

Bereaved Fathers in Herodotus*

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Herodotus, when describing Persian customs, notes one particular practice relating to fathers and sons. Young boys, we are told, are not seen by their fathers before the age of five, in order to spare their fathers distress in case they die in early childhood (Hdt. 1.136). Herodotus approves of this custom (αἰνέω ... τόνδε τὸν νόμον 1.137.1) and his praise not only indicates that the historian attaches great importance to the relationship between fathers and sons, but that he is particularly aware of the possibility that sons may die and leave their fathers bereaved and in anguish. Bereaved fathers, in fact, play a prominent part in the *History*. Virtually all of Herodotus' stories dealing with fathers who lose their sons can be arranged in doublets or pairs and it is only when we look at both members of a pair together that we fully appreciate the meanings of these tales: each half of these doublets illuminates and elucidates the other.

Croesus and Periander. The Lydian king Croesus (1.34-45) and the Corinthian tyrant Periander (3.50-53) are one pair of bereaved fathers. Croesus is fated to be the last of the Mermnads to ascend to the throne, just as the tyrant Periander is destined to be the last of his family to rule — in this case it is a short-lived dynasty of father (Cypselus) and son (Periander)¹ — and this means

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¹ For an analysis of Periander and his family in Herodotus, see J.-P. Vernant, "From Oedipus to Periander: Lameness, Tyranny, Incest in Legend and History", *Arethusa* 15 (1982), 19-38; there is a later version, "The Lame Tyrant: From Oedipus to Periander" in: J.-P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (New York 1988), 207-236, 466-472. See, too, C. Sourvinou-Inwood, "'Myth' and History: On Herodotus 3.48 and 3.50-53" in: *Reading' Greek Culture: Text and Images, Rituals and Myths* (Oxford 1991), 244-284 (a revision of *Opuscula Atheniensa* 17 [1988], 167-182). According to other, non-Herodotean versions of the Cypselids' rule, a nephew of Periander succeeded the tyrant for a short while — cf. Arist. *Pol.* 1315b 25-26; Nicolaus of Damascus, *FGrH* 90 F59-60.

that their sons have to die. Both Periander and Croesus have two sons — a disappointing older² child, and a younger, more promising son, who is meant to be his father's successor. Croesus is perhaps the outstanding father in Herodotus' *History*: he is a concerned paternalistic king,³ virtually adopts two additional "sons", Adrastus and Cambyses, and above all, is a devoted father to his own two children. The Lydian king does all that is in his power to prevent the premature death of his younger and more capable son, Atys, and in a rare conversation between a father and his son in Herodotus (1.37-40), we learn something of the relations between the two. Croesus' son is courteous, requesting his father's permission to be allowed to join the boar hunt. The boy is skilled with words and uses rhetoric and reason,⁴ rather than angry words, to persuade his father. Won over by Atys' logic ("what kind of spear does a boar wield?"), Croesus gracefully yields to his son's request and the young man is, of course, killed. Although Croesus considers his second, mute⁵ son of no account (cf. τὸν ... ἕτερον οὐκ εἶναί μοι λογίζομαι 1.38.2), he treats this disappointing child kindly and is too conscientious a father not to make every effort (τὸ πᾶν ... ἐπεποίηκε 1.85.1) to help him. Eventually the son repays this solicitude: during the conquest of Lydia, this mute son, shocked and afraid, manages to burst into speech (cf. ὑπὸ δέους τε καὶ κακοῦ ἔρρηξε φωνήν 1.85.4) for the first time, and thus saves his father's life. Henceforth Croesus' unnamed mute son is able to speak. Scholars note how critical the power of speech is for the two Lydian princes: Atys' skill in speaking — his ability to persuade Croesus to allow him to join the hunt — costs him his life, while his "worthless" mute brother saves their father's life when *he* utters words for the first time.⁶

² Although we are not specifically told so, it seems likely that Croesus' mute son is also the elder of the two brothers, for if he were not the original heir, less attention would be paid to his disability. The motif of the unsatisfactory first-born son is a familiar folk theme — see S. Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (Copenhagen 1955-58), L10, L11, and H 1242. A further variation on the younger of two brothers being more able is the motif of the youngest of *three* brothers succeeding in some quest, and such resourceful third sons appear several times in Herodotus — cf. 4.5 (and W.W. How & J. Wells, *A Commentary on Herodotus* [Oxford 1928], *ad loc.*); 4.10; 8.137.

³ Cyrus calls him πατήρ of the Lydians (1.155); the only other king who is similarly designated father of his people is Cyrus himself (3.89).

⁴ Note in particular how he twice uses the various cases of the interrogative κοῖος (1.37.3; 1.39.2) to rhetorical effect. See H.R. Immerwahr, *Form and Thought in Herodotus* (Cleveland 1966), 71 with n. 70 for a formal analysis of Atys' two speeches to his father.

⁵ Cf. κωφός 1.34; διεφθαρμένον [τὴν ἀκοήν] 1.38; ἄφωνος 1.85.

