

## A Herodotean Reading of Solon

By Anne Rémillard

One of the most famous passages in Herodotus' *Histories* is the encounter between Solon and Croesus early in Book I.<sup>1</sup> It is generally agreed among scholars that Solon expresses Herodotus' own ethical, religious and philosophical views, not only because this episode is so prominently placed at the beginning of the work, but also because the conceptions of divinity and human prosperity introduced in Solon's lengthy speech recur throughout the *Histories*.<sup>2</sup> It is meaningful, then, to ask where these ideas come from, and in particular to inquire about the relationship between them and the extant fragments of Solon's poetry. In this paper, I will compare Solon's poetic fragments with his speech in Herodotus, and argue that the latter is not a free creation, but Herodotus' cautious adaptation of his knowledge of Solon's verses. Therefore it both contains views borrowed from Solon and distinct views that are original to Herodotus.

First, there is clear evidence – without which this task would be much less relevant – that Herodotus knew at least some of Solon's poetry. In his final speech to Croesus, Solon “sets the limit of life for a man to seventy years.”<sup>3</sup> This statement strongly echoes one of Solon's poems, which discusses the characteristics of each of the ten seven-year stages of human life, and ends with the declaration that “if someone completes a tenth seven and reaches the measured line, his due of death will not befall him prematurely.” (*fr.* 27 West) Moreover, in Book V, Herodotus directly mentions verses from a fragment we still have in which Solon praises the Cypriote king Philocyprus (*fr.* 19): “that Philocyprus whom Solon of Athens, when he came to Cyprus, extolled in a poem above all other tyrants.”<sup>4</sup> In addition to this basic evidence for Herodotus' acquaintance with Solon's poetry, Herodotus' views concerning the jealousy of the gods and the fragility of human happiness – expressed in the speech of his character Solon, reveal an ideological connection between the historian and the poet. Although Herodotus' work does not contain other direct allusions to Solon's verses than those aforementioned, there are plenty of indirect references to be found in the similarity in content and themes between the Herodotean speech of Solon and the poems themselves. This analysis requires detailed overviews of both texts, beginning with Herodotus.

After taking a tour of the Lydian royal treasury, Herodotus tells us, Solon is asked by Croesus who is the *olbiōtatos* man he has seen.<sup>5</sup> In Croesus' mouth, who expects his present material success to constitute the supreme human achievement, *olbios* refers merely to material prosperity – the traditional meaning of this word and the only one found in nearly all early Greek poets.<sup>6</sup> However, Solon's answer – the stories of Tellus and of

1 D. Asheri, *A Commentary on Herodotus Books I-IV* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 97; Hdt. 1.29–33.

2 S. Shapiro, “Herodotus and Solon,” *Classical Antiquity* vol. 89, (1996), 348.

3 Hdt. 1.32.2.

4 Hdt. 5.113.2.

5 Hdt. 1.30.2.

6 C. De Heer, *Makar; Eudaimon, Olbios, Eutuche: A Study of the Semantic Field Denoting Happiness in Ancient Greek to the End of the 5th Century B.C.* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1969), 51.

Cleobis and Biton – gives a completely different and more complex connotation to the word *olbios*, which we would translate as “happy” or “blessed”, rather than “prosperous” in Croesus’ sense.<sup>7</sup> The *olbiōtatos* man is the Athenian Tellus: he lived in a flourishing city, was moderately well-off by Greek standards, had noble sons and surviving descendants, and, most importantly, had a most glorious death – he died bravely after routing Athens’ enemy in battle, and was granted the honor of a public burial.<sup>8</sup> Next, Solon declares the Argive brothers Cleobis and Biton as second in *olbos*: they had a sufficient livelihood and the physical strength of champion athletes, which enabled them to accomplish a glorious deed – they carried their mother by chariot to the far-off temple of Hera in front of the whole citizen body applauding them in the context of a religious festival.<sup>9</sup> At this moment of greatest glory, they were granted the best possible death by Hera, a high honor for mortal men, and the citizens of Argos dedicated statues of them at Delphi “as if they had become the best of men.”<sup>10</sup> According to Solon, this event “shows that it is better for a man to die than to live.”<sup>11</sup>

