

be the case that the cognate noun is here used to mean the questioning of eye-witnesses specifically *as opposed to* other forms of investigation.

- (b) In order to demonstrate the truth of his contention here, Polybius goes on (12.27.7–11) to cite in support Ephorus, Theopompus, and Homer. But he does not cite them because they endorse the importance of questioning witnesses, but because they support the importance of the historian's possession of personal knowledge, both in terms of autopsy of the specific events (which is Ephorus' point) and wider experience of such things as warfare and oratory (which is what he derives from Theopompus and Homer). §6 must therefore include these aspects of historical writing.

The real interpretation is ready to hand. The antithesis in (C) does not in fact elaborate on the division in (B). What it rather does is introduce a new contrast between Timaeus' lack of effort and research, and the hard work of the good historian. Thus *ἡ πολυπραγμοσύνη* in §6 refers to all the historian's activities in research, exactly as it does elsewhere in the passage. But, crucially, it is prescriptive rather than descriptive (hence *προσδείται*)—this is the sort of effort that is required if research is to be done *properly*.⁸ And it is research involving such effort—which thus includes both questioning eyewitnesses and autopsy—which is described as *μέγιστόν ... μέρος τῆς ἱστορίας*, and which is then justified by reference to Ephorus, Theopompus, and Homer. This is loose phrasing on Polybius' part, since it is not *ἡ πολυπραγμοσύνη* as a whole which is the subject of the second half of the sentence, as the strict grammar implies, but only the type of *πολυπραγμοσύνη* which conforms to the conditions set out in the first part of the sentence. It is however comprehensible, and the only reading which makes sense of both the logic and the wording.

Consequently Polybius' reasoning in this passage is entirely consistent. History-writing can be divided into that requiring effort (including both autopsy and interrogating witnesses), and that which does not (using books). The former is 'the most important part of history'. But the history-writing which requires effort can itself be further subdivided into that which involves 'seeing' and that which involves 'hearing', and of those, the former is more accurate than the latter. The inferior effort-less research, on the other hand, is *all* done by 'hearing'.

University of Leeds

D.S. LEVENE

D.S.Levene@leeds.ac.uk

doi:10.1093/cq/bmi061

AUTOCASTRATION OR REGICIDE? LUCIAN, *DE DEA SYRIA* 20¹

The king of Assyria has ordered his friend Combabus to accompany queen Stratonice to the Holy City and there to help her to build a votive temple to Hera. Immediately

This is doubly wrong. Polybius uses the term in this context to refer to research (of any sort), and the examples that Sacks gives of different meanings are simply specific applications within that general semantic range. And Polybius explicitly uses the term of the researches of Timaeus, which he directly says did *not* involve toil, expense, and danger.

⁸ With Polybius' sentiments here one can compare Thucydides 1.20.3, who likewise points out the general need for *ταλαιπωρία* if one is to determine the truth; so too Theopompus *FGrH* 115F26 (= Dion. Hal., *Pomp.* 6) emphasizes the importance to the historian of *παρασκευή* and *δαπάνη*.

¹ I am grateful to Professor Donald Russell for helpful comments.

realizing the jealous suspicions to which this situation could give rise, Combabus begs the king not to force the task on him, but without success. Eventually Combabus decides to castrate himself as a means of protection against future charges of sexual misconduct. The soliloquy which he delivers immediately before his drastic action ends with the following words (Chapter 20):²

νέος μὲν ἐγὼ καὶ γυναικὶ καλῇ ἔψομαι. τὸ δέ μοι μεγάλη συμφορὴ ἔσσεται, εἰ μὴ ἔγωγε πᾶσαν αἰτίην κακοῦ ἀπωθήσομαι. τῷ με χρὴ μέγα ἔργον ἀποτελέσαι, τό μοι πάντα φόβον ἴησεται.

What are we to make of the phrase μέγα ἔργον? In her commentary, Lightfoot³ compares Herodotus' use of the expression (both in the singular and the plural) to refer to the accomplishments of 'kings, tyrants, heroes in war, or massive forces in nature'. Under this interpretation, the phrase ironically represents Combabus' horrific act of self-mutilation as a 'great deed'⁴ comparable to mighty conquests (cf. Hdt. 1.14.4, 1.59.4), brilliant generalship (cf. Hdt. 3.155.6), or heroic acts performed in the thick of battle (cf. Hdt. 8.17, 8.90.3). The lofty language is half-humorously deflated (I nearly wrote 'undercut') by the grim reality of the act which follows; yet at the same time the undeniable bravery of Combabus' deed is also recognized by the narrator.

