

THE URINE AND THE VINE: ASTYAGES' DREAMS AT HERODOTUS 1.107–8

Ἐκδέκεται δὲ Ἀστυάγης ὁ Κυαξάρειω παῖς τὴν βασιληίην. Καὶ οἱ ἐγένετο θυγάτηρ τῇ οὐνομα ἔθετο Μανδάνην, τὴν ἐδόκεε Ἀστυάγης ἐν τῷ ὕπνῳ οὐρήσαι τοσοῦτον ὥστε πληῖσαι μὲν τὴν ἐωυτοῦ πόλιν, ἐπικατακλύσαι δὲ καὶ τὴν Ἀσίην πᾶσαν. Ὑπερθέμενος δὲ τῶν μάγων τοῖσι ὄνειροπόλοισι τὸ ἐνύπνιον, ἐφοβήθη παρ' αὐτῶν αὐτὰ ἕκαστα μαθῶν. Μετὰ δὲ τὴν Μανδάνην ταύτην εἶσαν ἡδὴ ἀνδρὸς ὠραίην Μήδων μὲν τῶν ἐωυτοῦ ἀξίων οὐδενὶ διδοῖ γυναικα, δεδοικώς τὴν ὄψιν, ὃ δὲ Πέρσῃ διδοὶ τῷ οὐνομα ἦν Καμβύσης, τὸν εὗρισκε οἰκίης μὲν ἐόντα ἀγαθῆς, τρόπου δὲ ἡσυχίου, πολλῶ ἐνεργε ἄγων αὐτὸν μέσου ἀνδρὸς Μήδου.

Συνοικεούσης δὲ τῷ Καμβύσῃ τῆς Μανδάνης ὁ Ἀστυάγης τῷ πρώτῳ ἔτει εἶδε ἄλλην ὄψιν· ἐδόκεε [δε] οἱ ἐκ τῶν αἰδοίων τῆς θυγατρὸς ταύτης φῦναι ἄμπελον, τὴν δὲ ἄμπελον ἐπισχεῖν τὴν Ἀσίην πᾶσαν. Ἰδὼν δὲ τοῦτο καὶ ὑπερθέμενος τοῖσι ὄνειροπόλοις μετεπέμψατο ἐκ τῶν Περσέων τὴν θυγατέρα ἐπίτοκα εἶσαν, ἀπικομένην δὲ ἐφύλασσε βουλόμενος τὸ γεννώμενον ἐξ αὐτῆς διαφθεῖραι· ἐκ γάρ οἱ τῆς ὄψιος τῶν μάγων οἱ ὄνειροπόλοι ἐσήμαινον ὅτι μέλλοι ὁ τῆς θυγατρὸς αὐτοῦ γόνος βασιλεύσειν ἀντὶ ἐκείνου.

Astyages, son of Cyaxares, now inherited the throne. A daughter was born to him, whom he called Mandane; and Astyages dreamed that she urinated so much that the urine filled his city, then went on to flood all of Asia. He consulted the dream-experts among the magi, and was alarmed by the details which he heard from them. Later, when this Mandane was already old enough for marriage, he did not give her as wife to any of the Medes who were worthy of him, because he was fearful of the dream; instead he gave her to a Persian named Cambyses, who, he discovered, belonged to a good house and was mild in nature, but was still—he thought—far inferior to a Mede of even middling status.

In the first year of Mandane's marriage to Cambyses Astyages had another dream: he dreamed that a vine grew from the genitalia of this daughter, and spread over the whole of Asia. He again consulted the dream-experts on what he had seen, then sent for his daughter to come to him from the land of the Persians. By now she was pregnant. When she arrived he kept her under guard, planning to kill the product of her womb: for the dream-experts among the magi interpreted his dream as indicating that his daughter's offspring would take his place upon the throne.

In this paper I shall discuss the narrative logic of this passage, and its role within Herodotus' presentation of Cyrus' story. In passing, but only in passing, I shall graze a number of other issues: the origin (Greek or Oriental?) of these items; one point of historical truth (was the historical Cyrus Mandane's son, or an outsider?); and the ways we might reconstruct the symbolic suggestions of urination for Herodotus' audience.

I

First, the narrative logic. Here critics have generally been hard on Herodotus. The two dreams, it is claimed, represent a simple doublet.¹ The resulting narrative has also seemed to some to be inconsequential or inept: in Herodotus' account Astyages has no male heir (*ἄπαις ἔρσηνος γόνου*, 1.109.3), so the notion of his daughter's offspring ruling all Asia or coming to the throne need not be threatening: and even if some threat were to be felt, what could be more senseless than to give Mandane in any sort