Taken together, the examples of Tellus and Cleobis and Biton provide us with a description of the nature of the ideal life for Herodotus: the highest achievement for a man is manifold – it involves moderate wealth, family, civic achievements witnessed by the whole community, an honorable death, and permanent commemoration after death. However, the most crucial information on Herodotus’ moral views is found in Solon’s last speech to Croesus, and is expressed in three main sentences.<sup>12</sup> First, the divine (*to theion*) is wholly jealous (*phthoneron*) and troublesome.<sup>13</sup> Second, as a consequence of divine jealousy, human happiness is unstable and “man is entirely chance” (*pan esti anthrōpos sumphorē*).<sup>14</sup> Third, because human affairs are so ephemeral, every matter – including human life – should not be judged before we examine the end it comes (*skopeein de chrē pantos chrēmatis tēn teleutēn*).

The key element, then, is the instability of human prosperity, and Solon brings in further specification to help explain what he means. Since earthly beings are not self-sufficient, no man can enjoy every advantage: “it is impossible for one who is human to gather all these things, just as no land is fully sufficient itself in what it produc-

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7 J. A. Arieti, *Discourses on the First Book of Herodotus* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), 45.

8 Hdt. 1.30.4-5.

9 Hdt. 1.31.1-2.

10 Hdt. 1.31.5.

11 Hdt. 1.31.3.

12 Hdt. 1.32.1-9.

13 The explanation of misfortunes as a manifestation of divine *phthonos* is repeated later in Amasis’ warning to Polycrates (3.40.2) and Artabanus’ advice to Xerxes (7.46.4). See Shapiro 1996, 352-355 for a detailed discussion of the recurrence of this notion throughout the Histories.

14 See Shapiro 1996, 355-357 for an analysis of the importance of Solon’s principle of the instability of human fortune in the Histories. Interestingly, this notion corresponds to Herodotus’ conception of the nature of human affairs stated in the proem: “I will speak of small and great cities of men alike, for many states that were once great have now become small; and those that were great in my time were small before. Knowing therefore that human prosperity never continues in the same place, I shall mention both alike.” (Hdt. 1.5.4) Some scholars argue that it is the main guiding principle of the Histories; Cf. Harrison 2000, 38 and Murray 2001, 32.

es, but has one thing and lacks the other.”<sup>15</sup> For this reason, Herodotus makes it clear that we must draw a distinction between *olbios* and *eutuchēs*: *olbos* is a permanent, long-lasting state of prosperity and well-being, which can only be measured at one’s death.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly while a man still lives, we can only call him *eutuchēs*, “lucky”.

Solon has thus given to Croesus two reasons why excessive wealth is not desirable. First, it invites divine *phthonos*: the resentful gods will punish the very wealthy man and ruin him. It appears, then, that in Herodotus’ view of the universe, the role of divine *phthonos* is to maintain balance, to preserve a natural order and ensure that the boundaries between human and divine realms are not trespassed.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, extraordinary wealth – or, in fact, any excess – sets itself as a challenge to the gods: the very rich man is responsible for a sort of *hubris*, insofar as he has thought himself superior to a man and similar to a god, and in so doing has blurred the boundaries between heaven and earth. Second, since man is not self-sufficient and cannot accumulate all advantages, extraordinary wealth is not desirable: the moderately well-off man is more likely to obtain the other elements which form the combination of happiness – family, honor, noble death, etc. – and is especially likely to be blessed with good luck – since his moderation will not cause him to face divine resistance.<sup>18</sup> As a consequence, for Herodotus, any excessive wealth or power is an inevitable path in the direction of ruin. In the *Histories*, whenever a character is said to have outstanding possessions, not matter how he has acquired them – justly or not – it is also an ominous sign of his impending downfall.<sup>19</sup>

Let us now turn to the historical Solon. His work is dated to the late 7th century and early 6th Century B.C.E.<sup>20</sup> In general, Solon’s verses reveal that their author was highly concerned with the potential dangers of wealth and civic strife caused by the unequal distribution of money in the community. Indeed, Athens was facing an economic crisis at this time, and in 594, Solon was given the power to reform Athens’ laws in order to relieve the citizens from various injustices and burdens, notably by abolishing some problems concerning land-ownership and debt bondage.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, we only have 40 extant fragments of Solon’s poetry, and most of them are very short. Many of the fragments considered in this paper are quoted by Plutarch (*fr.* 14-15-21-24), some by Plato (*fr.* 18-23) and another by Clement of Alexandria (*fr.* 16). However, the most interesting poem is the longest – a complete poem preserved by Stobaeus, which is traditionally referred to as the Hymn to the Muses (*fr.* 13).

