

# AND IT CAME TO PASS THAT PHARAOH DREAMED: NOTES ON HERODOTUS 2.139, 141\*

Significant dreams, like omens and oracles, play a conspicuous part in Herodotus' narrative; the prominence which he affords to them well illustrates the difference between his approach to historiography and that of Thucydides, in whose work we shall look in vain for nocturnal visions. From the point of view of the scientific historian reports of dreams are inadmissible evidence, resting as they must on the unverifiable testimony of a single witness whose recollection is very likely to have been influenced by subsequent events. Herodotus' more hospitable attitude in part reflects his incalculable debt to the traditions of Levantine storytelling; but it is also connected with the central position occupied by kings and other powerful individuals in his narrative. Homer bears witness to the belief that the dreams of kings are more likely to be divinely inspired than those of others (*Il.* 2.80–3), and throughout the Near East rulers recorded the achievements which resulted from monitions received in sleep; if royal dreams assumed a more lucid and orderly form than most people could well parallel from their own experience, this might be regarded as a natural corollary of the peculiar link between king and gods.<sup>1</sup>

A thorough study of Herodotean dreams would undoubtedly be of great value, but would entail tackling most of the major issues of current Herodotean scholarship.<sup>2</sup> Piecemeal investigation must obviously be regarded as a *δευτερος πλοῦς*. But some modest progress on the Egyptian front may be made without stirring up too many hornets' nests, and though the two dreams to be considered here are only tenuously linked to the main thread of Herodotus' narrative, they deserve more attention than they have received.

Both come near the end of the account of the Pharaohs who ruled before Psammetichus (2.99–142). Herodotus would have us believe that his ancient history of Egypt rests on what he was told by the priests of Memphis,<sup>3</sup> but it is impossible to take at face-value his claim to draw directly on the uncontaminated well-springs of a unitary and continuous native tradition. Many scholars have emphasised the propensity of the local dragoman to retail ingenious speculation as if it were traditionary lore; but Greek informants have certainly contributed more to this section than Herodotus would lead us to suppose. Some may feel that his credit might be satisfactorily upheld by the hypothesis that, believing the priests of Memphis to be the ultimate source of his information, he cut out any reference to intermediaries for the sake of vividness and concision; but this expedient will not satisfy everyone.

\* Where no book number is given in references to Herodotus, book 2 is meant.

<sup>1</sup> See further E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley–Los Angeles, 1951), 102–34, E. L. Ehrlich, *Der Traum im Alten Testament* (*Beiheft zur Zeitschrift f. die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 73, Berlin, 1953), A. L. Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* (*Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* N.S. 46 (1956), 179–255).

<sup>2</sup> The monograph by Peter Frisch, *Die Träume bei Herodot* (*Beiträge zur klass. Philologie* 27, Meisenheim am Glan, 1968) is extremely superficial; cf. W. Marg, *Gnomon* 42 (1970), 515–17.

<sup>3</sup> Herodotus is careful to stress that these chapters form a continuous and unitary account: note the repeated *ἐλεγον* (both with and without *οἱ ἱερεῖς*) at 99.2, 100.1, 101.1, 102.2, 107.1, 109.1, 111.1, 112.1, 113.1, 116.1, 118.1, 120.1, 121.1, 122.1, 124.1, 127.1, 136.1, 139.1.

However, we can make some headway here without settling the general problem raised by Herodotus' source-citations.<sup>4</sup>

In the first case with which we are concerned a Greek (or at any rate, non-Egyptian) source is clearly demonstrable. For Herodotus the pious Nubian pharaohs of Dynasty XXV are represented by the single figure of Sabacos (2.137–9). Here at last we feel ourselves on reasonably solid historical ground: Sabacos is Shabako (c. 715–702), and unlike the earlier identifiable pharaohs mentioned by Herodotus, he is in approximately the right place chronologically,<sup>5</sup> a reflection of Greek contacts with Egypt preceding Psammetichus' regularisation of relations. Herodotus' account of Sabacos' reign omits any reference to the brief revival of the ancient glories of Thebes at this period,<sup>6</sup> and concentrates on this king's sentencing policy (137.3–4):

ὁκως τῶν τις Αἰγυπτίων ἀμάρτοι τι, κτείνειν μὲν αὐτῶν οὐδένα ἐθέλειν, τὸν δὲ κατὰ μέγαθος τοῦ ἀδικήματος ἐκάστω δικάζειν, ἐπιτάσσοντα χώματα χοῦν πρὸς τῇ ἐωνυῶν πόλι, ὅθεν ἕκαστος ἦν τῶν ἀδικούντων. καὶ οὕτω ἔτι αἱ πόλεις ἐγένοντο ὑψηλότεραι. τὸ μὲν γὰρ πρῶτον ἐχώσθησαν ὑπὸ τῶν τὰς διώρυχας ὀρυζάντων ἐπὶ Σεσώστριος βασιλέως, δευτέρα δὲ ἐπὶ τοῦ Αἰθίοπος, καὶ κάρτα ὑψηλαὶ ἐγένοντο.