¹ W. Aly, *Volksmärchen, Sage und Novelle bei Herodot und seine Zeitgenossen* (Göttingen, 1921), p. 49, elaborated by H. Erbse, *Studien zum Verständnis Herodots* (Berlin and New York, 1992), pp. 34–5; cf. Asheri on 1.107, 'I due sogni...sono analoghi e trasmettono il medesimo messaggio'. Contra, K. Reinhardt, *Vermächtnis der Antike* (Göttingen, 1940), p. 149, arguing that both dreams are necessary to suggest the duality of Cyrus, both boon and curse. If the argument pursued below is correct, that duality is already suggested by the urination dream.

of marriage, least of all one to a foreigner?² Von Fritz inferred that the original version of the dream(s) suggested a threat from *outside* the regal house:³ that, he thought, was the only plausible explanation of Astyages' alarm. For what it was worth, such was the version of Ctesias, *FGrH* 688 F 9.2, who represented the infant Cyrus as no relation of Astyages: this Ctesian version may well underlie Nic. Dam. *FGrH* 90 F 66.9, who makes Cyrus the son of a Mardian 'Argoste' rather than of Mandane.⁴

Yet there is one crucial difference between the first dream (urination) and the second (vine): the suggestions⁵ of the second are much more *clear-cut* than the first.⁶ The spreading tree in the second dream evidently portends a coming domination, here as in Sophocles' *Electra* (419–23) or in Xerxes' dream at 7.19.1:⁷ this is especially appropriate in an Oriental dream, both because of the familiarity with such symbolism as portending success and salvation⁸ and because of the frequency of the vine as an Achaemenid royal symbol.⁹

² Cf. esp. K. von Fritz, *Die griechische Geschichtsschreibung* (Berlin, 1967), p. 286; D. Fehling, *Herodotus and his sources* (revised edition; tr. J. G. Howie [Liverpool, 1989]), p. 200 (who does make one crucial point clear: below, n. 28); J. A. S. Evans, *Herodotus, explorer of the past* (Princeton, 1991), p. 53; Erbse (n. 1), pp. 34–5. ³ Von Fritz (n. 2), pp. 286–7.

⁴ But it is difficult to go much further in reconstructing Ctesias' account from Nicolaus. For instance, the graphic embellishment and the rationalization of supernatural details are both recurrent features of Nicolaus' narrative, and may well reflect his own technique. See M. Toher, *CA* 8 (1989), 159–72.

⁵ By 'suggestions' I here mean the suggestions sensed by an ancient audience, culturally primed to interpret dreams as potentially (though not universally: see S. R. West, *CQ* 37 [1987], 264) predictive of the future. I am not here concerned with those felt by post-Freudian modern readers, primed as we are to interpret dreams as illuminating the *present* psyche of the dreamer. On this distinction cf. S. R. F. Price, in *Before Sexuality*, D. M. Halperin, J. J. Winkler and F. I. Zeitlin (edd.), (Princeton, 1990), pp. 365–88: Freud emphasized the point himself, e.g. *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900: J. Strachey [tr., ed.], [Harmondsworth, 1976]), pp. 59–61, 170; 'Five lectures on psycho-analysis', in *Two short accounts of Psycho-analysis* (Harmondsworth, 1962: first published 1910), p. 61. I therefore resist the temptation to toy with psychoanalytic interpretations. Here a father's preoccupation with his daughter's genitalia would evidently be a promising theme, but such modern decodings are likely to obscure the original audience response.—It is true that even in the Greek world dreams could be used to illustrate the dreamer's current state of health: cf. especially [Hipp.] *περί διαίτης* 4; G. E. R. Lloyd, *Magic, reason, and experience* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 43; S. M. Oberhelman, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 61 (1987), 47–60, and *ANRW* ii.37.1 (1993), 121–56, esp. 127–36. But the interpretative register is on the whole substantially different (cf. also V. Langholf, *Medical theories in Hippocrates* [Berlin and New York, 1990], p. 246), and clearly unhelpful here: for instance a dream of a spring or cistern might point to a bladder disease, or a flood-dream might indicate an excess of bodily moisture (*περί διαίτης* 4.90 p. 656 L. = pp. 438–40 J.). Herodotus' Astyages has his problems, but the audience will not conceive them as being of this sort.

⁶ Contrast R. Bichler, *Chiron* 15 (1985), 130, emphasizing the 'eindeutig' quality of both dreams. Even H. R. Immerwahr, *Form and thought in Herodotus* (APA Monographs 23, Cleveland, OH, 1966), p. 163, who is sensitive to the darker aspects of the urination dream, does not bring out its multivalence; nor does G. Devereux, *Dreams in Greek Tragedy: an Ethno-Psycho-Analytical Study* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1976), pp. 219–55, whose analysis is at once highly elaborate and highly reductionist.

⁷ Dr Heyworth also points to Ov. *Fast.* 3.27–38, where the pregnant Silvia dreams of two palm-trees (Romulus and Remus), and her uncle Amulius' frustrated attempt to fell the greater of the two.

⁸ Cf. the Old Testament parallels, emphasized by Devereux (n. 6), 229, and Bichler (n. 6), pp. 130–31: *Genesis* 40.9–13, *Ezekiel* 17, and the later *Daniel* 4. For detailed discussion of the first and last cases cf. E. L. Ehrlich, *Der Traum im Alten Testament* (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 73, Berlin, 1953), pp. 65–73, 113–22.