First, the theme of human happiness is present in many of Solon’s verses. He always uses the word *olbios* to denote a happy man, except in one poem where he uses the word *makar*: “Nor yet is any mortal fortunate [*makar*], but all are wretched that the sun looks down upon (*fr.* 14).”

15 Hdt. 1.32.8.

16 Hdt. 1.32.5-6.

17 C. Chiasson, “The Herodotean Solon,” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* vol.27, no.3 (1986), 261.

18 Solon explains in detail how illusory are the only two advantages of the wealthy man who is not *eutuchēs* over the moderately well-off who is lucky (1.32.6).

19 D. Lateiner, “A Note on the Perils of Prosperity in Herodotus,” *Rheinisches Museum* vol. 125 (1982), 98.

20 D. Mulroy, *Early Greek Lyric Poetry* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 63.

21 Mulroy 1992, 64.

In the other instances of the word *makar*, it is used only to denote divine bliss. For instance, in the opening lines of the Hymn to the Muses, Solon prays to receive *olbos* from the *makares* gods (*fr.*13.3). For Solon, there is a clear division between gods and men: while men can become *olbioi*, only gods can be called *makares*.<sup>22</sup> It is already plain, then, that human *olbos* is limited, and somewhat inferior to divine blessedness. We find here the same negative overtone that was present in the speech of the Herodotean Solon, but at a different level: for Herodotus, no man can be called *olbios* while he lives, whereas for Solon, a man can actually become *olbios* – but not *makar* like a god.

Before going any further in this comparison, one must understand what Solon means exactly by *olbios*. It is important to note that Solon is the first preserved Greek poet to depart from the traditional meaning of *olbios*, which used to connote merely material prosperity up to the late 5th century.<sup>23</sup> For Solon, sufficient material comfort is only one part of being *olbios*:

Equally rich is he who has abundancy  
of silver, gold, and acres under plough  
horses and mules, and he that only has the means  
to eat well, couch well, and go softly shod,  
and by and by enjoy a lad's or a woman's bloom  
with youth and strength still his to suit his need.  
This is a man's true wealth: he cannot take all those  
possessions with him when he goes below. (*fr.*24,1-8)

This poem does not compare wealth and poverty, but outstanding wealth and moderately sufficient wealth.<sup>24</sup> This conception of *olbos* as something other than material prosperity is very similar to the Herodotean view. Indeed, Herodotus uses very similar terms in Solon's speech, when he asserts that: "The very rich man is not more fortunate than the one who has enough for his day."<sup>25</sup> For both Herodotus and Solon, wealth – in moderate quantities – plays only a supporting or secondary role in human happiness. However, the last two verses of the same fragment (*fr.*24.7-8) show that this belief is not based on the same reason in both cases: extraordinary wealth, for Herodotus, stirs the jealousy of the gods, but for Solon, excessive wealth is simply wasted.

For Solon, therefore, wealth is not undesirable, but certain-

22 De Heer 1969, 51.

23 Chiasson 1986, p. 250. Cf. De Heer 1969 who goes in detail over usages of the word by early greek poets: 8, 12-14 (Homer); 16-19 (Homeric hymns); 20-31 (Hesiod) and 32-38 (archaic poets). Based on different observations from Homer, Hesiod and the Homeric hymns, Allen (1949, 52) also concludes that wealth was a crucial element of prosperity in Greek thought "until the revolution in values which came with the end of the fifth century."

24 Chiasson 1986, 255.

25 Hdt. 1.32.5.

ly not the best of man's possessions and only of secondary importance in a successful life. The other main component of *olbos*, for him, is *aretē*:

For many curs [*kakoi*] are rich, and men of class [*agathoi*] are poor,  
but we'll not take their riches in exchange  
for our virtue [*aretē*], which always stays secure,  
while wealth belongs to different men in turn. (*fr.*15)

This poem shows that wealth and virtue are separate qualities, which do not often come together. Moreover, virtue is more valuable than wealth, which confirms the previous idea that wealth is not the most important part of happiness. In addition, *aretē*, since it is an internal quality, is constant and long-lasting, whereas wealth, by contrast, is only contingent, ephemeral and beyond human control. By looking at the elements constituting the ideal life throughout the Solonian corpus, it is possible to reconstruct a general idea of Solon's notion of *aretē*: it presumably encompasses public service, involvement in the community as a citizen, health, friends, family and descendants.<sup>26</sup> This view is perfectly reflected by Herodotus' story of Tellus, and also by some elements of the lives of Cleobis and Biton; both authors agree on the elements integral to the ideal life.