This account is based on two facts which to a foreign observer might have seemed to call for explanation, but which a native would have taken for granted. (1) Imprisonment as a punishment was unusual; more commonly the offender became a state-slave. (2) Where houses are built of mud, inhabited sites are normally higher than the surrounding countryside; when a building collapses its remains are not removed but simply levelled off as a foundation for the next structure.<sup>7</sup> The attribution of this immemorial custom to the initiative of a single, relatively late, ruler is precisely paralleled by the ascription to Sesostrius of the canal-system<sup>8</sup> essential to Egyptian agriculture (108).<sup>9</sup>

Sabacos' reign ended after fifty years as a result of a disturbing dream (139):<sup>10</sup>

τέλος δὲ τῆς ἀπαλλαγῆς τοῦ Αἰθίοπος ὧδε ἔλεγον γενέσθαι· ὅψιν ἐν τῷ ὕπνῳ τοιήνδε ἰδόντα αὐτὸν οἴχεσθαι φεύγοντα· ἐδόκέε οἱ ἄνδρα ἐπιστάντα συμβουλευεῖν τοὺς ἱρέας τοὺς

<sup>4</sup> Detlev Fehling has directed attention to the problems posed by Herodotus' source-citations (*Die Quellenangaben bei Herodot.*, Berlin, 1971); it is good to see that his arguments are now being taken seriously: cf. H. R. Immerwahr, *CHCL* (Cambridge, 1985), i.439f.

<sup>5</sup> Min (99.2) is correctly placed first, but about eight millennia too early (cf. 142.1). Sesostrius (102ff.), who represents one or more of the Senwosrets of Dynasty xii, is set about five hundred years too late, two generations before the Trojan War. The position assigned to the pyramid-builders, Cheops, Chephren and Mycerinus (124–35), the last of whom is separated from Psammetichus by only three generations, is a long-standing embarrassment; cf. A. B. Lloyd, *Herodotus Book ii: Introduction* (Leiden, 1975), 188f.

<sup>6</sup> Reflected in the *Iliad* (9.381–4); see further W. Burkert, 'Das hunderttorige Theben u. die Datierung der Ilias', *WSI* N.F. 10 (1976), 5ff. Herodotus' extremely sketchy treatment of a site rich in monuments, and of obvious interest to anyone familiar with Homer, remains a strong argument against his claim to have been in Upper Egypt, despite Lloyd's ingenious attempt to defend his veracity (*Introduction* 73–5; n. on 29.1); much of the indictment set out by A. H. Sayce more than a century ago (*JPh* 14 (1885), 257ff.) retains its force. What Herodotus says he was shown at Thebes (143) does nothing to diminish such suspicions: see further Fehling, *op. cit.* (n. 4), 59–66.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Wiedemann, How and Wells *ad loc.*

<sup>8</sup> Though Herodotus did not understand its purpose; cf. 14.2, which clearly reveals his failure to appreciate the importance of the laboriously maintained irrigation system.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. (e.g.) his ascription to the Median Deioces of the rituals generally characteristic of Oriental courts (1.99). On the importance of the concept of the *πρῶτος εὐρετής* see A. Klein-günther, *Πρώτος Εὐρετής*, *Philologus Suppl.* 26.1 (1933), esp. 40–65.

<sup>10</sup> Omitted from Oppenheim's assemblage of dream-reports from ancient Near Eastern sources (*op. cit.* (n. 1), 245–55), though Sethos' dream (141) is included.

ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ συλλέξαντα πάντας μέσους διαταμείν· 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 ποιήσῃ ταῦτα, ἀλλὰ γὰρ οἱ ἐξεληλυθέναι τὸν χρόνον ὁκόσον κεκρῆσθαι ἄρξαντα Αἰγύπτου ἐκχωρήσῃν. ἐν γὰρ τῇ Αἰθιοπίῃ ἔοντι αὐτῷ τὰ μαντήια τοῖσι χρέωνται Αἰθιοπεῖς ἀνείλε ὡς δέοι αὐτὸν Αἰγύπτου βασιλεῦσαι ἔτεα πεντήκοντα. ὡς ὦν ὁ χρόνος οὗτος ἐξήιε καὶ αὐτὸν ἡ ὄψις τοῦ ἐνυπνίου ἐπετάρασσε, ἐκὼν ἀπαλλάσσετο ἐξ Αἰγύπτου ὁ Σαβακῶς.

‘Nihil tam praepostere, tam incondite, tam monstruose cogitari potest quod non possimus somnare’ (Cic. *Div.* 2.146). But Herodotus, though he may be assumed to have shared with prudent Penelope (*Od.* 19.560–9) and his own wise Artabanus (7.16) the belief that many dreams are without significance,<sup>11</sup> does not entertain the possibility that this macabre vision might be no more than a random nightmare, fortuitously serving as a reminder of a prophecy half a century old.

Like the story of Mycerinus’ accelerated end (133) (which, though it inspired a fine poem from Matthew Arnold, tends to be overlooked in discussions of Herodotus’ religious views),<sup>12</sup> this narrative suggests that in Egypt the gods move in very mysterious ways indeed, a disconcerting exception to Herodotus’ general tendency to exaggerate the element common to Greek and Egyptian religion, at the expense of much more significant differences.

Many have been reminded of the deceitful dream sent by Zeus to Agamemnon in the *Iliad* (2.23ff.); but, important as Homeric precedent often is for our reading of Herodotus, this episode is not in fact very helpful. Agamemnon is not ordered to undertake an act violating normally accepted moral or religious principles, but to adopt a strategy which would otherwise appear ill-advised.