⁹ Cf. Asheri on 1.107; P. Frisch, *Die Träume bei Herodot* (Meisenheim, 1968), p. 10.

The urination dream would be much harder to interpret. Here it will be useful to adduce evidence from other cultures, though it is important to be clear about the methodology. Of course we cannot assume that Herodotus' Greek audience would align with every nuance felt by a Hottentot or a Namaqua tribesman, but comparative material can still serve as a suggestive eye-opener; it can alert us to alternative possibilities, and in particular warn us against too hasty an inference from limited and western modern assumptions.¹⁰ Naturally, the comparative material becomes more telling as it comes closer to the world with which Herodotus is dealing, and the most illuminating material will in fact be Assyrian; but even more distant parallels can be thought-provoking.

Both Greek and comparative material make it clear that urine, as a warm carrier of bodily life-juices, can suggest many things.¹¹ It can have positive associations with healing and fertility,¹² especially when, as here, a virgin's urine is concerned; but urine can also have a magical, apotropaic function, and this can in its turn lead into a gesture of symbolic magic, casting ill fortune on an enemy or simply articulating contempt.¹³ This relates to a feature of pollution which several scholars have recently stressed, the way in which dirty, 'polluting' elements can in suitable circumstances cleanse as well as defile, can bring cures and benefits as well as disease and disaster.¹⁴ It is understandable that a whole art of folk-urinomancy could develop, requiring an expert to read the signs and suggestions of a person's urine.

It is understandable too that a urination dream would be particularly hard to interpret. Closely similar dreams could bear totally divergent interpretations, ranging from the wholly propitious to the totally catastrophic. The range of symbolic suggestions is best illustrated by an Assyrian dream-book, containing material which

¹⁰ This methodology provides a further reason (cf. n. 5) why I have passed over psychoanalytic explanations. The culturally specific features of such explanations are increasingly recognized: true, *any* decoding or symbolism will have such specific features, but it is precisely our modern assumptions which we should try to minimize or renounce—even if (of course) total escape is impossible.

¹¹ Cf. the fascinating collection of material in R. Muth, *Träger der Lebenskraft: Ausscheidungen des Organismus im Volksglauben der Antike* (Wien, 1956), and his briefer summary in *R-E* Spb. xi (1968) s.v. 'Urin', pp. 1292–303.

¹² Thus it was a Hottentot and Namaqua custom for a priest to urinate over a couple after marrying them, and a tradition in the Papuan Gulf for a chieftain to urinate into the mouth of a newly initiated warrior (Muth [n. 11], 21, and S. Donaldson in *Encyclopaedia of Homosexuality* (W. R. Dynes [ed.], 1990), pp. 1353–5). The well-known (and in part scientifically confirmed: Muth [n. 11], p. 19, etc) value of urine as a folk-remedy is reflected in the tale of the Pharaoh Pheros at 2.111.2–3: cf. A. B. Lloyd ad loc., F. D. Harvey in Dawson and Harvey, *BICS* 83 (1966), 94 n. 34, and H. von Staden, *Helios* 19 (1992), 7–30.

¹³ Muth (n. 11), esp. pp. 18–22, 64–70, 129–43, 154–60. For the contemptuous suggestions of urination cf. the dreams discussed by Artemidorus 4.44. D. Fehling, *Ethnologische Überlegungen auf dem Gebiet der Altertumskunde* (Zetemata 61, Munich, 1974), p. 34 collects further evidence.

¹⁴ Cf. especially J.-P. Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece* (Janet Lloyd [tr.], Brighton and New Jersey, 1980), pp. 125–6; R. C. T. Parker, *Miasma* (Oxford, 1983), 233–4. Von Staden (n. 12) brings out that this nexus of ideas is particularly strong when women, often constructed as 'dirty', are in point: thus faeces are prescribed in the Hippocratic corpus as a treatment for female diseases. The femininity both of Mandane and of 'Asia' may therefore be relevant; but the suggestions of urine admittedly seem less gender-specific than those of faeces (von Staden [n. 12], 11–12).

may well go back to the second millennium B.C.¹⁵ In each case, the reference seems to be to a dreamed, rather than actual, act of urination:

If his urine [expands(?)] in front of (his) penis and [] the wall: [he will not have] sons.

If his urine ex[pands] in front of (his) penis and [] the wall, the street: he will h[ave] sons.

If his urine expands in front of his penis and f[ills(?)] all] the streets: his property will be robb[ed] and given to the city [].

If his urine expands in front of (his) penis [and] he does obeisance in front of his urine: he will beget a son and he (i.e. the son) will be king. ...

If he sprinkles (himself) with his urine: his (sheep)-fold will expand.

If he sprinkles (himself) with his urine and wipes himself (clean): (the disease called) 'Hand of Ishtar'.

