spartan he has a co-king—he attempts to depose Demaratus and thus acts in the manner of an autocrat.

## PHERETIME: DIVINE VENGEANCE

Not only does Herodotus depict rulers of varying ethnicities committing religious transgressions, he likewise depicts such violations as crossing the gender divide as well. This point becomes evident in the story of Pheretime,<sup>66</sup> whose son, Arcesilaus, was the king of the Cyrenaeans. While Arcesilaus was in Barce, Pheretime “held her son’s prerogative at Cyrene, and she administered all his affairs and sat in council” (ἡ δὲ εἶχε αὐτὴ τοῦ παιδὸς τὰ γέρεα ἐν Κυρήνῃ καὶ τᾶλλα νεμομένη καὶ ἐν βουλῇ παρίζουσα, 4.165.1). Thus, although Pheretime is not herself a true monarch, she acts as one in her son’s place, and can thus be viewed as a female ruler. Notably, Pheretime shares the distinction—along with Alexander—of being one of only two individuals whom Herodotus decisively accuses of incurring divine retribution for some injustice. For when her son is murdered by the Barcaeans,<sup>67</sup> Pheretime exacts a horrifying revenge:

τοὺς μὲν νυν αἰτιωτάτους τῶν Βαρκαίων ἡ Φερετίμη, ἐπεῖτε οἱ ἐκ τῶν Περσέων παρεδόθησαν, ἀνεσκολόπισε κύκλῳ τοῦ τείχεος, τῶν δὲ σφι γυναικῶν τοὺς μαζοὺς ἀποταμοῦσα περιέστιξε καὶ τούτοις τὸ τεῖχος· τοὺς δὲ λοιποὺς τῶν Βαρκαίων λήϊν ἐκέλευσε θέσθαι τοὺς Πέρσας, πλὴν ὅσοι αὐτῶν ἦσαν Βαττιάδαι τε καὶ τοῦ φόνου οὐ μεταίτιοι· τούτοις δὲ τὴν πόλιν ἐπέτρεψε ἡ Φερετίμη (4.202).

When they were delivered by the Persians, Pheretime took the most guilty of the Barcaeans and impaled them round about the wall, and she stuck the severed breasts of the women around the wall in a similar manner. As for the

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<sup>66</sup> For more on Pheretime, see Munson, 2001: 187-88.

<sup>67</sup> Arcesilaus’ murder is a direct consequence of his not fully comprehending an oracle’s warning. Kindt therefore sees it as yet another story that “parades the ignorance of those in power about the principles and practices of human-divine communication” (2016: 29). Perhaps this factor also contributes to Pheretime’s own punishment: she enacted extreme vengeance for a murder that had divine roots.

rest of the Barcaeans, she told the Persians to take them as a reward, except those who were descendants of Battus and not accessory to the murder: to these Pheretime turned over the city.

The excessiveness of this retaliation is evocative of Cambyses, who likewise mutilated bodies (or, more accurately, one particular body). Also reminiscent of Cambyses is the intensity and duration of Pheretime's anger (although, surprisingly, she is never explicitly described as angry): Cambyses' rage lasted throughout the Egyptian campaign, and persisted even after he had abused Amasis' corpse; Pheretime's seethes throughout a nine-month siege (4.200). While Cambyses lives for some time after his revenge, however, Pheretime meets an immediate demise:

οὐ μὲν οὐδὲ ἡ Φερετίμη εὖ τὴν ζόην κατέπλεξε. ὥς γὰρ δὴ τάχιστα ἐκ τῆς Λιβύης τεισαμένη τοὺς Βαρκαίους ἀπενόστησε ἐς τὴν Αἴγυπτον, ἀπέθανε κακῶς· ζῶσα γὰρ εὐλέων ἐξέζεσε, ὥς ἄρα ἀνθρώποισι, αἱ λίην ἰσχυραὶ τιμωρίαι πρὸς θεῶν ἐπίφθονοι γίνονται. ἡ μὲν δὲ Φερετίμης τῆς Βάττου τοιαύτη τε καὶ τοσαύτη τιμωρὴ ἐγένετο ἐς Βαρκαίους (4.205).