Even less illuminating, though often cited in this connection, are the dreams which prevent Xerxes cancelling his invasion-plans (7.12–17). Despite the widespread assumption that these dreams are sent to mislead the king<sup>13</sup> there is no reason to question their message that it would be personally disastrous for Xerxes to change his mind at this point (14 ὡς καὶ μέγας καὶ πολλὸς ἐγένεο ἐν ὀλίγῳ χρόνῳ, οὕτω καὶ

<sup>11</sup> Frisch is surely wholly mistaken in supposing Herodotus to have regarded all dreams as significant (op. cit. (n. 2), 61): ‘Herodot referiert uns Züge des Traumglaubens seiner Zeit, führt sie aber ad absurdum. Für ihn sind alle Träume bedeutsam und alle Träume erfüllen sich. Als entschiedener Verfechter der Gültigkeit aller Träume stellt sich Herodot bewusst in Gegensatz zu den Anschauungen mancher seiner Zeitgenossen.’ In a work of literature we may expect to find reported only dreams deemed to be significant.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Es gibt keinen Bericht im Werke Herodots, dem wir mit unseren Vorstellungen von gerechter Weltordnung und von Schuld und Verdienst der Menschen ratloser gegenüberstehen als dem von Schicksal des Mykerinos’ (J. Kirchberg, *Die Funktion der Orakel im Werke des Herodots* (Göttingen, 1965), 45). The disconcerting element in this story lies in the oracle’s explanation for the comparative brevity of Mycerinus’ reign (133.3), as alien to Egyptian conceptions of Ma’at as to Greek ideas of the justice of Zeus. Granted that some *apologia* was felt to be needed for the relative shortness of Mycerinus’ reign compared with those of his wicked father and uncle (a notion apparently suggested by the size of their respective pyramids), it is not difficult to think of less demoralising alternatives (hereditary guilt (cf. 1.91, 7.134–7), or a reward for piety (cf. 1.314–5, 7.463–4), or punishment for (alleged) incest with his daughter (131)). It is surely significant that his attempt to frustrate the oracle is linked with what must be a Greek aetiology for the festival of the *λυχνοκαΐα* (described at 62), just as his daughter’s early death is associated with an evidently Greek account of rites in honour of Osiris (129–32). (The pathos of Mycerinus’ story is of course considerably reduced if we pay any attention to Herodotus’ indications of chronology, since, though his reign might be short, he could not be less than sixty-three at the time of his death.)

<sup>13</sup> So, e.g., Macan, How and Wells ad loc., H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley–Los Angeles, 1971), 61, M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griech. Religion*<sup>3</sup> (Munich, 1967), i.760.

ταπεινὸς ὀπίσω κατὰ τάχος ἔσσει). To frustrate at this stage the expectations of foreign conquest now raised would be to invite revolt.<sup>14</sup> The campaign may have failed, but Xerxes remained secure on his throne.

A slightly more promising analogy, theologically, is offered by the case of the Cumaeans, who apparently receive from Apollo's oracle at Branchidae supernatural approval for their plan to surrender their suppliant Pactyes (1.158, 159); however, this unexpected licence for impiety is rapidly shown not to be what it seems, but rather a powerful expression of the god's displeasure with men who could even contemplate violating a suppliant's rights.<sup>15</sup>

Apart from the strange content of Sabacos' dream, its disconcerting injunction is delivered with remarkable curtness, and we may well be puzzled by the unexplained specification of the *modus operandi*: why bisection, μέσους διαταμεῖν, in particular?

Diodorus' somewhat fuller account (1.65.6–8) indicates an answer:

ἔδοξε μὲν γὰρ κατὰ τὸν ὕπνον λέγειν αὐτῷ τὸν ἐν Θήβαις θεὸν ὅτι βασιλεύειν οὐ δυνήσεται τῆς Αἰγύπτου μακαρίως οὐδὲ πολὺν χρόνον, ἐὰν μὴ τοὺς ἱερεῖς ἅπαντας διατεμῶν διὰ μέσων αὐτῶν διέλθῃ μετὰ τῆς θεραπείας. πολλάκις δὲ τούτου γινομένου μεταπεμψάμενος πανταχόθεν τοὺς ἱερεῖς ἔφη λυπεῖν τὸν θεὸν ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ μένων· οὐ γὰρ ἂν αὐτῷ τοιαῦτα προστάττειν κατὰ τὸν ὕπνον. ἀπελθὼν οὖν βούλεσθαι καθαρὸς παντὸς μύσου ἀποδοῦναι τὸ ζῆν τῇ πετρωμένη μάλλον ἢ λυπῶν τὸν κύριον καὶ μίαντας ἀσεβεῖ φόνον τὸν ἴδιον βίον ἄρχειν τῆς Αἰγύπτου· καὶ πέρας τοῖς ἐγχωρίοις ἀποδοῦναι τὴν βασιλείαν ἐπανήλθεν εἰς τὴν Αἰθιοπίαν.

Commentators have not failed to note a Herodotean parallel for the macabre procedure here prescribed. When the Persian army started out from Sardis at the beginning of the campaigning season in 480 (7.39), there was an eclipse of the sun;<sup>16</sup> the Magi saw in this a portent of victory (though their principles of interpretation seem strange),<sup>17</sup> but Pythius, the richest man in Lydia and a proven friend to Xerxes (27–9), foresaw disaster, and asked the king to exempt one of his five sons from service on the campaign. Xerxes, enraged at this request, ordered the immediate execution of the eldest (39.3–40.1): αὐτίκα ἐκέλευε τοῖσι προσετέτακτο ταῦτα πρῆσσειν, τῶν Πυθίου παίδων ἔξευρόντας τὸν πρεσβύτατον μέσον διαταμεῖν, διαταμόντας δὲ τὰ ἡμίτομα διαθεῖναι τὸ μὲν ἐπὶ δεξιᾷ τῆς ὁδοῦ, τὸ δ' ἐπ' ἄριστερά, καὶ ταύτῃ διεξιέναι τὸν στρατόν. ποιησάντων δὲ τούτων τοῦτο, μετὰ ταῦτα διεξήγε ὁ στρατός.