⁶ See T. Sebeok and E. Brady, "The Two Sons of Croesus: A Myth about Communication in Herodotus", *QUCC* 30 (1979), 7-22, esp. 18. In contrast to Atys, whose rhetorical abilities lead to his own death, there are several instances in

If the emphasis is on speech in Croesus' relationship with his sons, in Periander's troubled family the stress is on silence. Lycophron, Periander's younger son, becomes estranged from his father after he learns that the tyrant has killed his mother, Melissa. He immediately breaks off all contact with his father, refusing to communicate with him, and subsequently — in contrast to the polite and rhetorical Atys — maintains an obdurate silence towards his father. Periander retaliates by “excommunicating” his son, forbidding the Corinthians to accept Lycophron in their homes or to converse with him. Even when the tyrant relents and tries to win his son over with words, Lycophron has nothing to say to his father, other than his brusque remark that Periander is violating his own edict by speaking to him. The tyrant then sends Lycophron out of sight,⁷ away to Corcyra. Lycophron is no more loquacious with other members of his family: while his father, grandfather, and sister all address him directly, Herodotus consistently and effectively uses silence and *oratio obliqua* to denote the responses of this angry young man.⁸ Periander's unsatisfactory elder son is only slightly more communicative. The tyrant considers this son unintelligent (cf. *νωθέστερος* 3.53.1) and the boy does not speak up (or, for that matter, react), until he is compelled by the persistent interrogations of his father (*ἐλιπάρεε τε ιστορέων* 3.51.1) to do so. Periander treats his eldest son with contempt and the boy fulfils his father's negative expectations and is of no avail whatsoever. Periander's anonymous daughter, on the other hand, is quite eloquent, more vocal than her unintelligent older brother or the grimly silent Lycophron. When sent by Periander to address Lycophron, her words consist of a series of rhetorical commonplaces.⁹ One particular argument in her speech suggests that perhaps Periander's backward elder son is not quite as simple as he seems. Lycophron is warned by his sister that sons, at times, lose their father's inheritance, by siding with their mothers *πολλοὶ δὲ ἤδη τὰ μητρῶια διζήμενοι τὰ πατρῶια ἀπέβαλον* (3.53.4), and this is, of course, precisely what has happened to Lycophron. By

Herodotus where persuasive speech brings about the rescue of sons. Cf. the impressive words of Intaphrenes' wife (3.119); Kyno (1.113) and Psammenitus (3.14).
⁷ *ἐξ ὀφθαλμῶν* (3.52.6); young Cyrus is another troublesome child who is sent *ἐξ ὀφθαλμῶν*, out of his grandfather's sight (1.120.6).

⁸ See J. Gould, *Herodotus* (London 1989), 52-53; P. Hohti, *The Interrelation of Speech and Action in the Histories of Herodotus* (Helsinki 1976), 96.

⁹ Her speech (3.53.3-4), a series of asyndetic *gnomai* — R. Heni, *Die Gespräche bei Herodot* (Diss. Heidelberg 1976), 141 n. 154, calls 3.53.4 a “Gnomenhäufung” — has been termed “hyper-feminine parody”; cf. G.L. Cooper, “Intrusive Oblique Infinitives in Herodotus”, *TAPA* 104 (1974), 34 n. 14. This seems unfair, considering that Herodotus specifically tells us that she has been tutored by her father (3.53.5). Periander, who is, we should recall, one of the Seven Wise Men, also speaks in maxims — see 3.52.3-5 and cf. Heni, 81 n. 284 and Hohti (above, n. 8), 28.

(perhaps deliberately) paying no attention to the heavy hints and innuendos about him,¹⁰ Periander's "stupid" elder son manages to avoid the difficult dilemma of choosing between his father and his mother, and consequently, he — like Croesus' equally anonymous and equally disappointing son — survives.

A further element common to the tales of Croesus and Periander is that of exclusion and exile. We have already seen that excommunication, or lack of contact, is a punitive tactic used both by Lycophron and Periander. Lycophron does not want, it seems, to be polluted by the man who murdered his mother either by talking to his father, or later on, residing in the same city. Periander uses the exact same sort of sanctions against his son — he decrees that no one in Corinth is to talk to Lycophron or receive him in their households and then exiles the boy — even though it is he himself, not his son, who is the killer.¹¹ Croesus, on the other hand, grants purification and shelter to Adrastus, a genuinely polluted but involuntary killer. In fact, after Adrastus' own father, Gordias, has been compelled to exile Adrastus because of the accidental killing of his other son,¹² Croesus acts virtually as an adoptive father towards the young Phrygian, and this is probably due to the *ξενία* relationship between the Lydian and Phrygian royal families.¹³ Subsequently, Adrastus will kill once more, unintentionally causing the death of a "brother" yet again,¹⁴ if we press the point about his being an "adopted" member of the Lydian royal family.

Both fathers attempt to ensure that their younger sons will succeed them, but there is a difference in attitude between the Lydian and the Corinthian rulers. Periander and his daughter stress the public consequences of Lycophron's estrangement from his father — i.e. that an outsider will rule over Corinth.¹⁵ When Croesus addresses his son Atys, his concern seems more personal than dynastic. We can assume that the Lydian king is eager to transfer the reins of power to his son, but all that he attempts to do is to keep his son alive during his own lifetime (ἐπὶ τῆς ἐμῆς ... ζόης 1.38.2): Croesus cannot face the sorrow of losing Atys. Both Periander and Croesus fail, of course, in their efforts to save their children,

¹⁰ Cf. ἐν οὐδενὶ λόγῳ ἐποιήσατο (3.50.3); οὐ νόῳ λαβῶν (3.51.1).

¹¹ Periander's public proclamation concerning Lycophron (3.52.1) is very similar to Oedipus' announcement of the excommunication of Laius' killer in *S. OT* (238-241); see R. Parker, *Miasma* (Oxford 1983), 125 with n. 83, 194, and compare 123 with n. 77. See, too, Sourvinou-Inwood (above, n. 1), 259-260 with notes.

¹² See Parker (above, n. 11), 123.

¹³ Hdt. 1.44.2. See G. Herman, *Ritualised Friendship and the Greek City* (Cambridge 1987), 22-26, 127 on the foster parenthood implied in the *xenia* relationship.