But Pheretime did not end her life well, either. For indeed as soon as she had taken vengeance upon the Barcaeans and returned from Libya, she met an awful death: for while she was still alive she teemed with maggots. Thus does over-violent human revenge invite retribution from the gods. Indeed the revenge of Pheretime, daughter of Battus, against the Barcaeans was of such a sort.

Just as Pheretime's crime was reminiscent of Cambyses', her punishment is perhaps evocative of Cleomenes': both are destroyed bodily while they are yet living (although Cleomenes' wounds are self-inflicted). But while Cambyses and Cleomenes both engaged in explicitly religious transgressions, Pheretime's crime is more complicated: revenge itself does not seem to be the issue, but rather the hubristic nature of it. Harrison suggests that Pheretime's "garish punishment...might be interpreted as due to her having usurped a divine



prerogative.”<sup>68</sup> That is, punishments of this caliber are in the divine domain, and humans who carry them out should therefore expect to incur the gods’ jealousy (cf. ἐπίφθονοι).

Pheretime’s crime is not overtly religious in nature, however, and our only indication to read it as such is that her gruesome fate is so explicitly delivered by the gods. Our provisional definition of “religious transgression” does not comfortably allow us to consider revenge an offense against the divine—but offense has been taken, and while vengeance itself may not be a transgression, Herodotus indicates that hubristic vengeance is.

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<sup>68</sup> Harrison, 2000: 164.

## XERXES: A COMPLICATED CASE STUDY

In his discussion of Xerxes' position within the larger framework of eastern *logoi*, Immerwahr suggests that when Xerxes is compared "with the portraits of the preceding kings, it becomes apparent that they are in a sense the preparation for the full development of the figure of this last Persian king discussed by Herodotus."<sup>69</sup> This same perception can be applied to the idea of religious transgression: when the previous concepts and figures presented throughout the *Histories* are compared to Xerxes, a complicated picture arises regarding his character and motives.<sup>70</sup> However, as Baragwanath notes, "ambiguity in presentation of character does not represent an interpretative dead end: rather it may reflect the complexity of human character and the real challenge of interpreting it."<sup>71</sup> The monarchs we have encountered thus far can guide readers' interpretations, revealing a complex understanding of the singular character of Xerxes.

Herodotus first mentions Xerxes all the way back in book 1, and in keeping with Immerwahr's idea of the comparative relationship among the Persian emperors, this episode features a clear contrast between Xerxes and Darius:

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<sup>69</sup> Immerwahr, 1966: 176.

<sup>70</sup> Dewald confirms this view, stating that Xerxes' "portrait is the most vivid and nuanced of the five" (2003: 43). Cf. also Bridges: "...Herodotus' narrative constructs our most detailed insight into the character and actions of Xerxes, who is given a more thorough treatment than any other Persian in the *Histories*. One aspect of this representation inevitably concerns those episodes which relate to his role as a brutal barbarian despot, the enslaving and cruel tyrant who transgressed both physical and moral boundaries and behaved with disregard for the gods of the Greeks" (2015: 45). For more on the topic of Xerxes' personality, see Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 2002: 579-90.

<sup>71</sup> Baragwanath, 2015: 30.

ἐγὼ μὲν μιν οὐκ εἶδον, τὰ δὲ λέγεται ὑπὸ Χαλδαίων, ταῦτα λέγω. τούτῳ τῷ ἀνδριάντι Δαρεῖος μὲν ὁ Ὑστάσπεος ἐπιβουλεύσας οὐκ ἐτόλμησε λαβεῖν, Ξέρξης δὲ ὁ Δαρείου ἔλαβε καὶ τὸν ἱερεὺς ἀπέκτεινε ἀπαγορεύοντα μὴ κινεῖν τὸν ἀνδριάντα (1.183.3).

I myself have not seen it [a golden image of Zeus], but I report what is said by the Chaldeans: Darius son of Hystaspes planned to take the statue but dared not; Xerxes his son took it, and killed the priest who had warned him not to move the statue.