As Herodotus relates it, the story of Pythius serves primarily (like the very similar tale of Darius and Oeobazus, 4.84) to exemplify the cruelty which he thought characteristic of oriental autocrats; the macabre parade past the remains of the executed boy must have a chastening effect on the army as a whole, and may be thought to illustrate that brutal Persian military discipline of which we hear more in the conversation between Xerxes and Demaratus (7.103–4) before we observe it in action.

Herodotus presents this episode as a cruel and unusual punishment, and evidently sees no magical or religious significance in what is done. But we may recognize in his description a widespread ritual of purification by passage between the parts of a sacrificial victim. Thus, as Livy records in his account of 182 (40.6.1–2), it was

<sup>14</sup> For a penetrating analysis of this section see H. R. Immerwahr, *TAPhA* 85 (1954), 34f.; see also K. von Fritz, *Die griech. Geschichtsschreibung* (Berlin, 1967), i.249.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. 6.86 γ.

<sup>16</sup> Nothing of the sort was observable at Sardis in spring 480: see How and Wells ad loc. We have here a palmary instance of the tendency of tradition to synchronize eclipses with notable events; see further D. Henige, *Oral Historiography* (London–New York–Lagos, 1982), 102f., A. Demandt, 'Verformungstendenzen in der Überlieferung antiker Sonnen- u. Mondfinsternisse', *AAWM* 1970, 7.

<sup>17</sup> Contrast 1.74 (Lydians and Medes are moved to make peace as a result of an eclipse).

Macedonian custom to purify the army when it reassembled in the spring by making it march between the two halves of a slaughtered bitch; Curtius Rufus (10.9.11–12) describes arrangements for a similar ceremony in Alexander's army in 323.<sup>18</sup> The practice has been very thoroughly studied by O. Masson in connection with a Hittite text preserving instructions for the purification of an army; there too a human victim is used (as well as animals).<sup>19</sup> Besides ancient instances (though none from Egypt or Nubia) he notes examples from eighteenth-century Siberia, among the Arabs, and among the Chins of Assam and Burma, and concludes: 'Nous ne pouvons donc retrouver que des maillons éparés d'une coutume qui semble appartenir au répertoire magico-religieux d'un assez grand nombre de peuples.'

As narrated in Diodorus the injunction of Sabacos' dream thus corresponds to a well-attested practice, even if the number and character of the victims puts it in a class by itself; in Herodotus we are confronted with a simple atrocity. Native tradition is unlikely to have supplied Diodorus with the further essential prescription of passage between the parts of the sacrifice; we have no evidence for such rituals in ancient Egypt, and the argument from silence must be allowed some weight here, given the extent of our information about Egyptian religion. The gruesome procession surely reflects Greek speculation; the exclusiveness of Egyptian temples<sup>20</sup> no doubt fostered the belief that ghastly rituals were celebrated within their precincts. This detail might represent a post-Herodotean elaboration, whether due to Diodorus himself or to another source.<sup>21</sup> But Herodotus' choice of μέσους διαταμείν rather than, e.g., ἀποκτείνειν or σφάζειν suggests that bisection as such is important, and we should consider the possibility that something has dropped out after διαταμείν, e.g. <διαταμόντα δὲ διὰ τὰ ἡμίτομα μετὰ τῆς θεραπήης διελθεῖν>· ἰδόντα δὲ κτλ. If this conjecture, which involves enough homoeoteleuton to make accidental omission all too easy, is deemed unacceptable, we must, I think, conclude that Herodotus did not quite understand what he was told, and failed to realise the importance of the second stage in the procedure. Of course Herodotus' narrative often looks cryptic to us because he and his audience shared certain assumptions which we do not take for granted; but this explanation will hardly meet the difficulty here, since it is clear from the case of Pythius' son that he was not describing a familiar ritual.

Thus the gods, in the year of his jubilee, reveal to Sabacos the price of continued rule; with Diodorus' help we see that, though the charge is impossibly inflated, it is expressed in a recognizable currency. The clearly detectable contribution of Greek speculation about Egyptian rites to the tale of Mycerinus<sup>22</sup> encourages me to suggest that this strange story partly derives from sensationalistic Greek conjecture about the

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Plu. *Quaest. Rom.* 111 (1290d) (Boeotian custom); for a (mythical) human victim cf. Apollod. *Bibl.* 3, 173 (13.7) (Astydamia, at the hands of Peleus).

<sup>19</sup> 'A propos d'un rituel hittite pour la lustration d'une armée: le rite de purification par le passage entre les deux parties d'une victime', *RHR* 137 (1950), 5–25; see also W. K. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War* (Berkeley–Los Angeles, 1979), iii.196–202, R. C. T. Parker, *Miasma* (Oxford, 1983), 22f.

<sup>20</sup> A restriction of which Herodotus seems strangely unconscious.

<sup>21</sup> This section of Diodorus' work (1.43–68) is undoubtedly based ultimately on Herodotus, but the use of another authority is implied by the presence of material not found in Herodotus and by Diodorus' animadversions on his predecessor's methods (cf. in particular 1.69.7 ὅσα μὲν οὖν Ἡρόδοτος καὶ τινες τῶν τὰς Αἰγυπτίων πράξεις συνταξαμένων ἐσχεδιάκασιν, ἔκουσίως προκρίναντες τῆς ἀληθείας τὸ παραδοξολογεῖν καὶ μύθους πλάττειν ψυχαγωγίας ἕνεκα, παρήσομεν). Whether he himself was responsible for correlating Herodotus and another source, or simply followed a work in which this had already been done, is not clear and does not matter here. See further Anne Burton, *Diodorus Siculus, Book 1: a Commentary* (Leiden, 1972), 25–9.