¹⁴ See T. Long, *Repetition and Variation in the Short Stories of Herodotus* (Frankfurt am Main 1987), 102 on the use of the word ἀέκων in relation to Adrastus' killing of the two young men (1.35.3; 1.45.2).

¹⁵ See M. Stahl, "Tyrannis und das Problem der Macht: Die Geschichten Herodots über Kypselos und Periander von Korinth", *Hermes* 111 (1983), 202-220, esp. 209-210.

and in each instance the manner of the son's death seems to be related to his father's character. On the whole, Croesus of the *History* is a kindly figure, if misguided at times.¹⁶ Periander, on the other hand, was, as Herodotus tells us, fairly mild at the beginning of his reign, but eventually turned out to be even more cruel and savage than his tyrannical father Cypselus (5.92 ζ-η).¹⁷ Perhaps it is not a coincidence, then, that Croesus' son dies accidentally at the hands of a man befriended by his father and, consequently, the Lydian does not avenge his death in any way; on the contrary, Croesus, when informed of the death of his son, is — after an initial outburst against Zeus — kindly and forgiving towards Adrastus. Lycophron is deliberately murdered by his father's enemies and Periander's (intended) vengeance is terrible — the castration of the sons of 300 leading men of Corcyra.¹⁸ Croesus grieves quietly for two years; Periander immediately thinks of revenge.

The tale of Periander and his family is an instance of vengeance for the death of a son (or in our case — originally daughter, for the killing of Melissa and her father's hints trigger all the subsequent troubles) being carried over from one generation to the next and reaching a wider circle of victims. The son paradoxically "bequeaths" to his bereaved father an inheritance of vengeance and retribution.¹⁹ Another theme found in the story of Periander and Lycophron is that of a son being put to death through no fault or action of his own, but simply because

¹⁶ Croesus' threat to cut down the people of Lampsacus "like a pine tree" (6.37) is his most tyrannical act. For Croesus as a well-meaning but misguided figure, see H.-P. Stahl, "Learning through Suffering? Croesus' Conversations in the History of Herodotus", *YCS* 24 (1975), 1-36; cf. M. Miller, "The Herodotean Croesus", *Klio* 41 (1963), 58-94.

¹⁷ H. Immerwahr, "The Samian stories of Herodotus", *CJ* 52 (1956-57), 312-322, esp. 320 thinks that Herodotus portrays the tyranny of Periander as degenerating in three stages from the splendor of the tyrant's court at 1.23-24, through the troubles of succession at 3.48-53, to the gruesome crimes of 5.92. K. H. Waters, *Herodotos on Tyrants and Despots: A Study in Objectivity*, (*Historia Einzelschriften* 15. Wiesbaden 1971), 13-15, 18-20 argues that Herodotus does *not* portray Periander as a detestable tyrant.

¹⁸ When he chooses this means of avenging his son's death, Periander may have been reminded of the oracle given to his father Cypselus, namely that Cypselus and his son would rule in Corinth, but not his son's sons (5.92ε). Similarly, Periander tries to ensure that while the people of Corcyra, the murderers of Lycophron, have sons of their own, there will be no sons' sons to inherit them.

¹⁹ See Hdt. 1.103 for a rare instance in Herodotus of a son not only inheriting a war from his father, but also avenging him; cf. H. Immerwahr "Aspects of Historical Causation in Herodotus", *TAPA* 87 (1956), 241-280, esp. 257-58 nn. 29-30.

he is his father's son. There are in the *History* a whole series of such sons who die because of their fathers,²⁰ including the children of Harpagus and Prexaspes.

Harpagus and Prexaspes. The tales of the sons of Harpagus and Prexaspes are very similar: in both stories a cruel, omnipotent despot kills the son of his chief aide, after he has asked that minister to kill a member of the royal family. Harpagus' story (1.107-129) involves several sets of parents and children: Astyages, his daughter Mandane, and her son Cyrus; the shepherd Mithridates, his wife Spako, and their dead son; the noble Mede, Artembares, and his son, who is humiliated by young Cyrus; and, of course, Harpagus and his only son. Astyages arranges a terrible end for Harpagus' son, punishing father and son alike: in a kind of poetic "injustice" the minister's "reward" for keeping the tyrant's offspring alive is the death of his own son. There are certain parallels between what Harpagus, or his emissary, the shepherd Mithridates, were supposed to do to Cyrus — expose the child, allow animals to tear him to pieces, see the dead boy, and then bury him — and what Astyages actually does to Harpagus' son, when he dismembers the boy, has Harpagus view the remains, and then allows him to bury the child.²¹ Astyages has also added a touch of his own, serving up the boy to his father at dinner; he may have been influenced by an episode involving his father Cyaxares, who was once served such a meal by angry Scythian hunters (1.73.4-6).

Cambyses is not unlike his great grandfather, Astyages, and he too does not hesitate to have his closest relatives put to death. Mad Cambyses²² first orders his faithful lieutenant Prexaspes to assassinate his brother Smerdis (3.30) and then brings about the death of his own unborn child, when he kills his pregnant sister-wife in a fit of rage (3.31-32). In other words, Cambyses becomes a "bereaved" father by his own hand. Cambyses then kills the son of his chief minister and audience master, Prexaspes, simply because he wishes to demonstrate his sobriety and sanity (3.34-35).²³ Before aiming an arrow at the boy, Camby-

²⁰ See too Cranaspes, son of Mitrobates (3.120,126); the sons of Phanes (3.11); the wife and children of Lycidas (9.5); the son of Artayctes (9.116-121); Nicolaus and Aneristus (7.133-137; here it is not mortal men, but a semi-divine agent, Talthybius, who exacts retribution); compare also 1.155.1; 4.69.3. Contrast Darius' surprisingly friendly attitude towards Metiochus, son of Miltiades (6.41) and Pausanias' reluctance to punish the young sons of the pro-Persian Attaginus (9.88).