If he directs urine towards the sky, the son of this man whom he will (thereafter) beget will become important, (but) his (own) days will be short.

If he pours his (urine) into a river: his harvest will be bountiful.

If he pours his urine into a well: he will lose his property.

If he pours his urine into an irrigation-canal: Adad will flood his harvest.

If he pou[rs] his urine to his (personal) god [or to] his (personal) goddess: he will [find(?)] his lost property.

In Herodotus too there was more than one way of taking the dream. The urine *might* straightforwardly suggest Mandane's future offspring, as modern critics tend uncritically to assume: it is true that the urinary and genital aspects of the uro-genital tract are often assimilated to one another in myths and folklore, just as they are with those 'sons' of the Assyrian dream-book.¹⁶ In that case Astyages' dream would simply presage a successful, conquering grandson, and an heirless grandfather might indeed have little to fear. Yet the urinary/genital assimilation is comparatively rare in Greek thought;¹⁷ the darker, more negative suggestions of urine could also suggest to Herodotus' audience a soiled bodily product rather than an honourably produced son, hinting at a *distorted* succession.¹⁸ It may be significant that one of the few Greek cases of urinary/genital assimilation uses the word *οὔρειν* ('urinate') in a story of Minos. His wife Pasiphae, infuriated by his sexual unfaithfulness, laid a curse upon

¹⁵ A. L. Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* (Trans. Am. Philosoph. Society 46.3, Philadelphia, 1956): the quotation is from p. 265. Cf. J. Bottéro, *Ktēma* 7 (1982), 11–16; Asheri on 1.107. For more recent parallels cf. J. S. Lincoln, *The Dream in Primitive Cultures* (London, 1935), pp. 107–8: among the Ashanti a dream of falling into a latrine, or in China a dream of a lavatory, could be taken as a sign of good luck, 'you will get money'; but in many cultures similar dreams also signify both death or loss. If one searches for a rationalized explanation, Stephanie West points out to me that latrines have proved a fruitful source for medieval archaeologists: a user was unlikely to search for anything valuable dropped while in action. So where there is muck, there may genuinely also be brass.

¹⁶ Or in the tale of the generous old woman who, on her death, transformed into a Brahman's urine as a way of giving birth to a hundred posthumous children: E. Chavannes, *Cinq cent contes et apologues: extraits du Tripitaka Chinois* (Paris, 1910–34) i.80–81: cf. Stith Thompson, *Motif-index of Folk Literature* (Copenhagen, 1955–8) T.512.2. In that case the urine was drunk by a doe, and the doe became pregnant: for two similar tales cf. Chavannes ii.283 and iii.233–4, in each of which a doe drinks a hermit's urine and becomes pregnant. The doe then typically begins the nurture of the human baby, who turns out to have miraculous qualities. There is a possibility, but no more, that a similar story-pattern underlies the Herodotean case, with human urine linked to the birth and animal-nurturing of a wonder-child. If so, that would imply a version in which the miraculous urination was real (though doubtless less spectacular), not merely dreamed.

¹⁷ As Bichler (n. 6), 132 n. 30 remarks. Besides the Minos story to be discussed in a moment, Muth (n. 11), 154–60 and *R-E Spb.* xi 1300–303 mentions only the Boeotian myth of the parentage of Orion, where in one version three gods urinate into an animal hide: as Muth emphasizes, etymological speculation (*Οὐρίων* or *Οὐρείων* ~ *οὔρειν*) has here evidently played a part.

¹⁸ Cf. Immerwahr (n. 6), 163, concentrating on urine as a pollutant. Herodotus was aware that the Persians thought of urine as unclean: cf. 1.133.3, 1.138.2 with the commentaries.

him, and the result was that after intercourse with other women Minos would *οὐρεῖν* 'snakes and scorpions and venomous millipedes' (Ant. Lib. 41.4–5).¹⁹ The sexual function is again distorted, this time in a particularly uncomfortable way: *οὐρεῖν* would not be a natural way of imaging any normal part of the reproductive process.

The *flood* of urine might again be difficult to interpret. Once again, it could be straightforward, along the same lines as the spreading vine: an offspring²⁰ will overwhelm and dominate all Asia. This has something in common with the familiar²¹ phenomenon of territorial urination: the urine marks out the family property. Still, folklore urine-floods rarely have these sorts of connotation, and this may alert us to wider possibilities. Particularly associated with female urination, such floods sometimes denote barriers and hindrances, though admittedly the (male) hero rarely finds them insuperable. There is an African story, for instance, of a traveller, Kombe Alhassu, finding his way into a giant's house, fleeing in terror and hiding in what he thinks is a cave—but in fact it is the vagina of the giantess, and he is soon evacuated to safety in a flood of urine.²² More often, floods simply explain the origins of rivers or seas; as in the Melanesian tale of the old woman who always urinated in a giant leaf in her garden; one day two boys accidentally upturned it in their play—they were shooting at lizards—and that was the origin of the sea.²³ In Astyages' dream too there might be similar suggestions. The king's city (presumably Ecbatana) and then the land of Asia are turned into sea: that may hint at the theme of distorting nature which becomes so important in the later books.²⁴ And the darker suggestions of urination may again be relevant, indicating contempt or hostility for the city and land, and perhaps by extension for its current king.²⁵ This is not the sort of imagery that gently points to a peaceful inheritance.