From the very first book, then, Herodotus has established a comparison between Xerxes and his predecessors; and importantly, this connection is made by means of a religious transgression. Through this initial episode, Herodotus sets up his audience with a negative expectation of Xerxes: he is an arrogant king who not only dared to take what his father would not, but killed the priest who protected it. Here we have a twist on the tactic Herodotus employed in the Cambyses narrative. Cambyses was introduced in a positive light through his display of religious tolerance, but Herodotus soon revealed him to be a transgressive, maddened, and intolerant ruler. Xerxes, on the other hand, is initially depicted in a negative light as he commits a religious transgression, but his characterization does not remain this straightforward; Herodotus rather presents us with an increasingly ambivalent figure, which is especially apparent regarding Xerxes' decision to invade Greece.<sup>72</sup>

There are two primary motives ascribed to Xerxes' ultimate involvement in Greece: (1) an inciting dream, and (2) revenge for the burning of the temple at Sardis. In the beginning of book 7, Xerxes holds a conference to discuss the possibility of a campaign against Greece; although there are many lengthy speeches regarding the matter, this council rather serves as a convenient gathering for Xerxes to express his decision not to engage in

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<sup>72</sup> For a detailed examination of Xerxes' motives, see Baragwanath, 2008: 242-253.

such a campaign (7.8-11). By the end of the council, however, he has changed his mind and decided to invade, reasoning that the Athenians need to be punished for burning the temple at Sardis (7.8.11). Later that night, Xerxes changes his mind yet again, and decides to refrain from a war with Greece:

δεδογμένων δέ οἱ αὖτις τούτων κατύπνωσε, καὶ δὴ κου ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ εἶδε ὄψιν τοιήνδε, ὡς λέγεται ὑπὸ Περσέων· ἐδόκεε ὁ Ξέρξης ἄνδρα οἱ ἐπιστάντα μέγαν τε καὶ εὐειδέα εἰπεῖν· Μετὰ δὲ βουλευέαι, ὃ Πέρσα, στράτευμα μὴ ἄγειν ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα, προείπας ἀλίζειν Πέρσας στρατόν; οὔτε ὢν μεταβουλεύόμενος ποίεις εὖ, οὔτε ὁ συγγνωσόμενός τοι πάρα· ἀλλ' ὥσπερ τῆς ἡμέρης ἐβουλεύσαιο ποίειν, ταύτην ἴθι τῶν ὁδῶν (7.12).

He made this second resolve and fell fast asleep; then, so the Persians say, he saw a vision in the night: it seemed to Xerxes that a tall and handsome man stood over him and said, “Are you changing your resolve, Persian, will you not lead a campaign against Hellas, although you made a proclamation to assemble the army? You do not act well in changing your mind and no one will pardon you for it; but let your course be along the path you resolved upon yesterday.”

Xerxes does not heed the dream, however, and receives a similar vision the following night.

Again the figure stands beside his bed, but this time he warns Xerxes that if he does not undertake war, his power will be diminished (7.14). Fearful, Xerxes summons Artabanos and recounts the threat of the dream; the pair then decide to test<sup>73</sup> the vision by having Artabanos dress in Xerxes' clothes and sleep in his bed in order to determine whether or not it was truly sent from the god (7.15-17). Artabanos also receives a dream:

ὥς μετὰ ταῦτα κοῖτον ἐποιέετο, ἥλθῃ οἱ κατυπνωμένῳ τῶντ' ὄνειρον τὸ καὶ παρὰ Ξέρξην ἐφοῖτα, ὑπερστὰν δὲ τοῦ Ἀρταβάνου εἶπε τάδε· Σὺ δὴ κεῖνος εἰς ὁ ἀποσπεύδων Ξέρξην στρατεύεσθαι ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα ὡς δὴ κηδόμενος αὐτοῦ; ἀλλ' οὔτε ἐς τὸ μετέπειτα οὔτε ἐς τὸ παραντίκα {νῦν} καταπροΐξεαι ἀποτρέπων τὸ χρεὼν γενέσθαι, Ξέρξην δὲ τὰ δεῖ ἀνηκουστέοντα παθεῖν, αὐτῷ ἐκείνῳ δεδήλωται (7.17).

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<sup>73</sup> For an analysis of their experiment see Christ, 1994: 193-7.