²¹ Cf. Long (above, n. 14), 165-175.

²² T. S. Brown, "Herodotus' portrait of Cambyses", *Historia* 31 (1982), 387-403; A. B. Lloyd, "Herodotus on Cambyses: Some Thoughts on Recent Work" in: *Achaemenid History III: Method and Theory*, edd. A. Kuhrt and H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg (Leiden 1988), 55-66; R. V. Munson, "The Madness of Cambyses (Hdt. 3. 16-38)", *Arethusa* 24 (1991), 43-63 are three recent studies of Herodotus' portrayal of Cambyses.

²³ Cambyses actually confuses sobriety with sanity: accused of drunkenness (φιλοινίη 3.34.2), he tries to demonstrate that he is not deranged (παρὰφρονέειν καὶ οὐκ

ses reminds Prexaspes of an earlier occasion when his Persian subjects had stated that he, Cambyses, was superior to his father Cyrus. All had agreed that he was the better of the two, recalls Cambyses, with the exception of Croesus. Croesus has virtually been bequeathed to Cambyses by his father — along with the Persian kingdom — and in the only exchange recorded between father and son in the *History*, Cyrus urges Cambyses to honor the Lydian and treat him kindly. Cyrus, we later learn, has also repeatedly enjoined Croesus to supervise and advise his son. Thus the Lydian monarch acts as a kind of moral guardian or surrogate father to Cambyses.²⁴ Croesus, in any event, tells Cambyses that he is not equal to his father because he does not have a son like the one Cyrus has left behind in himself (οὐ γὰρ κῶ τοί ἐστι υἱὸς οἷον σε ἐκεῖνος κατέλιπετο 3.34.5). Cambyses is very pleased by Croesus' remark — which can be taken as flattery, pure and simple — but the Lydian, in all likelihood, intends to rebuke his charge. The bereaved Croesus, who knows how fraught with sorrow fatherhood and the survival of one's sons can be, is actually chastising Cambyses here for recklessly killing his unborn child and not leaving him behind. Raise a child, Croesus obliquely tells the young king, and learn what it means to be human.²⁵ That Cambyses is sorely in need of such a lesson can be seen from his subsequent killing of his young cupbearer, Prexaspes' son, and his delight in discovering that his arrow has indeed pierced the boy's heart.

Both Astyages and Cambyses gloat over their cruel deeds, asking their bereaved ministers a pointed question while having them look at the pitiful remnants of their children. The two fathers, Harpagus and Prexaspes, react with similar composure and dignity to the sight of their dead sons. Harpagus views his son's remains on a platter, but does not react, other than to express — in response to Astyages' prodding — his acceptance of the king's will. In fact, Harpagus is more restrained when faced with his own dead child than when handed the task of killing the infant Cyrus — he weeps when he carries young Cyrus to his house (ῥιε κλαίων ἐς τὰ οἰκία 1.109.1), but, learning of the death of his own son, he withdraws into himself (ἐντός τε ἑωυτοῦ γίνεται ...) and carries the dismembered child home in silence (ῥιε ἐς τὰ οἰκία 1.119.7).²⁶

εἶναι νοήμονα 3.34.3; cf. παραφρονέουσι 3.35.4). Note also Cambyses' use of the word σωφρονεῖν (3.35.2) which can apply to either state. See Heni (above, n. 9), 130-31 and cf. Munson (above, n. 22), 54-55 with n. 19.

²⁴ Cf. 1.208; 3.36.1. Interestingly, all three of Croesus' encounters with Cambyses in the *History* (3.14.11; 3.34.5; 3.36) deal with the theme of fathers and sons.

²⁵ See Immerwahr (above, n. 4), 168 who sees Croesus' statement as a reproach related to dynastic, rather than moral, concerns; compare K. von Fritz, *Die griechische Geschichtsschreibung* I.1 (Berlin 1967), 233-34. Croesus will subsequently rebuke his charge more directly, taking Cambyses to task for killing his Persian subjects — both adults and children — at will (3.36.1-2).

²⁶ Cf. Long (above, n. 14), 163.

Prexaspes, asked by the unbalanced Cambyses to applaud his marksmanship, does so, stating quietly that the god himself could aim no better. Perhaps the dignified reserve of Harpagus and Prexaspes is intended to cheat their sons' killers of the satisfaction that outward manifestations of grief would afford them: the victims do not oblige their powerful tormentors with an open display of pain. In any event, neither Astyages nor Cambyses seems to have any understanding of the normal feelings of a parent. Astyages apparently knows nothing of the love fathers feel for their daughters or mothers for their sons, for he marries off his only daughter to a lowly Persian and tries to kill her child. He does so in order to prevent Cyrus from inheriting his kingdom, but since he has no male heirs, it is difficult to see who Astyages thinks *should* rule after him.²⁷ Cambyses, who brings about the deaths of his own brother, sister, and unborn child, clearly does not understand family feeling at all. It is not a coincidence that both Astyages and Cambyses die without any heirs; in Cambyses' case Herodotus stresses the fact that the tyrant dies altogether childless ἀπαίδα δὲ τὸ παράπαν ἔόντα ἔρσενος καὶ θήλεος γόνου (3.66.2). In the *History*, childlessness is a terrible punishment reserved for the most cruel of Herodotus' characters.²⁸