<sup>22</sup> See above, n. 12.

rites of reinvestiture celebrated by long-ruling pharaohs in the *Sed*-festival;<sup>23</sup> the renewal of the king's powers would clearly require extraordinary ceremonies, and it would be understandable if heaven raised the ante for an alien ruler. After all, foreigners must often expect to be charged more than the natives.

Sabacos' dream resulted in Egypt's liberation from alien rule and the restoration of the native pharaoh. To the latter's successor there came a dream of related purpose, preserving the land from foreign conquest.<sup>24</sup> The last of Herodotus' pre-Saite kings, the otherwise unknown Sethos (141),<sup>25</sup> enjoys the only unambiguously reassuring dream in the work,<sup>26</sup> and a uniquely explicit theophany. When his soldiers mutinied<sup>27</sup> before the advancing Sennacherib,<sup>28</sup> Sethos, being a priest of Hephæstus,<sup>29</sup> appealed to his god, and in sleep received a promise of assistance:

ὁλοφύρομενον δ' ἄρα μιν ἐπελθεῖν ὕπνον καὶ οἱ δόξαι ἐν τῇ ὄψι ἐπιστάνα τὸν θεὸν θαρσύνειν ὥς οὐδὲν πείσεται ἄχαρι ἀντιάων τὸν Ἀραβίων στρατὸν· αὐτὸς γάρ οἱ πέμψειν τιμωροὺς. τοῦτοι δὲ μιν πῖσνον παραλαβόντα Αἰγυπτίων τοὺς βουλομένους οἱ ἔπεσθαι στρατοπεδεύσασθαι ἐν Πηλουσίῳ (ταύτῃ γάρ εἰσι αἱ ἐσβολαί): ἔπεσθαι δὲ οἱ τῶν μαχίμων μὲν οὐδένα ἀνδρῶν, καπήλους δὲ καὶ χειρῶνακτας καὶ ἀγοραίους ἀνθρώπους. ἐνθαῦτα ἀπικομένοις τοῖσι ἐναντίοις ἐπιχυθῆτας νυκτὸς μὺς ἀρουραίους κατὰ μὲν φαγεῖν τοὺς φαρετρεῶνας

<sup>23</sup> See further *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* v (Wiesbaden, 1984), s.v. Sedfest. On the Rosetta Stone *τριακονταετηρίς* (OGI 90.2) is used to render the expression denoting a *Sed*-period; but periods both longer and shorter than thirty years are attested.

<sup>24</sup> For the prospect of military activity as the occasion for a significant dream cf. 1.209 (Cyrus), 6.107.1 (Hippias), 7.12–19 (Xerxes and Artabanus); see further R. Bichler, *Chiron* 15 (1985), 125–47.

<sup>25</sup> Some have thought that what Herodotus took to be a personal name is the priestly title *stm*. (We may compare the misconception of 111.1, where Pheros is treated as a king's name; Patizeithes (3.61.3; 63.4) may reflect a similar misunderstanding.) It was tentatively suggested by J. Krall (*MPER* 6 (1897), 1 n. 3) that the legendary magician, Prince Khaemwese (historically a son of Rameses II), who regularly bears this title, is Herodotus' Sethos, and this chapter is accordingly included in G. Maspero's *Popular Stories of Ancient Egypt* (London, 1915, translated by Mrs C. H. W. Johns from the fourth (1911) edition of *Les Contes populaires de l'Égypte ancienne*) under the title 'How Satni-Khamois triumphed over the Assyrians'. But this identification seems to me rather implausible. As a figure of legend Khaemwese's distinctive quality is his pre-eminence in magic, and he is hardly recognizable transformed into an *exemplum* of conventional piety. For the Khaemwese stories see M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Berkeley–Los Angeles–London, 1980), iii.125–51. It has also been suggested that Sethos may represent Seti, wildly displaced from the proper chronological situation.

<sup>26</sup> However we interpret the much discussed dream sent to Agariste a few days before Pericles' birth (6.131.2), it would hardly have laid to rest the anxieties natural to an expectant mother.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. 30; 161.4ff. (It is of interest for Herodotus' methods of composition that he postpones his account of the place of the *μάχιμοι* in the Egyptian caste system to the point where they become relevant to the Greeks (164).)

<sup>28</sup> Herodotus seems uncertain about Sennacherib's place in the world; he introduces him as βασιλέα Ἀραβίων τε καὶ Ἀσσυρίων and subsequently refers to his army as τὸν Ἀραβίων στρατὸν. This inaccuracy might be regarded as further support (if any is needed) for the orthodox interpretation of Herodotus' apparently unfulfilled promise of Ἀσσύριοι λόγοι (1.106.2; 184); he was, I suggest, aware that he needed to do more work in this area, and intended to pass on to his audience the fruits of his enquiries. There is, similarly, an unfinished look about the abrupt reference to five hundred and twenty years of Assyrian rule with which he introduces the story of Deiocees (1.95.2) immediately after a rather formal preface to an account of Cyrus' origins; I suspect that this uncharacteristically clumsy opening is a stopgap, intended to serve merely until Herodotus had informed himself more fully about the Assyrian empire. I imagine that he continued to tinker with his work as long as he lived; there was no reason why he should envisage a deadline after which no further alterations were possible. For two rather different approaches to the question of his Ἀσσύριοι λόγοι see J. G. Macqueen, *CQ* 28 (1978), 284–91, H. Erbse, *Ausgewählte Schriften z. klass. Philologie* (Berlin–New York, 1979), 162–9.

<sup>29</sup> i.e. Ptah; but no Greek writer of the classical period uses the name, and Herodotus probably did not know it.