Then while he slept on his bed, there came to him the same dream that had appeared to Xerxes; it stood over Artabanos and said, “Are you the one who is dissuading Xerxes from marching against Hellas, because you are concerned for him? Neither in the future nor now will you escape with impunity for striving to turn aside what must be. To Xerxes himself it has been declared what will befall him if he disobeys.”

After this dream, Artabanos and Xerxes are convinced of its authenticity and Xerxes heeds its command and resolves to invade Greece. As we have seen, however, dreams can be sites of interpretative confusion, and it cannot easily be determined whether Xerxes’ dream represents genuine advice or sinister entrapment. It may be comparable to Sabacos’ dream from book 2, as both are auditory rather than visual: each features the figure of a man standing beside the recipient and addressing him directly.<sup>74</sup> The language describing Sabacos’ vision and Xerxes’ is strikingly similar:

Sabacos: **ἐδόκεε οἱ ἄνδρα ἐπιστάντα συμβουλεύειν** (2.139.1).

Xerxes: **ἐδόκεε ὁ Ξέρξης ἄνδρα οἱ ἐπιστάντα μέγαν τε καὶ εὖειδέα εἰπεῖν** (7.12.1).

In accordance with the more threatening nature of Artabanos’ version of the dream, however, the verb used to describe it is the slightly more sinister *ὑπερσταν*, “standing over,” rather than *ἐπιστάντα*, “standing beside.” This language may serve to cast doubt upon Xerxes’ adherence to the dream’s commands: is he perhaps being persuaded to commit an indiscretion? As Christ points out, however, Sabacos’ dream “makes no provision for punishment should he disobey its orders, and thus leaves him considerably more room to maneuver than Artabanus’ dream vision does him.”<sup>75</sup> Moreover, Herodotus makes sure to

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<sup>74</sup> See Hollmann, 2001:80. Hollmann identifies two types of dreams in the *Histories*. This type is also experienced by Croesus (1.38.1), Sethos (2.141.3), and Hipparchus (5.56.1).

<sup>75</sup> Christ, 1994: 196.

include a detailed vetting of the dream, which places Xerxes more in the camp of Aristodicus, who thoroughly tested his questionable oracular advice. Also contributing to the complication involved in interpreting this dream is the use of the term τὸ χρεόν. The vision uses this word when it appears to Artabanos, rebuking him for attempting to turn away “that which must be” (7.17). This is the same “fate” word used by the oracle in the account of Mycerinus. This might suggest yet another reading of the dream: that it is neither attempting to help nor to entrap but is simply stating that which must be—true fate. If this were the case, Xerxes would, like Mycerinus, be mistaken in acting contrarily. In this way, Herodotus complicates the very inception of Xerxes’ war against Greece, as well as his motive for invasion.

The other primary motive ascribed to Xerxes is revenge for the burning of the temple at Sardis, and Xerxes himself declares that punishment for this crime was his main goal (7.7b). At first blush this is an entirely legitimate reason for engaging in a campaign against Greece, but the issue is complicated when one observes the sheer excess of Persian retaliation for this act. Herodotus describes the initial Athenian offense thus:

καὶ Σάρδιες μὲν ἐνεπρήσθησαν, ἐν δὲ αὐτῇσι καὶ ἱρὸν ἐπιχωρίης θεοῦ Κυβήβης, τὸ σκηπτόμενοι οἱ Πέρσαι ὕστερον ἀντενεπίμπρασαν τὰ ἐν Ἑλλήσι ἱρά (5.102.1).

In the fire at Sardis, a temple of Cybele, the goddess of that country, was burnt down, and the Persians afterward made this their pretext for burning the temples of Hellas.

Here Herodotus seems to be undercutting this event as worthy of Persian retaliation. The burning of the temple is portrayed as an unfortunate side effect of the burning of the town, rather than a purposeful attack against it. And although we have seen that accidental transgressions do not annul culpability, we have also seen that a hubristic form of revenge is