There are, then, many parallels between the tales of Prexaspes and Harpagus, but there are also two substantial differences between the stories and these differences may well be linked. (1) Harpagus does not kill a member of the king's family, while Prexaspes does. (2) Astyages' minister takes revenge upon his king and eventually brings about the downfall of his empire, but Prexaspes never tries to avenge the death of his son and continues to serve Cambyses faithfully until the end of his days (cf. 3.62-63). Even when he is offered the opportunity by the Magi to do a great deal of damage to the Achaemenids, Prexaspes does his utmost to preserve Persian rule, confessing to the murder of Smerdis and jumping bravely to his death (3.74-75). Why doesn't Prexaspes avenge the death of his son? Perhaps the "rules" of vengeance and retribution in Herodotus' *History* are such that Prexaspes has no right to repay Cambyses for killing his son after he himself has assassinated the king's brother, even if he has murdered Smerdis at Cambyses' bidding.²⁹ Similarly, Harpagus is given the credit for saving Cyrus' life, despite the fact that he did so only indirectly and inadvertently: in both these tales, one's actions, not one's motives and intentions, are what count. It seems that the blood on Prexaspes' hands — his complicity in the

²⁷ Cf. D. Fehling, *Herodotus and his "Sources": Citation, Invention and Narrative Art* (Leeds 1989), 200 and compare Polybus of Sicyon who is ἀπαίς (i.e. has no male children) and bequeaths his kingdom to his daughter's son, Adrastus (5.67.4).

²⁸ See D. Lateiner, *The Historical Method of Herodotus* (Toronto 1989), 142-44 on childlessness or the extirpation of a house in Herodotus as retribution for deeds of extraordinary wickedness.

²⁹ Prexaspes, in his farewell speech, implies that he was *forced* to kill Smerdis — cf. ἔλεγε ... ὡς αὐτὸς ὑπὸ Καμβύσῳ ἀναγκαζόμενος ἀποκτείνειε (3.75.2).

murder of Smerdis — prevents him from taking revenge and in the end, the Persian minister acts only against himself, committing suicide. It is interesting to note that Prexaspes' farewell address has many parallels with Cambyses' final speech: both the minister and his king regretfully confess to the killing of Smerdis and both threaten the Persians with dire consequences if they do not attempt to overthrow the Magi (3.65; 3.75). Both Prexaspes and Cambyses die shortly after their final addresses and in each case Herodotus takes the opportunity to sum up the two men. Prexaspes, we are told, has been an honourable man throughout his life *ἕως ... πάντα χρόνον ἀνὴρ δόκιμος* (3.75.3).³⁰ With Cambyses Herodotus simply mentions the length of his reign and the fact that the king died childless and we have already seen that this summation not only provides necessary dynastic information, but is a moral judgement as well.

Harpagus seems to accept his punishment at the hands of his ruler quite meekly, but ultimately has his revenge, secretly persuading Cyrus to rebel against his Mede grandfather. Astyages appoints Harpagus commander of the Median army sent to confront the rebellious Cyrus, forgetting the wrong he has done to his chief aide. Naturally, Harpagus joins forces with Cyrus and the Mede tyrant is quickly defeated. How could Astyages have forgotten his cruel treatment of his minister? Herodotus explains that Astyages has been stricken by the gods (*ὥστε θεοβλαβῆς ἕως* 1.127.2).³¹ Since his own family means nothing to Astyages, perhaps it is not surprising that he does not remember that Harpagus may still be deeply anguished over the death of his son. Harpagus and Astyages have very different values: the minister, a relative of the king, is unwilling to kill Cyrus because of the kinship between them, and because of his relationship with the king and his daughter (1.117.3), while Astyages, the infant's grandfather, has no such scruples.³² If the Mede tyrant is interested only in the question of succession to his throne, his minister is concerned solely with his personal sorrow. Harpagus, as Astyages points out after his downfall, has sacrificed all of

³⁰ For the difficulties presented by Herodotus' picture of Prexaspes as *δόκιμος*, see S. Flory, "Arion's Leap: Brave Gestures in Herodotus", *AJP* 99 (1978), 411-421, esp. 414-15 with n. 9.

³¹ See again, Lateiner (above, n. 28), 142-44. Lateiner mentions in this context the revenge the eunuch Hermotimus has upon Panionius, the man who castrated him: Hermotimus forces Panionius to castrate his own sons and then has the sons castrate their father (Hdt. 8.104-106). Panionius is surprisingly blind and believes that the eunuch is genuinely grateful to him for having emasculated him: although he has sons of his own, Panionius, like Astyages, does not seem to understand what fatherhood may mean to others.

³² The regret Astyages expresses to Harpagus at having ordered Cyrus' death and caused a rift with his daughter (1.118.2) is belied by his consultation immediately afterwards with the Magi on what is now to be done with his grandson (1.120-121); presumably Astyages would be prepared to kill Cyrus all over again. The Mede tyrant certainly does not regret killing Harpagus' son, who is also related to him.

the Medes in his desire for vengeance for the death of his son. Neither Astyages nor Harpagus is an altogether black or white character: the gloating Harpagus — who never actually tried to save Cyrus' life, but simply wanted to avoid bloodying his own hands — *does* betray his own people, while Astyages becomes a wise adviser of sorts once he has been captured.³³ Cambyses, with his penitent deathbed speech, is a similarly complicated figure, who has a positive side as well.