¹⁹ Simon Swain reminds me of the Athenian 'Ephebus', who in one spectacular orgasm produced a 'furry creature walking quickly with its many legs' (Plut. *Mor.* 733c). Plutarch tells this immediately after a similar urination tale, though that need not in itself mean an assimilation of orgasm to urination.

²⁰ Cf. the material collected by A. Dundes, *Journal of Psychoanalytic Anthropology* 9 (1986), 359–72 (reprinted in his collection *The Flood Myth* [Berkeley and London, 1988], pp. 151–65). Dundes argues that flood myths of the Noah-Deucalion type represent, via urinary/genital assimilation, a myth of male procreation without female assistance, with male urination mimicking the female breaking of the waters in childbirth. This emphasis would seem to ignore the greater frequency of *female* urination in such myths (below, nn. 22–3), as here.

²¹ Most familiar to us from the embarrassing behaviour of domestic cats and dogs, but the phenomenon seems to have wider anthropological parallels and significance: cf. Muth (n. 11), p. 24; Donaldson (n. 12), p. 1354. The use of ithyphallic Herms to demarcate territory may be a related phenomenon (W. Burkert, *Structure and history in Greek mythology and ritual* [Berkeley etc., 1979], pp. 39–41, 45).

²² L. Frobenius, *Atlantis* (Jena, 1921–8), vi.219: cf. some other instances among those listed by Stith Thompson (n. 16), A.933. Notice the confusion of vagina and urethra, on which see Devereux (n. 6), p. 228, and for classical Greece especially Lesley Ann Dean-Jones, *Women's bodies in Classical Greek Science* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 80–83, observing that Aristotle made the same mistake (*PA* 689a6–9). This confusion might aid the urinary/genital assimilation discussed above.

²³ R. H. Codrington, *The Melanesians: Studies in their Anthropology and Folk-lore* (Oxford, 1891), pp. 372–3: cf. P. Sébillot, *Le folk-lore de la France* (Paris, 1905), ii.327–8 for parallels in French folk-lore; Géza Róheim, *The Gates of the Dream* (New York, 1952), pp. 448–9 (= *The Flood Myth* [n. 20], pp. 152–3) for parallels from the New Hebrides, the Narrinyeri, and the Heiltsuk; and more generally Stith Thompson (n. 16) A.923.1, 933.2, 1012.2.

²⁴ I have discussed this 'land and sea' theme in *Georgica: Greek studies in honour of George Cawkwell* (M. A. Flower and M. Toher [eds.], *BICS Supplement* 58, 1991), pp. 136–9. Immerwahr (n. 6), p. 163 was not far astray in connecting this with the 'river-motif' which his book emphasized.

²⁵ G. Hoffmann, *La jeune fille, le pouvoir et la mort* (Paris, 1992), pp. 205–6.

The elusiveness of this first dream is important for making sense of Herodotus' narrative. It is understandable that Astyages should here refer such a dream to the experts, and that he should find their responses alarming: but, in view of the bemusing multivalence of the dream, it is also understandable that he would be reluctant to kill his daughter out of hand, or even—yet—to exclude the possibility of her having offspring, for 'offspring' was only one of the possible registers for interpreting the dream. Instead he distances her from the 'city' which was first threatened by the urine-flood, and gives her to an outsider to marry, the Persian Cambyses; a reader might presume that, even if 'offspring' turned out to be the correct interpretative register, any child's lack of status might still exclude the possibility of serious danger.²⁶ There is a certain parental halfheartedness about this, but a reader need not find it humanly implausible.

The enigmatic quality of the first dream also clarifies its narrative relationship to the second. Duplication of dreams in such a setting is anyway not implausible: the Old Testament and *Gilgamesh* both offer parallels to such double dreaming when so momentous an event is presaged.²⁷ But the second dream is not a mere repeat, for once again the increasing clarity is important. This time the suggestions are inescapable: Mandane's offspring will rule all Asia. Had this dream come first, an heirless Astyages might indeed have had nothing to fear, and could rejoice in the presaged glory of a grandson; the marriage to an outsider would in that case have been most inappropriate. But by now it is too late, for Mandane is already married to that outsider. It is that marriage, more than anything in the dream itself, that makes the prophecy such a disturbing one:²⁸ now any succession of Mandane's offspring to the throne could only, once again, be a distorted one. Hence the experts interpret this, not as suggesting that his grandson will inherit, but that he will 'rule *instead of him*' (1.108.2), a suggestion of violence and usurpation rather than natural inheritance. The time for half-measures has now passed, and Astyages turns to more murderous action.