There may be more than Herodotus lurking in this expression, however. In several places in the *Odyssey* (3.261, 11.272, 12.373, 19.92, 24.426, 24.458)⁵ the phrase μέγα ἔργον is found with a set of meanings whose significance is quite different from that outlined above. It may refer to an act of great violence (e.g. 24.426, the killing of the suitors), of wanton humiliation aimed at another person (19.92, Melantho's verbal attack on Odysseus), of deliberate disobedience of the divine will (12.373, the slaughter of the cattle of the Sun), or of transgression, albeit unintended, of some basic norm (e.g. 11.272, the marriage of Epicaste to her son Oedipus). The phrase is also used in similar senses at Hes. *Theog.* 209–10, Pind. *N.* 10.64 and Aesch. *Pers.* 759–60, but, given the concentration of occurrences in the *Odyssey*, it is fair to assume that Lucian's audience will have felt it as a specifically Homeric usage. In this meaning the phrase is always found in the singular. In each case there is a powerful sense of the violation of the proper order of things, often through an act involving excessive violence or cruelty. This gives a sentiment which fits well in the mouth of a man on the verge of unmanning himself, given that the act of castration is such a fundamentally violent attack on the proper wholeness of the human male. More generally, the Homeric flavour of the phrase is entirely appropriate in this narrative context.⁶

There is, of course, an important distinction between the Homeric use of the expression⁷ and the use which we find in our passage: namely, that references to a μέγα ἔργον in this Homeric sense are not made by the person who performs

² The text is that of J. L. Lightfoot (ed., trans., comm.), *Lucian: On the Syrian Goddess* (Oxford, 2003) (itself a μέγα ἔργον if ever there was one), 260 lines 11–13. I do not mention the small textual variants in the passage, which do not affect my argument.

³ *Ibid.*, 405.

⁴ Cf. Lightfoot's translation 'therefore I must do a mighty thing that will eradicate all cause for dread' (n. 2), 261. So also J. Elsner, 'Describing self in the language of other: pseudo (?) Lucian at the temple of Hierapolis', in S. D. Goldhill (ed.), *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire* (Cambridge, 2001), 123–53, at 147: 'he made himself imperfect by performing (literally "perfecting") a "great deed" upon himself'.

⁵ Cf. M. Bissinger, *Das Adjektiv MEGAS in der griechischen Dichtung* (Munich, 1966), 203.

⁶ Lightfoot (n. 2), 398 points out how in this passage 'the vocabulary owes more to epic than any other section of the treatise'. For other examples of Homeric colouring in the immediate vicinity see Lightfoot's notes on ὦ δειλαῖος, τῆς τέλος ἦδη δέρομαι, and τῷ με χρὴ (all p. 405).

the act.⁸ This is hardly surprising, given the negative connotations of the phrase. Rather, it is most commonly used to condemn the act in question, and is often set in the context of a claim or prediction that vengeance will come upon its perpetrator as a consequence (cf. *Od.* 19.92 ἔρδουσα μέγα ἔργον, ὃ σῇ κεφαλῇ ἀναμάξεις, 24.426 with τισόμεθα at line 435, 12.373 with τίσαι at 378, Hes. *Theog.* 209–10; also *Od.* 3.255–61, where the vengeance is hypothetical). Yet despite these threats, the perpetrator of a μέγα ἔργον usually does not stop to consider the likely effects of his actions and the punishment to which they may lead.

Lucian's handling of the expression effectively exploits some of these Homeric resonances, though in an unexpected way. Combabab's violent and transgressive act, far from suggesting his insensibility to the prospect of imminent vengeance, is aimed precisely at the avoidance of a likely future punishment. Far from being a morally reprehensible act, it is designed to protect its perpetrator from even the mere suspicion of wrongdoing. Yet at the same time, this prophylactic against punishment paradoxically constitutes one of the most horrible punishments imaginable: cf. especially Hdt. 8.105.1, where the castration of Panionius and his sons as a punishment for Panionius' involvement in the eunuch trade is regarded by the historian as the μεγίστη τίσις . . . πάντων τῶν ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν. The fruitfulness of such a comparison between the Homeric and Lucianic contexts of the phrase points towards the probability that this Homeric sense for μέγα ἔργον in this passage was indeed felt by Lucian's audience. The phrase thus appears every bit as grimly ironical as when taken under its Herodotean aspect.

The phrase is also significant for the nature of Lucian's narrative technique in this passage. We do not learn that Combabab is contemplating self-castration until the moment that the act is performed, immediately after his monologue comes to an end. The vague language of this soliloquy (cf. εἰ μὴ ἔγωγε πᾶσαν αἰτίην κακοῦ ἀπωθήσομαι and τό μοι πάντα φόβον ἰήσεται) gives no hint of his likely course of action. The referent of μέγα ἔργον is thus not at first clear. Few, if any, of Lucian's audience would have understood it to denote autocastration. Given the context, it is more likely that the phrase would have been taken as a reference to a pre-emptive strike against the king on the part of Combabab. That would be an obvious course for a subject in this desperate situation: more obvious, certainly, than the bizarre choice of voluntary self-castration. The phrase μέγα ἔργον in its Homeric sense helps to point us in that direction, since it constitutes a natural designation of the act of regicide, and in fact is used to refer to this crime at *Od.* 3.261 (Aegisthus' killing of Agamemnon).