Psammenitus and Intaphrenes' wife. We see something of Cambyses' complex character in the tale of his encounter with Psammenitus; the Egyptian king and the wife of Intaphrenes are another parallel pair of bereaved parents (3.14-15; 3.119). Both Psammenitus and Intaphrenes' wife are rewarded for reacting in an unconventional way to the imminent execution of their children, but in this instance one tale is virtually the mirror image of the other.³⁴ Cambyses' plan to subjugate Psammenitus' daughter and execute the ruler's son is presented as an experiment meant to test — and humiliate (cf. ἐπὶ λύμῃ ... διεπειράτο αὐτοῦ τῆς ψυχῆς 3.14.1) — his newly vanquished opponent. Psammenitus is made to watch his daughter, dressed as a slave and carrying a water pitcher, walk by; he is then forced to witness the spectacle of his bridled and trussed son being led to his death.³⁵ The other Egyptian nobles present, whose children are treated in the same fashion, shout and weep at the sight of their humiliated daughters and sons, but Psammenitus, after a brief glance of comprehension, does not react and simply lowers his head to the ground. Psammenitus breaks his silence — crying aloud and striking his head — only when an old man, a former drinking companion now reduced to begging, accidentally passes by.³⁶ Questioned about his

³³ For Astyages as a Croesus-type figure, wise in defeat, see R. Lattimore, "The Wise Adviser in Herodotus", *CP* 34 (1939), 24-35, esp. 31. See too K. Reinhardt, "Herodots Persergeschichten" in: *Herodot: Eine Auswahl aus der neueren Forschung*², ed. W. Marg (*Wege der Forschung* 26. Darmstadt 1965), 320-369, in particular his perceptive comment that Harpagus, by conniving with Cyrus against the Medes, is once again feasting on his own flesh (340-41).

³⁴ Cf. S. Benardete, *Herodotean Inquiries* (Hague 1969), 75-76.

³⁵ This motif of *seeing* is regularly found in stories of bereaved fathers. It is not enough for the fathers simply to know that their sons have been killed: often the children are murdered in front of their fathers (ἐς ὄψιν) or the bereaved parents are called to look upon the sight of their dead child, as in the cases of Harpagus (1.119.6) and Prexaspes (3.35.4). Phanes' children are killed ἐς ὄψιν τοῦ πατρός (3.11.2) and Artayctes' son is stoned to death ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖσι τοῦ Ἀρταύκτεω (9.120.4). Cf. the behaviour of Hermotimus (8.106).

³⁶ One wonders if Cambyses had planned a third procession, consisting of the captive Egyptian wives, including Psammenitus' own queen, before the old man arrived on the scene. The actual sequence of events is meant to be increasingly difficult for the Egyptians to bear, for soon-to-be-dead sons are an even more distressing sight than captive daughters. We are led to expect a third, most painful parade of all, but the

puzzling behavior by a curious Cambyses, Psammenitus explains that his own personal sorrow is too great to express aloud, while the fate of a man who is stripped in old age of all his possessions well deserves tears. This reply, we are told, causes Croesus, who has accompanied his “charge” Cambyses to Egypt, to burst into tears, as do the other Persians who are present. Cambyses himself, Herodotus states, feels a certain amount of pity for the defeated king and he immediately issues an order to save Psammenitus’ son from execution. The reprieve, however, comes too late to save the boy, for the Egyptian prince was the very first of the captives to have been killed.

In this encounter with Psammenitus, Cambyses reminds us of his father, Cyrus. The scene echoes in many ways the first meeting between Cyrus and Croesus (1.86-90),³⁷ for in both instances the victorious Persian king sets up a test, almost a “life or death” experiment for his vanquished enemy.³⁸ Cambyses is eager to test his opponent’s mettle, while Cyrus places Croesus on the pyre, partly in order to see whether Apollo will rescue his devoted admirer from being burnt alive.³⁹ In each case the Persian king arranges an elaborate backdrop: Cyrus places the fettered Croesus on a large funeral pyre along with 14 Lydian youngsters, while Cambyses organizes a parade, complete with costumes and props, of the Egyptian sons and daughters. In these two experiments the victorious king is taught an important lesson in humanity by his vanquished enemy, but an extra, outside catalyst is needed to impart the lesson. It is the combination of Solon’s words of wisdom and the Lydian king’s recollection of those words at a crucial moment which lead Cyrus to realize that he too is human and vulnerable. Similarly Psammenitus’ moving remarks taken together with Croesus’ emotional reaction to them are what convince Cambyses to release Psammenitus’ son. One further similarity between the two scenes is that the two Persian kings, whose experiments have led to unexpected results, prove incapable of actually saving their intended victims. In the case of the defeated Lydian, only Apollo can extinguish the flames of the pyre, while with Psammenitus there is no divine intervention and Cambyses’ good intentions come too late to rescue the Egyptian’s son. Croesus survives and becomes a wise counsellor, first to Cyrus and

accidental appearance of the old man upsets Cambyses’ careful procession. (For a wife as more precious to a man than his sons — see Xerxes’ angry words to Pythius at 7.39.1.)

37 Cf. W. Marg, “‘Selbstsicherheit’ bei Herodot” in Marg (above n. 33), 290-301, esp. 293.

38 For other instances of experiments or inquiries undertaken by kings, see S. Flory, *The Archaic Smile of Herodotus* (Detroit 1987), 78 with 174 n. 34.