II

Herodotus' narrative has turned out to be coherent after all. The two dreams do not simply repeat one another, and their order could not be reversed. The halfhearted response to the first is a natural reaction to its multivalence; then that first response, involving the marriage to the outsider, is a necessary premiss for the second, clearer dream to be taken as threatening.

We might still ask about Herodotus' own part in this. Is the coherence his own imposition, as he deftly finds room for two uncomfortably similar items? Can we

²⁶ Erbse (n. 1), 34 compares the marriage of Euripides' Electra to a peasant farmer, where Aegisthus and Clytemnestra could similarly hope that any offspring would be politically negligible. That comparison is more apt for Herodotus' presentation, with Cambyses as a middle-class quietist, than for any version which acknowledged Cambyses' royal status: cf. below. Devereux (n. 6), 223 suggests that Euripides is here borrowing from Herodotus.

²⁷ Oppenheim (n. 15), 208–9; Immerwahr (n. 6), 163 n. 39. Such serial dreaming is of course familiar in real life, and has attracted psychoanalytic attention: cf. Devereux (n. 6), p. 225, with further bibliography.

²⁸ Fehling (n. 2), p. 200 makes this important point clearly. (Justin 1.4.2–4 thus abbreviates incomprehensibly when he suppresses the first dream and represents the second as the inspiration for the marriage to Cambyses.) But John Moles may be right in putting to me that this second dream is also phallic, and intrudes some suggestive and disquieting blurring of male and female roles. The vagina produces the equivalent of a male member; its product is described by words (*γεννώμενον, γόνος*) more usually used of the male. If so, the challenging male-female play is another 'tragic' element to add to those discussed below.

detect anything about his adaptation of his original material? Or about the way in which he has made it serve the wider themes of his narrative?

These are not straightforward questions to address, and they touch on some of the most disputed questions of current Herodotean criticism; but some points can be made. Even if there are 'Greek' touches elsewhere in his Cyrus narrative,²⁹ there seems no reason to doubt that he is using genuinely Oriental material here: whatever might be thought of the rest of the comparative evidence, the Assyrian material confirms both the importance and the ambivalence of urination in Near Eastern dream-interpretation. Even the combination of the two dream-motifs *may* go back beyond Herodotus; the vine imagery would have been as clear-cut as the urination was ambivalent, for an Assyrian, a Median, or a Persian just as for a Greek; and either an Oriental or a Greek could have developed a story of a royal father finding such a dream about his daughter to be deeply disturbing, but not yet sufficiently disturbing to provoke murder or infanticide. And there certainly seems insufficient reason to follow von Fritz in inferring an original version with Cyrus as an outsider rather than a prince.³⁰ In terms of the story's imagery, we have seen that Astyages' growing alarm makes good sense in its own terms; and in terms of real history, it is perfectly plausible to think of Cyrus as the king's grandson.³¹ Cambyses was a royal figure, the king of Anšan (though Herodotus obscures the fact—more on this below): he would be a thoroughly suitable husband for a Median princess.³²

We are on surer ground in detecting some Herodotean touches in the detail of the narrative, in particular the way in which he makes the sequence more credible still. First, we are not told exactly what the experts advised after the first dream, only that Astyages 'was alarmed by the details which he heard from them': there is not yet any talk of the fear of Mandane's potential offspring. Had any such reading of the dream

²⁹ Cf. especially Fehling (n. 2), pp. 110–11, 198–9. The most notable Greek elements are the *κῶλον* ~ *Kôpos* word-play at 1.122.3 and the 'Thyestes banquet' of 1.119–20: cf. Aly (n. 1), 50; W. Burkert, *Homo Necans* (P. Bing [tr.], Berkeley etc, 1983), pp. 108–9; Erbse (n. 1), p. 33. However, it is bad method to infer a Greek origin for the whole of the Cyrus narrative. It is almost inconceivable that Persian stories about Cyrus were *not* circulating (cf. D. L. Gera, *Xenophon's Cyropaedia: style, genre, and literary technique* [Oxford, 1993], pp. 16–17), and it is likely both (a) that Greek elements had already combined with Persian before Herodotus, and (b) that Herodotus' own filtering of any 'Persian' material continued the process of contamination, in particular streamlining to highlight elements which would be most familiar to a Greek audience. The *Märchenmotiven* of the exposure and salvation of a wonder-child have an international and cross-cultural background (cf. von Fritz [n. 2], 284–5), and it is rash to claim them either as Greek or as Oriental. Brian Lewis, *The Sargon Legend* (American Schools of Oriental Research Dissertation Series 4, Cambridge, MA, 1980), pp. 262, 265 tentatively identifies a Mesopotamian or Western Asian origin for the wonder-child folktale; but (a) it is uncertain whether the quest for an Ur-form is methodologically sound, and perhaps we should think of polygenesis; and (b) even if Lewis is right, the folktale motifs will have spread from their place of origin at least a millennium before Cyrus.