particularly upsetting to the gods. This reading is encouraged by the word σκηπτόμενοι, which suggests the Persians are “alleging by way of excuse” or using this event as a “prop” for their subsequent actions. This denunciation of the Persian motive problematizes their subsequent excessive revenge. Instances of the Persians burning Greek temples are scattered throughout books 8 and 9: they burn temples at Phocis (8.32), Abae (8.33), Athens (8.53), Potidaea (8.129), Athens again (9.13), and Eleusis (9.65). In addition to these acts of arson, the Persians also attempt to plunder the temple at Delphi (8.35-38), and they murder suppliants in the temple of Athena Polias (8.53). This degree of retaliation may be a form of overstepping—a hubris of revenge—of a sort with Pheretime’s. An important factor is missing from Xerxes’ revenge narrative, however, and that is the element of divine punishment. Pheretime’s vengeance was clearly designated as a transgression by divine interference; Xerxes, however, provokes no such retributive divine action. Moreover, if Xerxes was acting to avenge his own holy spaces, his action could perhaps even be read as pious.

Xerxes engages in numerous other activities which, although not profane in themselves, mirror the religious transgressions of previous autocrats: he cuts Pythius’ eldest son in half and marches his army through the two sections of his body, which is in some ways reflective of the sacrilege Sabacos avoided (7.39); he ignores portents, which is comparable to Scyles (7.57-58); he dishonors Leonidas’ corpse, which is a toned-down version of Cambyses’ crime (7.238); and he whips the Hellespont, which may be indicative of hubris (7.24, 35). To balance out such crimes, however, Herodotus also includes an episode of Xerxes’ religious respect. When Xerxes was in Achaea, his guides explained to him the story behind the holy sanctuary to Zeus and the locals’ unique form of worship there:

Ξέρξης δὲ ταῦτα ἀκούσας ὥς κατὰ τὸ ἄλσος ἐγίνετο, αὐτός τε ἔργετο αὐτοῦ καὶ τῇ στρατιῇ πάσῃ παρήγγειλε, τῶν τε Ἀθάμαντος ἀπογόνων τὴν οἰκίην ὁμοίως καὶ τὸ τέμενος ἐσέβετο (7.197.4).

Xerxes heard these things, and when he came to the sacred grove, he himself refrained from entering it and he bade all his army to do likewise, holding the house and the precinct of Athamas' descendants alike in reverence.

Like many monarchs throughout the *Histories*, Xerxes sometimes chooses to transgress against religion. He does not transgress against his own, however, like Cambyses, Scyles, or Cleomenes, and therefore avoids a decent into madness.<sup>76</sup> In this regard, Xerxes successfully avoids one of the marks of tyranny as presented by Otanes in the constitutional debate. Xerxes does transgress against foreign religion, however, which for Herodotus is still problematic. Perhaps the most complicated factor in Xerxes' characterization lies in the influence of either fate or divinity in his decision to begin a campaign against Greece. The dream seems to remove responsibility from Xerxes, but as discussed in previous sections, supernatural interference does not annul human culpability. So Xerxes is either transgressing by obeying, or would be transgressing by disobeying; Herodotus does not provide an answer to this question, and his complicated portrait of Xerxes only underscores this difficulty of interpretation.

Immerwahr believes that one of Herodotus' greatest merits as a historian is "the fine balance his work maintains between the particular and the general, the individual and the

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<sup>76</sup> Xerxes is described as exceedingly angry in several places, which may be reminiscent of Cambyses' depiction. But, as Bridges notes, "despite the violent and contemptible nature of some of Xerxes' actions, they are not attributable merely to irrationality or madness " but are rather behaviors that are part of a "broader pattern which characterizes the actions of several Persian kings..." (2015: 48-50).



pattern.”<sup>77</sup> This paper has endeavored to examine the various patterns that emerge in Herodotus’ treatment of religious transgression through the accounts of individuals, particularly of individuals with sole power or authority. What has emerged is a complex relationship between religion and monarchy, and one that is further complicated by bouts of madness, as well as the interplay of human culpability, fate, and divine interference. There seem to be a few distinct categories: accidental transgressors, such as Mycerinus and Croesus; transgressors of custom, such as Cambyses and Scyles; and those who successfully evaded transgression, such as Sabacos and Aristodicus. These patterns provide several options for readers who seek to reach an understanding of the singular character of Xerxes: Herodotus has presented us with a complicated view of this last Persian king, and his motives for engagement against the Greeks.

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<sup>77</sup> Immerwahr, 1966: 149.

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