In his prayer to the Muses, Solon also specifies that *olbos* (qualified by "*aiei echein*", *fr.*13.4) is a permanent state: success should be long-lasting. This poem illustrates *olbos* as a state of general well-being and as a gift of the gods to mankind.<sup>27</sup> However, this gift is rarely obtained and hard to maintain: Solon, just like the Herodotean character, insists on the fragility of human happiness and uncertainty of man's hopes:

We mortals, good and bad alike,  
believe our expectations will be fulfilled, until we suffer. Then we  
weep. But up to then  
we take fond pleasure in our mindless hopes (*fr.*13,33-36).

These verses are strongly echoed by the last line Herodotus puts in Solon's mouth: "For the god, having displayed fortune to many men, ruins them from the root."<sup>28</sup> The prospect of sudden failure and the unpredictability of our lot are present in both. Therefore, Solon believes, like Herodotus, that human affairs are unstable and that *olbos*, by contrast, is a permanent state. Although he does not draw the distinction between the words *eutuchēs* and *olbios*, Solon clearly adheres to the idea that there is an opposition between impermanent, unstable fortune and true, eternal happiness.

In short, Herodotus and Solon's notions of happiness bear striking similarities: the secondary role of material prosperity, the inferiority of our mortal condition, the long-lasting value of *olbos*, and necessary elements of virtue such as civic achievement and

26 See fragments 4, 13, 20, 21, 23, 24, 26, 32, 33, 36.

27 De Heer 1969, 52.

28 Hdt. 1.32.9..

familial posterity. Nonetheless, there is a major point on which Solon and Herodotus disagree concerning the ideal life, namely the notion articulated in the example of Cleobis and Biton according to which death is the best thing that can happen to a man. This pessimistic view of human life – that it is better to be dead than alive – is not found at all in Solon’s poetry. By contrast, Solon has a particularly optimistic view of life in general and especially of old age. First, as I have already mentioned, he describes the ideal and archetypal life as lasting seventy years (*fr.*27). Moreover, he proudly claims that he is still engaged in intellectual activity even as an elder: “As I grow old I’m always learning more” (*fr.*18). According to Chiasson, Solon’s views on this topic are unusual in the gloomy context of archaic thought, and the traditional Greek view of death is a particularly grim one.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the example of Cleobis and Biton would not have been supported by the poet Solon, and it is likely that the story of Cleobis and Biton was not transmitted to Herodotus by the historical Solon, but by another source closer to the traditional view of death – and to the bleak Greek folk wisdom that it is better to be dead than alive. It has been suggested that this story comes from Delphi: the moral of the story has a notable Delphic cast, since it emphasizes “the immense gulf separating lowly mankind from the Olympian gods.”<sup>30</sup> In addition, this origin would explain Herodotus’ mention of the statues dedicated in Delphi.

Besides, Solon also has a moral theory concerning the role of the gods in human success. In the *Hymn to the Muses*, Solon insists on the role of Zeus as the god of righteousness who will punish unjust deeds. Any injustice, but in particular unjust greed is punished by Zeus sooner or later and results in *atē*.<sup>31</sup>

I long for riches, but not unjustly [*adikōs*] gained;  
 for surely sometime justice [*dikē*] comes.  
 [...] But wealth that men extort gets out of control.  
 A reluctant attendant, constrained  
 by unjust actions, it quickly mixes with ruin [*atē*].  
 [...] Such is the punishment [*tisis*] of Zeus. He does not flare at every  
 insult, like a mortal man,  
 but all the time he is aware whose heart is marked  
 with sin, and in the end it shows for sure (*fr.*13.7-8;11-13;25-28).