The parallels between this episode and the Gyges narrative from Herodotus 1.8–14 lend further, stronger support to this view.⁹ There too we see a confidant of the king (1.8.1 ἀρεσκόμενος μάλιστα [sc. τῷ βασιλεῖ]; cf. *DDS* ch. 19, where Combabab is said to be one of the king's φίλοι) who is brought into deadly peril as the result of too proximate an encounter with the wife of his ruler. There too this encounter takes place because of the specific encouragements of the king, against the protestations of his

⁷ In this and subsequent references to the 'Homeric use' of the phrase I do not mean to imply that this is the *only* sense which this expression can have in Homer.

⁸ Contrast, however, Soph. *Aj.* 422 3 ἔπος/ἔξερῶ μέγα, spoken by Ajax: but given Ajax's delusional self promotion this is very much the exception which proves the rule. On this use of μέγα and magnum to qualify nouns other than ἔργον in a negative sense see the note in my commentary on Soph. *El.* 830 (Cambridge, forthcoming).

⁹ The connexion between the two narratives is noted by G. Anderson, *Studies in Lucian's Comic Fiction* (Leiden, 1976), 79 and by Lightfoot (n. 2), 399.

reluctant subject. In each case, the subject is forced to compromise himself, and as a result turns to desperate measures. The similarity of situation, along with the deliberate ambiguity of the phrase μέγα ἔργον, could easily have led a reader or listener to expect an attempt by Combabus to do away with the king before the king could do away with him. In the event, this turns out to be a false narrative path: and so the sudden reference to castration immediately after Combabus' monologue comes with greatly accentuated shock value.

The two interpretations offered by Lightfoot and by me need not, of course, exclude each other. Lightfoot herself has offered a sensitive analysis of Lucian's polyvalent use of the ἔργ- root in this narrative (p. 398), and so it is not surprising that this phrase here can carry more than one meaning. Both need to be appreciated for Lucian's artistry to be fully understood.

All Souls College, Oxford

P. J. FINGLASS

patrick.finglass@all-souls.ox.ac.uk

doi:10.1093/cq/bmi062

PLAUTUS AND ENNIUS: A NOTE ON PLAUTUS, *BACCHIDES* 962–5¹

At *Bacchides* 925–77 the clever slave Chrysalus recites a *canticum* in order to celebrate his success as a cheat to the detriment of his master Nicobulus, whom he has defrauded of the money necessary for his young master's love-affair: he carries out a hyperbolic comparison between his action and the triumph of the Greeks with the wooden horse in the war of Troy.² However, the *lamentatio* (so called at v. 932, *libet lamentari*) becomes larger and goes on to display a wider part of that legend, interpreted in a form of parody: there is a sort of review of personages and episodes from the Trojan myth (Priam, Alexander, Helen, Agamemnon, Menelaus, Ulysses, and others), compared to the characters and the intrigues performed in the comedy with a comic effect of contrast.³ At vv. 962–5 in particular Chrysalus recalls a risk that he has run and hardly averted; he compares it to a peculiar episode concerning Ulysses:

ibi uix me exsolui: id periculum adsimilo, Vlixem ut praedicant
cognitum ab Helena esse proditum Hecubae; sed ut olim ille se
blanditiis exemit et persuasit se ut amitteret,
item ego dolis me illo extuli e periculo et decepi senem.

These verses are considered interpolated by many editors, beginning with Friedrich Leo, because of their content, which seems to be out of place at that point and cannot be found in the works of other ancient authors (except Euripides and probably

¹ The *Bacchides* is included in the volume *Plaute* 2, texte établi et traduit par A. Ernout, (Paris, 1933); it is commented by Ernout himself (Paris, 1935), is edited with an ample introduction by C. Questa (Firenze, 1975²), and has an English translation and commentary by J. Barsby (Warminster, 1986).

² As regards the content, the structure and the many textual problems of this *canticum* cf. E. Fraenkel, *Plautinisches im Plautus* (Berlin, 1922), 61–72; Questa, *ibid.*, 46–68.

³ The parody of the mythical matter (or rather of the tragedy, which treats that matter) is a device frequently employed by Plautus; on this theme cf. H. Haefter, *Untersuchungen zur altlateinischen Dichtersprache* (Berlin, 1934), 76–85; A. Thierfelder, 'Plautus und die römische Tragödie', *Hermes* 74 (1939), 155–66; G. Manuwald, 'Tragödienelemente in Plautus' *Amphitruo*. Zeichen von Tragödienparodie oder Tragi komödie?', in Th. Baier (ed.), *Studien zu Plautus' Amphitruo* (Tübingen, 1999), 177–202.