αὐτῶν, κατὰ δὲ τὰ τόξα, πρὸς δὲ τῶν ἀσπίδων τὰ ὄχανα, ὥστε τῇ ὑστεραίῃ φευγόντων σφέων γυμνῶν πεσεῖν πολλοὺς. καὶ νῦν οὗτος ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐστήκε ἐν τῷ ἱρῷ τοῦ Ἡφαίστου λίθινος, ἔχων ἐπὶ τῆς χειρὸς μὺν, λέγων διὰ γραμμάτων τάδε· ἐς ἐμέ τις ὀρέων εὐσεβῆς ἔστω.

This tale is associated with a (decidedly peculiar) statue;<sup>30</sup> as often in this section Herodotus implies that the monuments of Memphis serve a mnemotechnic function, prompting his informants to anecdote.<sup>31</sup> But there is clearly more to this story than the fruits of such aetiological speculation as produced Sesostri's hairbreadth 'scape' (107)<sup>32</sup> and Mycerinus' prematurely deceased daughter (130–3).<sup>33</sup> Many scholars have seen a connection with the Old Testament account of Jerusalem's deliverance from Sennacherib in 701, in the reign of Hezekiah (2 *Kings* 19.35f., cf. *Isaiah* 37, 36f.), when in one night the angel of the Lord brought death to 185,000 in the Assyrian camp.<sup>34</sup> The modern tendency to demythologise this visitation, in the manner of Hecataeus, into a metaphor for an outbreak of plague<sup>35</sup> has inspired the hypothesis that (alleged) Semitic notions of a link between rats/mice<sup>36</sup> and pestilence provide a connection with Herodotus' story, though attempts to explain the relationship more precisely seem more ingenious than persuasive. Others have attached more weight to a parallel from Greek legend, related by Callinus (fr. 7) and recorded by Strabo (13.1.48, p. 604) in his account of the Troad,<sup>37</sup> in connection with Scopas' statue of Apollo Smintheus, under the foot of which a mouse was set, in accordance with the commonly accepted interpretation of the god's title as 'mouse-god':<sup>38</sup>

συνοικειοῦσι δὲ καὶ τὴν ἱστορίαν εἶτε μῦθον τούτῳ τῷ τόπῳ τὴν περὶ τῶν μυῶν. τοῖς γὰρ ἐκ τῆς Κρήτης ἀφυγμένοις Τεύκροις (ὡς<sup>39</sup> πρῶτος παρέδωκε Καλλίνος ὁ τῆς ἐλεγείας

<sup>30</sup> Wilhelm Spiegelberg, surveying the surviving remains of Egyptian sculpture sixty years ago, could produce no parallel (*Die Glaubwürdigkeit von Herodots Bericht über Ägypten im Lichte der ägyptischen Denkmäler* (Heidelberg, 1926), 26f. (Engl. translation by A. W. Blackman, *The Credibility of Herodotus' Account of Egypt in the Light of the Egyptian Monuments* (Oxford, 1927), 26f.). Subsequent Egyptological discovery does not appear to have brought to light anything like the statue which Herodotus describes: 'Das in diesem Zusammenhang genannte Standbild hat aber wohl keine Maus in der Hand, sondern einen Blindstab' (E. Brunner-Traut, *Lexikon d. Ägyptologie* s.v. Maus). Herodotus does not claim to have seen the statue himself – just as well, since it stood within the temple precincts (ἐστήκε ἐν τῷ ἱρῷ τοῦ Ἡφαίστου), and was thus out of bounds to the laity, whether native or Greek.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. 99.4, 101.2, 110, 112.1, 121.1, 136.1.

<sup>32</sup> As Spiegelberg showed (op. cit. (n. 30), 25f.), this tale was inspired by the convention of representing the triumphant pharaoh with his feet set on the heads of his prostrate foes, who are depicted on a smaller scale; see further D. Wildung, 'Der König Ägyptens als Herr der Welt?', *Archiv f. Orientforschung* 24 (1973), 108–16 (I am indebted for this reference to Professor J. R. Baines).

<sup>33</sup> See above, n. 12.

<sup>34</sup> This narrative presents several difficulties; in particular, the reference to 'Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia' (2 *Kings* 19.9, *Isaiah* 37.9) is hard to reconcile with the other data, since the reign of the Nubian king more commonly known as Taharka began only in 689. It has been suggested that Esarhaddon's unsuccessful campaign of 675 has been confused with Sennacherib's western campaign a quarter of a century earlier.

<sup>35</sup> It would be better to compare the slaughter of the first-born of Egypt (*Exodus* 12.29), a catastrophe not similarly amenable to epidemiological rationalisation.

<sup>36</sup> There was no hard and fast distinction between mice and rats in classical antiquity; the species of rat familiar to us, the black rat (*mus rattus ater*) and the brown or common rat (*mus norvegicus* – a misnomer), come from Central Asia and were then unknown in Europe and the lands around the Mediterranean. (It is interesting to read Aelian's horrified description of the rats found near the Caspian, based on the report of Alexander's *bematist* Amyntas (*NA* 17.17; *FGrHist* 122 F 3).)

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Sch. A on *Il.* 1.39

<sup>38</sup> On *σμήθος* 'mouse' see Pfeiffer on Callim. fr. 177.16.

<sup>39</sup> ὡς von Holzinger (on Lyc. 1303): οὗς codd.

ποιητής, ἡκολούθησαν δὲ πολλοί) χρησμός ἦν, αὐτόθι ποιήσασθαι τὴν μονήν, ὅπου ἂν οἱ γηγενεῖς αὐτοῖς ἐπιθῶνται· συμβῆναι δὲ τοῦτ' αὐτοῖς φασὶ περὶ Ἀμαξιτόν· νύκτωρ γὰρ πολὺ πλῆθος ἀρουραίων μυῶν ἐξανθήσαν διαφαγεῖν ὅσα σκύτινα τῶν τε ὄπλων καὶ τῶν χρηστηρίων· τοὺς δὲ αὐτόθι μέναι.