Moreover, according to Solon, injustice arises because men are never satisfied by their present possessions: “In the race for wealth, there is no finishing line [*terma*]. The richest of us are straining To double our possessions. What could satisfy us all” (*fr.*13.71-73)? Thus men’s endless pursuit for becoming ever wealthier, in the end, proves to be self-damaging: the thoughtless efforts of greedy men are likely to make them transgress the *termata* of justice, and therefore to encounter ruin, the *tisis* of Zeus.<sup>32</sup>

29 Chiasson 1986, 250.

30 Chiasson 1986, 253.

31 R. Lattimore, “The First Elegy of Solon.” *The American Journal of Philology* vol. 68, no. 2 (1947), 175.

32 A. Allen, “Solon’s Prayer to the Muser,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* vol.80, (1949), 53.

As such, injustice takes place when men trespass the proper limits of property and go beyond their due portion to step into what is rightly due to their neighbors.

Many scholars agree that Herodotus and Solon have the same basic notion concerning the role of the gods in human prosperity, but that Herodotus has demoralized or a-moralized Solon's views.<sup>33</sup> Both the *Hymn to the Muses* and the *Histories* contain the idea of a certain form divine retribution, and both agree that ruin comes from the transgression of boundaries, and that moderation is the key for success. However, for Herodotus, Zeus has become a nameless divine essence, and divine *tisis* for unjust actions has become *phthonos* for any outstanding achievement, good or bad. Although the *Histories* contain countless very powerful and wealthy characters, Herodotus never has anything to say about the way in which they became rich: as Oswyn Murray puts it, "prosperity causes the envy of the gods, regardless of the hero's moral status."<sup>34</sup> In other words, for Solon, what the gods punish is injustice, whereas for Herodotus, what the gods envy is simply human success – and they destroy this success not for moral reasons, but in order to defend their position of supremacy in the cosmos.<sup>35</sup>

There is one last Solonian idea which compares particularly well with the speech of Solon in Herodotus. In the *Hymn to the Muses*, Solon insists on the importance of looking at the end, a notion that is highly stressed by the Herodotean Solon as well, but, as I will show, with a completely different connotation. This idea appears in the explanation given by Solon for the instability of human affairs, namely that men are unable to foresee the final outcome of their undertakings:

Fate brings to mortal men both good and ill: the gifts the immortals  
give are inescapable.

There is risk in every undertaking. No one knows,  
when something starts, how it will finish up.

One man makes noble efforts, but despite them all

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33 To name only the few I came upon who agree on this point: Harrison 2001, 38; Chiasson 1986, 259; Munson 2001, 33; De Ste-Croix 1997, 140.

34 O. Murray, "Herodotus and Oral History," in *The Historian's Craft in the Age of Herodotus*, ed. N. Luraghi, 32. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

35 Chiasson 1986, 259 makes an interesting point: "This conception of deity bears a striking resemblance to the conduct of the tyrant, who must cut down the leading citizens in order to eliminate competition for the leadership of his state." Indeed, there are striking resemblances between the demonstration of Thrasyloulos (5.92ζ.2) on how to maintain one's power as a Tyrant (i.e. to murder those of the citizens who rise above the others), and the speech of Artabanus to Xerxes: "You see how the god smites with his thunderbolt creatures of greatness and does not suffer them to display their pride, while little ones do not move him to anger; and you see how it is always on the tallest buildings and trees that his bolts fall; for the god loves to bring low all things of surpassing greatness. Thus a large army is destroyed by a smaller, when the jealous god sends panic or the thunderbolt among them, and they perish unworthily; for the god suffers pride in none but himself." (7.10ε) Moreover, during the Persian constitutional debate, Otanes argues that the tyrant is driven by *phthonos*. (3.80.3)

falls into unforeseen calamity;  
(*fr.* 13,63-68)

The uncertainty of human expectations is a direct consequence of our lack of foresight. In contrast to the omniscient knowledge of the gods, men's knowledge is limited and based on illusions.<sup>36</sup> This idea is also found in another fragment:

It is difficult to see wisdom's farthest boundary,  
where the ends of all things lie.  
(*fr.* 16)

Solon thus explains why the presumed innocent suffer misfortunes: even if someone wants to respect the laws of justice, his incapacity to foresee the consequence of actions can lead him to commit unjust deeds unwillingly and unknowingly. Because of the natural limitations of mankind, men both commit unjust acts deliberately and ignorantly. Therefore, man's lack of foresight is the cause of the fluctuation of his fortune and of the instability of his lot.