39 Herodotus suggests several possible motives for Cyrus building the funeral pyre, one of which is the Persian king’s curiosity as to how Apollo will act — cf. εἶτε ... εἶτε ... εἶτε ... βουλόμενος εἰδέναι εἴ τις μιν δαιμόνων ῥύσεται τοῦ μὴ ζῶντα κατακαυθῆναι (1.86.2).

then to Cambyses. Cambyses' moment of compassion does not bear the same fruit, for while Psammenitus, whose son is not rescued, does join Cambyses' court, we hear of no sage advice offered by the Egyptian king. Instead, Psammenitus foments rebellion among the Egyptians and, when discovered by Cambyses, is executed. (We can only speculate as to whether Psammenitus would have behaved differently, had his son actually survived.) Nowhere is Cambyses more his father's son than here, in this tale of cold-blooded curiosity followed by human kindness, and perhaps it is not a coincidence that Cambyses is addressed here as the son of Cyrus (cf. ὦ παῖ Κύρου 3.14.10).

Psammenitus' silent reaction to his children's fate — which is contrasted both with the cries of the other Egyptian fathers and his own response to the plight of his former drinking companion — greatly impresses his Persian conquerors. If Psammenitus' silence and withdrawal from the sight of his captive children are unconventional and disturbing, his explanation of his behavior — which stems from a deep attachment to his family — is moving precisely because it is so recognizably human. The initial conduct of Intaphrenes' wife, on the other hand, is the height of conventionality. She, about to lose her husband, children, and other relatives, does not react as Psammenitus does, in quiet, controlled fashion: she weeps and wails outside the king's palace. This natural reaction on her part is enough to awaken Darius' pity and it is worth noting that the emotion of pity — the words οἶκτος, οἰκτῖρω, and κατοικτῖρω — almost always arises in Herodotus' *History* in the context of relations between parents and children or families in general.⁴⁰ When Darius allows Intaphrenes' wife to choose one member of her family to be spared, she, after considering the matter (βουλευσαμένη 3.119.4), decides to save her brother. Here the curiosity of the king is aroused, and Intaphrenes' wife accounts for her surprising choice, explaining that her husband and children can be replaced, for she may marry again and bear more children, but she will never have another brother, since her parents are dead.⁴¹ Her decision and explanation are neither orthodox nor particularly humane, but nonetheless have a positive effect: Darius releases yet another member of her family, her eldest son. Cambyses appreciates unorthodox behaviour and close family attachments, while Darius reacts to conventional tears, but admires unusual reasoning. Here, as with the other tales of bereaved parents, we learn something about those who order the children killed.

⁴⁰ See Periander and Lycophron (3.52.3); Cambyses and Psammenitus (3.14); Darius and Intaphrenes' wife (3.119); the Corinthians and Cypselus (5.92γ) Pythius' request to Xerxes (7.38); Aryandes and the bereaved Pheretime (4.167. 1); cf. the pity Croesus feels for Adrastus (1.45).

⁴¹ On the problematic, parallel argument used by Antigone in *S. Ant.* 904ff., see the useful survey of T.A. Szlezák, "Bemerkungen zur Diskussion um *Soph. Ant.* 904-920", *RhM* 124 (1981), 108-142.

Pythius, Oeobazus, and the mother of Cleobis and Biton. The wife of Intaphrenes is ready to renounce all of her children, but nonetheless receives her oldest son as a gift. Our next set of bereaved parents — Pythius, Oeobazus, and the mother of Cleobis and Biton — are in the opposite situation: they lose their sons solely as a result of their efforts to keep their children safe and sound. The tales of the wealthy Lydian Pythius (7.27-29; 38-39) and the Persian noble Oeobazus (4.84) are almost identical: both ask that their sons be excused from the dangers of a military campaign, so infuriating their respective Persian kings by the request that they have the young men executed. It is, of course, Croesus, the archetypal father of the *History*, who points out the dangers war holds for fathers, stating that only fools prefer war to peace, for in war fathers bury their sons, while in peace sons bury their fathers (1.87.4). In actual fact, there are virtually no tales of sons killed on the battlefield (and their bereaved fathers) in Herodotus' *History*.⁴² Oeobazus, who appears only in this brief tale, is even less of a full-fledged personality than the wealthy Pythius⁴³ and, in fact, the stories of Pythius and Oeobazus when taken together, essentially teach us about another father and his son: Darius and Xerxes.⁴⁴ It is difficult to decide which of the two Persian despots behaves in worse fashion — Darius who cold-bloodedly kills all three of Oeobazus' sons, thus fulfilling his promise to leave them behind⁴⁵ or hot-tempered Xerxes who “generously” kills only one of Pythius' five sons, but has the young man cut in half with his army marching through the two halves of the body.⁴⁶ What makes the plight of Oeobazus and Pythius all the more terrible is that their sons die as a direct result of their own actions: much as they try —

⁴² The son of Tomyris, queen of the Massagetae, who is taken by Cyrus in battle and then kills himself (1.211-214), furnishes a rare instance of situations of this kind. We *do* hear of fathers who go off to — and are subsequently killed in — wars, but these parents are careful to leave their sons safely behind: cf. the seer Megistias and his only son (7.221) and note how Leonidas ensures that the 300 men he selects to fight at Thermopylae all have (living) sons (7.205).

⁴³ Some commentators think that the affluent Πύθιος ὁ Ἄττος ἀνὴρ Λυδός (7.27.1) is Croesus' grandson, but one would expect Herodotus to mention this family relationship if it existed; cf. How & Wells (above, n. 2) *ad loc.*; Heni (above, n. 9), 26 n. 9.

⁴⁴ For the theme of weaker sons of powerful fathers in Herodotus, as exemplified by Xerxes and Cambyses, see Immerwahr (above, n. 4), 173-4, 179-80, 306. Immerwahr notes (180) that Xerxes, like Cambyses, does not respect family ties. The despot's brother, wife, sister-in-law, son, and daughter-in-law are all hurt by Xerxes' unbridled passion (9.108-113).