³⁰ Cf. above, pp. 68–9.

³¹ That version is rejected, without argument, by e.g. W. Hinz, *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* vi.5 (1985) s.v. 'Kyros', 401, apparently followed by Bichler (n. 6), 134. It is accepted, equally without argument, by e.g. I. M. Diakonoff and M. Mallowan in *Cambridge History of Iran* ii (I. Gershevitch [ed.], 1985), 144 and 404. The most judicious comments are those of Rawlinson *ad loc.*

³² Such a marriage would admittedly be less plausible if the historical Astyages genuinely had no male heir, as Herodotus claims, and if Mandane was the only daughter and hence, presumptively, wife or mother of the heir. But, immediately we accept the possibility that the story's details have been manipulated by Herodotus and/or his source, then it is just as likely that some other offspring of Astyages have slipped out of the tale. They would only complicate the story. Cf. Erbse (n. 1), p. 34.

been made more explicit (even as one of several interpretative possibilities), the risks Astyages was running by marrying her to anyone would have been more uncomfortably clear. Secondly, Cambyses is represented, not as the king that he was, but merely as 'belonging to a good house and mild in nature, but still—Astyages thought—far inferior to a Mede of even middling status'. This serves to make Astyages' half-measure a more plausible one, for a marriage to any sort of outside royalty would accentuate the continuing riskiness of the course.

We should also notice the ways in which this episode reflects characteristic concerns of Herodotus' narrative: even if the basic material was offered him by his sources, he has certainly made it his own. Take the recurring dream, for instance. The most telling parallel is within the History itself, the dream which visits Xerxes twice (7.12.2, 14.1) and then comes to Artabanus as well (7.17.1); then the further dream of Xerxes at 7.19.1.³³ There, as here, the point is not merely to emphasize the dreams' portentousness, but also to bring out the inexorability of the event portended. Xerxes, like Astyages, has already begun to try to avoid the unhappy events which the first dream threatened, but the returning dream underlines the hopelessness of any such attempt.

It is also a characteristic pattern of Herodotus' dream-stories to see a dreamer's responses turn out counter-productive, so that they bring on precisely the terrors which the dream portended.³⁴ Here too all Astyages' actions turn out to be precisely those necessary to make the dream come true.³⁵ And this is particularly telling at this point of the narrative: for it takes us back to Croesus, particularly the story of Atys and Adrastus (1.34–45). Croesus too has a dream, this time portending his son's death (1.34.1); Croesus too, there as elsewhere in his story, is intrigued and concerned by revelations of wisdom, but—whether they come from Solon, or in his dreams, or from Delphi—he finds them bewildering and unfathomable; Croesus too takes what seem to him sensible precautions, but his over-protectiveness turns out to be precisely the factor that destroys his son, with the chosen protector Adrastus throwing the fatal missile. There as here, an initial extreme caution goes on to give way to over-confidence, as each king is persuaded that his actions are sufficient to guard against the danger: Atys persuades his father that he cannot die of a spear-wound on a boar hunt (1.39), the seers assure Astyages that the threat from the young Cyrus has passed (1.120.5–6). Admittedly, Croesus is concerned to preserve his heir, while Astyages decides to destroy his, but the distinction is less crucial than it seems: for it is precisely Astyages' halfheartedness, his reluctance to take the hardest measures against his daughter, which directs his actions. The classic exposure-and-escape-of-the-wonder-child folktale presents a murderous, pitiless head of house, who finds the killing of a defenceless child or grandchild a sensible way of protecting his throne.³⁶ Astyages transforms the stereotype: he does what he can to be merciful, and it takes the clarity of the second dream to force him to decisive action.

This is not the last time that we shall see this trait in Astyages, for the same halfheartedness leads him to spare the adolescent Cyrus after his rediscovery, and to

³³ For discussion cf. Pelling (n. 24), pp. 130–31 and 139–40, with bibliography: add G. E. M. de Ste Croix, *G&R* 24 (1977), 143–5.

³⁴ This emerges clearly from Frisch (n. 9), though much of his treatment is superficial (cf. W. Marg's review, *Gnomon* 42 [1970], 515–17). The phenomenon of the 'self-fulfilling oracle' is evidently related.

³⁵ Including, a little later, the involvement of Harpagus. That is hard to explain realistically: why could not Astyages directly order a minion to carry out the execution, rather than involve the vizier (cf. Erbse [n. 1], 32–3)?

³⁶ Cf. the material collected by Brian Lewis (n. 29), summarized at his pp. 211–12.

rejoice (ἐχάρη, 1.121.1, in Herodotus an ominous word)³⁷ when the seers recommend this gentle course; but they also advise the king to send him away, hinting at some continuing unease. Thus Cyrus too is sent, like his mother Mandane before him, to the Persians (1.120.6–121.1), and the consequences are momentous. In each case the halfheartedness turns out worse for Astyages than any fullblooded response would have done: and this is not merely humanly credible, it is also tragic.