This legend, it is suggested, was transferred by Greeks familiar with the cult of Apollo Smintheus to a statue in the temple at Memphis.<sup>40</sup>

There is, however, a much closer parallel to Herodotus' story in a legend related in Khotan (Ho-t'ien) to the seventh-century Chinese pilgrim Hsüan-Tsang, who undertook a long and hazardous journey to India in order to make available to his countrymen Buddhist scriptures previously unknown in China.<sup>41</sup> The parallel appears to have been first noted by the German Orientalist H. J. von Klaproth,<sup>42</sup> but has been generally neglected by Herodotean scholars.<sup>43</sup> Stories of helpful animals are of course a cliché of folk-tale, while the extraordinary havoc created by the depredations of mice/rats, being virtually a universal fact of human experience, is an almost equally widespread theme; nevertheless, the correspondence between Hsüan Tsang's story and Herodotus' is very striking. As a précis may be subject to the suspicion of over-emphasising similarities at the expense of differences, while translations of Hsüan Tsang's work are not everywhere easily available, I subjoin his account in full, as translated by Samuel Beal:<sup>44</sup>

To the west of the capital city 150 or 160 li, in the midst of the straight road across a great sandy desert, there are a succession of small hills, formed by the burrowing of rats. I heard the following as the common story: 'In this desert there are rats as big as hedgehogs, their hair of a gold and silver colour. There is a head rat to the company. Every day he comes out of his hole and walks about; when he has finished the other rats follow him. In old days a general of the Hiung-nu<sup>45</sup> came to ravage the border of this country with several tens of myriads of followers. When he had arrived thus far at the rat-mounds he encamped his soldiers. Then the king of Kustana,<sup>46</sup> who commanded only some few myriads of men, feared that his force was not sufficient to take the offensive. He knew of the wonderful character of these desert rats, and that he had not yet made any religious offering to them; but now he was at a loss where to look for succour. His ministers, too, were all in alarm, and could think of no expedient. At last he determined to offer a religious offering to the rats and request their aid, if by these means his army might be strengthened a little. That night the king of Kustana in a dream saw a great rat, who said to him, "I wish respectfully to assist you. Tomorrow morning put your troops in movement; attack the enemy, and you will conquer."

The king of Kustana, recognising the miraculous character of this intervention, forthwith arrayed his cavalry and ordered his captains to set out before dawn, and at their head, after a rapid march, he fell unexpectedly on the enemy. The Hiung-nu, hearing their approach, were overcome by fear. They hastened to harness their horses and equip their chariots, but they found that the leather of their armour, and their horses' gear, and their bow strings, and all the fastenings of their clothes, had been gnawed by the rats. And now their enemies had arrived,

<sup>40</sup> So W. Aly, *Volksmärchen, Sage u. Novelle bei Herodot u. seinen Zeitgenossen* (Göttingen, 1921), 69f., Legrand ad loc., W. Leaf, *Strabo and the Troad* (Cambridge, 1923), 244f.

<sup>41</sup> His pilgrimage, which became the subject of a cycle of fantastic legends, forms the theme of the long sixteenth-century comic novel familiar to many English readers in Arthur Waley's translation under the title *Monkey*. For an attractive brief account of Hsüan Tsang see A. Waley, *The Real Tripitaka* (London, 1952), 9–130.

<sup>42</sup> *Mémoires relatifs à l'Asie* (Paris, 1826), ii.296–9.

<sup>43</sup> A. W. Lawrence is an honourable exception (*The History of Herodotus of Halicarnassus*, the translation of G. Rawlinson revised and annotated by A. W. Lawrence (London, 1935), 222), but his brief reference is not very helpful.

<sup>44</sup> *Si-yu-ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World*, translated from the Chinese of Hsüan-Tsang (A.D. 629) by Samuel Beal (London, 1884), ii.315f. This episode occurred near the end of Hsüan Tsang's homeward journey, in 645; the Herodotean parallel did not escape Beal.

<sup>45</sup> Huns.

<sup>46</sup> Khotan.



and they were taken in disorder. Thereupon their chief was killed and the principal soldiers made prisoners. The Hiung-nu were terrified on perceiving a divine interposition on behalf of their enemies. The king of Kustana, in gratitude to the rats, built a temple and offered sacrifices; and ever since they have continued to receive homage and reverence, and they have offered to them rare and precious things. Hence, from the highest to the lowest of the people, they pay these rats constant reverence and seek to propitiate them by sacrifices. On passing the mounds they descend from their chariots and pay their respects as they pass on, praying for success as they worship. Others offer clothes, and bows, and arrows; others scents, and flowers, and costly meats. Most of those who practise these religious rites obtain their wishes; but if they neglect them, then misfortune is sure to occur.'