⁴⁵ The chief point of this tale seems to be Darius' macabre witticism, not Oeobazus' grief; see Heni (above, n. 9), 42.

⁴⁶ For the symbolic meaning behind this act, see J. A. S. Evans, “The Story of Pythius (Hdt. 7.27-29, 38f.)”, *LCM* 13 (1988), 139 and compare How & Wells (above, n. 2), *ad* 7.39.3; Heni (above, n. 9), 39 with n. 87.

or because they try — to protect their children, these two fathers actually bring about the death of their sons.

The mother of Cleobis and Biton also inadvertently causes the death of her sons. She, extremely pleased (περιχαρής)⁴⁷ by her sons' devotion, prays to Hera to grant them the greatest blessing that can fall to mortal man. Death, it transpires, is the greatest possible blessing, for the two young men die in their sleep in the temple that night. Solon, who narrates this story in his famous discussion of happiness (1.30-33), states that Cleobis and Biton, two young men who are lucky enough to die in their prime, are second in their good fortune only to the Athenian Tellus.⁴⁸ Solon presents this tale from the viewpoint of Cleobis and Biton, not their mother, and this is an unusual perspective in stories of sons who die young; we have seen that normally Herodotus focusses upon the bereaved parents and those who are responsible for the death of their sons. Despite Solon's talk of happiness, it is more than likely that the mother of Cleobis and Biton is as desolate and bereaved as Pythius and Oeobazus; ironically, all three parents have only their good intentions to blame.

Before leaving these tales of bereaved fathers, one final point should be noted — the varied ethnic origins of these parents. While customs and arrangements relating to parents and children (such as the naming of children, burial of fathers, or obligation to support parents) may differ from culture to culture in the *History*,⁴⁹ the flesh-and-blood relationship between individual fathers and sons, and in particular the feelings and reactions of Herodotus' bereaved fathers are very alike, no matter what the fathers' origin.⁵⁰ Herodotus may describe "topsy turvy"

⁴⁷ See C. Chiasson, "An Ominous Word in Herodotus", *Hermes* 111 (1983), 115-118 for a discussion of the word περιχαρής in the *History*. He points out that Herodotus uses the word to denote "the short-lived joy of characters who are doomed to grief or disappointment of some kind". Oeobazus, too, was περιχαρής when Darius promised to leave his three sons behind (4.84).

⁴⁸ For the problems raised by this definition of happiness and its relation to the very different kind of good fortune exemplified by the long-lived Tellus, see M. Lloyd, "Cleobis and Biton (Herodotus 1,31)", *Hermes* 115 (1987), 22-28. One of the reasons Tellus is considered the most fortunate of men is that he has children and children's children surviving him (1.30.4).

⁴⁹ See e.g. Hdt. 1.137; 1.173; 3.38; 4.26; 2.35.

⁵⁰ This is not to say that there are no cruel fathers in Herodotus: besides Cambyses, we hear of Etarchus, who at the instigation of his wife, tries to have his daughter Phronima killed (4.154-155). It is not clear from Herodotus' brief reference to an ἄχαρις συμφορὴ λυπεῦσα παιδοφόνος (7. 190) whether the wealthy Ameinocles killed his own son or the son was murdered by someone else; cf. Immerwahr (above, n. 4), 76 n. 83. The king of the Bisaltae does not kill his sons, but blinds them in punishment for their disobedience (8.116). Artabanus toys with his children's lives (7.106; cf. 7.165) and Boges actually kills his own sons, when

Egyptian customs, where daughters, rather than sons, are obliged to support their parents (2.35), but Cambyses knows that the best way to punish Psammenitus and the Egyptian nobles is to execute their sons and not their daughters. In the *History* we are told of a wide variety of men who lose their sons — kings, tyrants, powerful ministers, nobles, peasants, mercenaries, and traitors — and all are equally vulnerable. Fathers (and mothers) — be they Greek, Mede, Persian, Lydian or Egyptian — generally love and try to protect their children, while vengeful men and women, both Greek and barbarian, treat their enemies' children as pawns, venting their anger on them and killing them in revenge for their fathers' misdeeds. If the Persians, Lydians, Medes, and Egyptians of the *History* love their children no less than the Greeks do, the Greeks are no kinder, no less vengeful than the barbarians. Herodotus generally lingers longer over the tales of children who die at the hands of barbarians, but the Greeks, who often act as a group,⁵¹ are just as vindictive towards the sons of their foes. The dominant emotions in these tales of bereaved fathers are love, pity, grief, and vengeance and these passions are felt by Greek and barbarian alike.⁵²

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he chooses to slaughter his entire household, rather than surrender to the Athenians (7.107). The outstandingly cruel fathers of the *History* are the Pelasgians of Lemnos, who kill their Athenian mistresses and their sons by these women; the adjective "Lemnian" becomes the very byword for a horrible, violent deed (6.138-139). Mycerinus (2.131), Polycrates (3.124), and, of course, Astyages (1.107ff.), are fathers who behave cruelly towards their daughters but their harsh acts fall short of murder.

51 Cf. e.g. the Greek and Carian mercenaries who slaughter Phanes' children (3.11); the men of Corcyra who kill Lycophron (3.53); the Athenian women who stone to death Lycidas' children (9.5); the Athenians who crucify Artayctes, after killing his son (9.120).

52 I would like to thank Lisa Ullmann and David Satran for their comments on earlier versions of this paper.