In this way, Herodotus and Solon both insist on the importance of looking at the end: for Solon, to look at the end means to look at the outcome of our actions, but for Herodotus, it is to look at the end of human life. It is plausible that Herodotus has borrowed this notion from Solon, but he has given a whole new meaning to the word *telos*. For Herodotus, the only way to secure happiness is death, but for the more optimistic Solon, wisdom is the remedy. In fact, what he prays for in the *Hymn to the Muses* when he asks for *olbos* is wisdom, by which proper boundaries are recognized, injustice avoided, and retribution prevented – the key for becoming *olbios*.<sup>37</sup>

To sum up, the similarities between Solon's poetry and Solon's speech in Herodotus are striking. Some of the most important elements are the following: they both offer a similar conception of the role of wealth and of other virtues in human happiness, the same notion that human affairs are fickle, a strong sense of differentiation between divine condition and human condition, and the idea that misfortunes are caused by a form of divine agency. What we can infer from these similarities is that Herodotus was clearly well acquainted with Solon's poetry and that the speech of Solon at the beginning of the *Histories* is a careful adaptation of Herodotus' knowledge of the poet.<sup>38</sup> According to T. Harrison, there are enough similarities to affirm that "Herodotus intended in some sense

36 Allen 1949, 54.

37 Allen 1949, 50.

38 M. Miller, "The Herodotus Croesus," *Klio* vol. 41. (1963), 89: Herodotus "possessed [...] a learned knowledge of Solon's life and writings." See also Chiasson 261: "Herodotus consciously and explicitly evokes the memory of Solon's verse. [...]. The conceptual affinities between them are sufficiently striking to suggest that

Herodotus knew Solon's poetry well and attempted, with remarkable historical conscientiousness, to incorporate its most prominent themes into the speeches he composed for the Athenian."

to be faithful to the historical figure, to create, as it were, a collage of Solonian thought.”<sup>39</sup>

However, the differences are equally meaningful, and inform us on the views that are distinctly Herodotean in Solon’s speech of Book I. Solon’s ironical insistence to Croesus that only death can secure happiness for mortals and the amoral principle found throughout the *Histories* that any exceeding human prosperity inevitably incurs ruin have no counterpart in the extant fragments. That world view suggests an unprincipled universe, which is not characteristic of Solonian but of Herodotean thinking.<sup>40</sup>

However, the views contained in Solon’s poetry can be a useful and more optimistic way to understand Herodotus. In some sense, rethinking parts of the *Histories* in light of a Solonian explanation can give a new cast to some narratives and makes Herodotus somewhat of a subtler moralist. For instance, from the point of view of Solon the poet, Croesus and Xerxes’ undertakings did not fail only because it was fated, or because of a divine *nemesis* incurred by the *phthonos* of the gods in front of outstanding wealth and power, but also because they were not wise men: they were unable to foresee the final outcome of their actions and undertakings, as well as to decipher the true meaning of oracles. Their ignorance – a limitation shared by all human beings except those gifted by wisdom – is the moral explanation for the reversal of their success. Perhaps the reason why excessively wealthy individuals and cities are often corrupted and fall in ruins – the reason why excessive prosperity is ominous – is in some sense explained by Solon’s wisdom and thus given a deeper meaning: great success tends to make people overconfident, and as a consequence they do not question themselves and take the time necessary to think concerning the possible outcomes, which makes them act foolishly. People take their present success for granted and do not beware of possible eventual threats to those goods, even more so if this success is outstanding. Wisdom – the ability to think, to question well – is the key to permanent success. The very ending lines of the histories are quite revealing:

“Go ahead and do this,” he said; “but if you do so, be prepared no longer to be rulers but rather subjects. Soft lands breed soft men; wondrous fruits of the earth and valiant warriors grow not from the same soil.” The Persians now realized that Cyrus reasoned better than they, and they departed, choosing rather to be rulers on a barren mountain side than dwelling in tilled valleys to be slaves to others.<sup>41</sup>

This is certainly no coincidence that Herodotus ends with these words. Cyrus is the wise man, capable of foreseeing the outcome. He lived at a time when Persia was not extraordinary in wealth and power. Xerxes ruled over the empire later, when it was great and luxurious, but overconfident, unwise, unable to understand the truth in the words of his adviser Artabanus, he undertook a thoughtless campaign and suffered the fate he deserved.

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39 Harrison 2000, 37.

40 Chiasson 1986, 249.

41 Hdt. 9.122.4.

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