Sir Aurel Stein, excavating among the ruined Buddhist temples of Dandān-Oilik, found a painted panel which he believed to illustrate this story; it depicts a 'rat-headed figure crowned with a diadem, and clearly marked as an object of worship by the attitude of an attendant figure'.<sup>47</sup> With some change of emphasis the tale had passed into the repertoire of the Tibetan storytellers whose work was recorded by Major (later Sir Frederick) O'Connor, secretary and interpreter of Younghusband's mission to Lhasa.<sup>48</sup> The Tibetan narrative is more complex; the mice are motivated by gratitude for an earlier act of kindness, and their depredations (updated to include the slings, slow-matches and fuses of the invaders' muskets) suffice to disperse the enemy without bloodshed; moreover, the king is able to convince his discomfited foes that he could, had he wished, have called for support on his realm's larger and fiercer animals, so that the episode has a long-term deterrent effect. This well-constructed novella points a moral, 'Cast your bread upon the waters...', but has no aetiological elements or religious overtones; it seems to represent a secularization of the Khotanese story. It is the only item listed in Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* (Copenhagen, 1955–58) under the heading (K 632.1), 'Army of mice save kingdom from enemy invading force by gnawing their provisions, ammunition etc. to shreds'.<sup>49</sup>

Polygenesis is surely not plausible here, and chronology would favour the hypothesis that Herodotus' story travelled eastwards. Yet compared with the more economical Khotanese legend his narrative looks like a rationalisation. Articulate rodents had no place in Herodotus' world, nor could he easily stomach animal-cult; the appearance of Hephaestus in the star-role frees the story from these obvious difficulties. The subsequent miracle, like Croesus' rescue from the pyre (1.87.2),<sup>50</sup> involves no violation of natural law; but a right-minded man could not fail to see divine intervention in so timely an answer to prayer.

The relationship between Herodotus' story and Hsüan Tsang's is, I believe, comparable (*si parva licet componere magnis*) to that between the *Odyssey* and the Central Asiatic epic of *Alpamysh*, both of which must derive from a common 'Eastern' (heroic) version of the tale of the Husband's Return.<sup>51</sup> Presumably the rodent story

<sup>47</sup> (Sir) M. Aurel Stein, *Ancient Khotan* (Oxford, 1907), 119f., Plate lxiii; *On Ancient Central-Asian Tracks* (London, 1933), 62, Fig. 30.

<sup>48</sup> W. F. O'Connor, *Folk Tales from Tibet* (London, 1906), 133–40. O'Connor notes that many of the best known Tibetan stories had been imported bodily from India or China, but was evidently unaware of Hsüan Tsang's story.

<sup>49</sup> This case well illustrates the difficulty of demarcating material relevant to *Märchenforschung*; it would be absurd to discuss the Tibetan story without regard to its Khotanese and Greek congeners.

<sup>50</sup> I do not think that we can tell whether Herodotus was himself responsible for giving this turn to the legend of Croesus' end; on this much discussed episode see, most recently, W. Burkert, 'Das Ende des Kroisos: Vorstufen einer Herodoteischen Geschichtserzählung', *Catalepton. Festschrift f. Bernhard Wyss* (Basel, 1985), 4–15.

<sup>51</sup> See further V. Zhirmunsky, 'The Epic of "Alpamysh" and the Return of Odysseus', *PBA* 52 (1966), 267–86.

came to the Greeks of Asia Minor as a result of eastern contacts before the Persian conquest, generating Callinus' less pointed legend. We should not assume that the tale was familiar in Egypt outside Hellenic circles; as we have seen already, we cannot take at face-value Herodotus' claim that his ancient history of Egypt is based on native tradition supplemented by his own observation.<sup>52</sup>

As told to Hsüan Tsang this legend offered an aetiology for a rat-cult, and it is tempting to wonder whether here it reflects Greek speculation about the Egyptian cult of the shrew-mouse.<sup>53</sup> Animal-worship was a serious embarrassment to Greco-Roman Egyptophilia, and the theory that Egyptian zoolatry represented gratitude for services rendered certainly appealed to Diodorus, who offers a survey of current hypotheses (1.86–90);<sup>54</sup> he notes that some connected the cult of the jackal with the animal's success in repelling an Ethiopian invasion. Herodotus himself explains the privileged status of the ibis as a gesture of appreciation for its effectiveness in pest-control (75); but though he cites Egyptian and Arab informants he could have extracted this explanation from native sources only by blatantly leading questions.<sup>55</sup> His failure to appreciate the fundamental importance of animal-worship in Egyptian religion is significant; it is surely more likely that the attitude of which this misconception is symptomatic was common among Greeks who interested themselves in Egypt than that it resulted from personal idiosyncrasy.<sup>56</sup>

A story which properly belongs to the timeless context of cult has been given a historical setting; its association with, specifically, Sennacherib perhaps reflects the same tradition as the Old Testament account of Assyrian disaster. Certainly the date assigned to this miracle is peculiarly happy, marking as it does (at any rate for a Greek mind) the end of an era in the history of a people whom Herodotus judged uniquely religious (37.1), and the concluding epigraphic exhortation to piety<sup>57</sup> provides an appropriate and memorable clausula to this narrative of the ancient pharaohs.

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<sup>52</sup> It is a pity to see it included, without qualification, under *Ägypten* in the *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* (Berlin, 1977), i.211f. (E. Brunner-Traut).

<sup>53</sup> See further Lloyd on Hdt. 2.67, E. Brunner-Traut, *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* s.vv. Ichneumon, Spitzmaus, *NAWG* 1965, 157ff.

<sup>54</sup> The application of this theory to the crocodile (1.89) is particularly ingenious.

<sup>55</sup> This explanation is offered in connection with that ancient scandal of Herodotean exegesis, the winged snakes whose remains he claims to have himself inspected; see further Fehling, *op. cit.* (n. 4), 20–3.

<sup>56</sup> See further C. Froidefond, *Le Mirage égyptien dans la littérature grecque d'Homère à Aristote* (Aix-en-Provence, 1971), 202f.

<sup>57</sup> Here, as with his interpretation of Sesostri's victory inscription (106.4), Herodotus appears to feel no disquiet about an inscription which, though expressed in the first person, fails to record its subject's identity and thus neglects what to our minds might seem its primary function.