Tragedy too presents figures whose good intentions turn out deathly: one thinks of Deianeira. Tragedy deals with a divided οἶκος, and so does this: even Harpagus is presented as a blood-relative to the royal house (1.108.3, 109.3), and consequently Harpagus' part in the planned murder of the infant Cyrus and Astyages' murder of Harpagus' son both appear as internal familial crimes. The second in particular, with its 'Thyestes banquet', is particularly tragic in resonance.³⁸ The marriage of Mandane to Cambyses bears a further significance here. The definition of Cambyses as a social inferior is useful to the narrative logic, as we have seen; but the social mismatch of Cyrus' parents also preserves a further Herodotean pattern. The Lydian λόγος began with a similar mixed marriage, with Gyges marrying a royal woman who was by far his social superior: there too the resulting dynasty ran a self-destructive course, and the instrument of destruction was precisely this 'mule' Cyrus, 'born of mixed parentage, with a mother of better class and a father of worse' (1.91.5–6).³⁹ Such episodes also fit a further mythical schema, whereby a threatening or disastrous child often occupies an ambivalent position, at once central and marginal, at once inside and outside the royal house.⁴⁰ That too is familiar from tragedy: one only has to think, in their different ways, of Oedipus, Orestes, Polynices, and Hippolytus.

We have come some way from the simple smoothing of a few sentences of narrative, but we have also seen that unobtrusive deftness of technique is more than an end in itself. In a few strokes, Herodotus has presented a plausible picture of a concerned father, one who gropes for enigmatic truth, one who balances cautious self-protection with a reluctance to authorize bloody kin-killing; and the narrative has set his hopeless efforts against a background of cosmic inevitability. Herodotus has fitted this portrayal into a wider picture of a family at odds with itself, where affection and menace, boon and disaster, caution and over-confidence mingle with bewildering and devastating effect. There are many ways, indeed, in which Cyrus' story replays that of Croesus, in a subtly different register. The curse on the Lydian house was explicit: Croesus' punishment in the fifth generation is traced back to Gyges (1.13.2, 91.1). But it is possible to see the origins of Cyrus, the 'mule' who destroys Croesus, as

³⁷ Cf. the 'great pleasure' which Harpagus has just twice felt, in each case tragically deluded (1.119.1, 6). Elsewhere cf. Croesus at 1.54.1, 1.56.1: later e.g. Cambyses at 3.34.5, Polycrates at 3.42.2, 123.1; Xerxes at 7.37.3, 44, 9.49.1, 109.1: H. Bischoff, *Der Warner bei Herodot* (Diss. Marburg, 1932), p. 36 n. 1; C. C. Chiasson, *GRBS* 27 (1986), 249–62; S. P. Flory *AJP* 99 (1978), 145–53, esp. 150; D. Lateiner, *TAPA* 107 (1977), 173–82.

³⁸ As has often been observed: cf. especially H. Schwabl, *Gymn.* 76 (1969) 269 and n. 15; Fehling (n. 2), 110–11.

³⁹ As the ring of Croesus' story closes, that initial presumption of Gyges—his 'going astray', ἀμαρτάδα—is recalled a few sentences before this mention of the 'mule' Cyrus and the similar 'going astray' (ἀμαρτάδα again) which he inspired in Croesus (1.91.1 ~ 5–7). Both form part of Apollo's explication of the riddling divine will: the symmetrical beginning and end of the Lydian dynasty are simultaneously made clear.

⁴⁰ Cf. the case of Cypselus, as elucidated by C. Sourvinou-Inwood, *Opuscula Atheniensia* 17.11 (1988), p. 181 and n. 122 (= *Reading Greek culture* [Oxford, 1991], p. 266 and 282–3 n. 122). Stephanie West also reminds me of the versions that Apries' daughter was Cambyses' mother (3.2.1) and that Nectanebos was the real father of Alexander. An interesting variation, she observes, is Stalin as an illegitimate son of a Georgian prince (R. Conquest, *The Great Terror* [revised edn., 1990], p. 55): has the Georgian royal line here taken the place of the Romanovs?

intimating a subtler equivalent of the same theme. The two tales are even mutually related, in terms which themselves highlight questions of family: as Croesus' story neared its end, the family relationship of Astyages, Cyrus, and Croesus became relevant (1.73–4), with an earlier Thyestes-banquet playing its part (1.73.5–6). The Achaemenid monarchy, like the Lydian monarchy before it, begins with an unequal union and a familial crime: and Cyrus' successors will find themselves no less trapped by history and no less self-destructive than Croesus had been, though the registers of historical explanation will become even richer and more varied, and any 'curse on the royal house' will be even less cosmically straightforward. Much of the challenge to Herodotus' readers is the exploration of such recurrent patterns, and the attempt to disentangle what is constant and what is new; and our few sentences of narrative play their part, as readers sense the beginning of a new dynastic tragedy, one which will require the entire History to carry to its end.⁴¹

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