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Published in Melammu Symposia 1:

Sanno Aro and R. M. Whiting (eds.),

The Heirs of Assyria.

Proceedings of the Opening Symposium of the Assyrian and Babylonian Intellectual Heritage Project. Held in Tvärminne, Finland, October 8-11, 1998 (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project 2000), pp. 65-83.

Publisher: <http://www.helsinki.fi/science/saa/>

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Herodotus and the Intellectual Heritage of the Ancient Near East

I. Introduction

When scholars of Ancient History look back for the possibility of interaction between the Ancient Near East and the awakening spirit of Ancient Greece and reckon with the possibility of a literarily stimulated influence from East to West, the view is generally directed to the Homeric Epics,¹ Greek mythology² or, of course, to the important opus of Hesiod.³ Sometimes other topics are treated such as the lyric poets,⁴ the Greek dramatists⁵ or the Homeric Hymns.⁶ In this respect Herodotus is usually out of scope for many reasons. The most important point is the traditional view of the genesis of the Histories and Herodotus' techniques of dealing with historical information. On that score the Halicarnassian happens to be regarded as working according to his principle of "legein ta legomena," a principle which is to a high degree responsible for his assessment as "Father of History."⁷ At first sight one might think this view a favourable precondition for taking into consideration literary influence. But this is not the case, or let us better say: this view only gives

access to one kind of literary transmission. In this way Herodotus truthfully *informs* us *about* oriental tradition which is especially characterised as being of an oral nature⁸ but he does not *transform* this tradition like Homer or Hesiod are expected to have done. Another cause for neglecting the Histories or other examples of non-archaic Greek literature may be the fact that the unique Greek spirit is considered to be completely developed in classical times which seems to make oriental influence inconceivable.

I would like to reexamine this conception. For this reason I will analyse two possible examples of ancient oriental heritage in the Histories which are not only "truthfully transmitted" but familiarized with the work. At the same time I will try to look for the methodological requirements which give us the potential to grasp oriental motifs in Greek disguise. My first example will take into consideration the Ancient Near East in its broader sense, the second one comes closer to the realm of Assyria itself.

¹ Oberhuber 1965. Oberhuber 1974. Burkert 1982. Burkert 1983a. Burkert 1991. Faraone 1987. Karavites 1992. Feldman 1996. Patzek 1996. Patzek 1996b. Rollinger 1996. M. L. West 1997, 334-437.

² Burkert 1981. Burkert 1984. Burkert 1987. Burkert 1992. Burkert 1994/95. Loucas 1988. Fauth 1990. S. West 1994. M. L. West 1997, 438-94.

³ Duchemin 1980. Bernabé 1989. M. L. West 1997, 276-333

⁴ M. L. West 1997, 495-543.

⁵ Duchemin 1980a. Auffarth 1994. M. L. West 1997, 544-87.

⁶ Bernabé 1988. Penglase 1994.

⁷ Cf., e.g., Myres 1953.

⁸ A very prominent example is the story of the birth and growing up of Cyrus the Great. Cf. Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1995, 50. See also the critical arguments of Erbse 1992, 182 n. 7 and Rollinger 1999a.

II. The story of the rich Pythios and his son

In Book VII.38-40, Herodotus tells an interesting story. It is set in the context of the beginning of Xerxes' great campaign against Greece in 480. The Persian king had passed the winter in Sardes and moved off with his army to the Hellespont in spring, when a solar eclipse occurred. This heavenly sign disturbs the king and he calls for his Μάγοι to give a correct interpretation of this incident. The Μάγοι interpret the ominous data in a positive way. So Xerxes is soothed and continues with his military campaign. In this situation the story of the very rich Lydian noble Pythios appears.⁹ He comes before Xerxes with a special request. Pythios was also worried about the heavenly sign. He has reason enough to be alarmed because all of his five sons are going to march with the Persian army to the West. Pythios expresses his demand very cautiously. He asks Xerxes to grant a wish of his heart. Xerxes agrees without knowing what Pythios desires. Only now does Pythios beg to relieve his eldest son from military service in order to take care of his father and his properties. Xerxes, who did not reckon with this kind of request, becomes very angry and inflicts an exceptionally cruel punishment on Pythios and his family:

(Xerxes:) "So now when thou art changed and grown impudent, thou shalt not receive all thy deserts, but less. For thyself and four of thy five sons, the entertainment which I had of thee shall gain protection; but as for him to whom thou clingest above the rest, the forfeit of his life shall be thy punishment." Having spoken, forthwith he commanded those to whom such tasks were assigned to seek out the eldest of the sons of Pythios, and having cut his body asunder, to place the two halves, one on the right, the other on the left, of the great road, so that the army might march out between them. Then the king's orders were obeyed; and the army marched out between the two halves of the carcass.¹⁰

The modern treatment of this story is very different. Usually the historicity of the narrative is not called into question. It is combined with a generally accepted view of Xerxes being the archetype of an oriental despot practicing oriental boundlessness.¹¹ More often the story is rationalised and understood as representing a kind of purificatory rite granting success for the following campaign.¹² Sometimes both interpretations are combined.¹³ Doubts about the historical character of the story are expressed very rarely and are articulated in a very cautious manner.¹⁴ But the story has a more far-reaching scope and it should be dis-

⁹ Cf. Aly 1921, 171f.

¹⁰ VII.39.2-40.1 following the translation of Rawlinson 1952, 223f. Compare also later versions of the story: Sen. De ira 3.16.4. Pliny NH 24.10.47. Plut. Mul. Virt. 262 D-263.

¹¹ Cf. e.g. Green 1996, 77 stating: "He (scil. Pythios) clearly had no idea just how orientally capricious a monarch Xerxes could be when crossed," and: "The King's wrath, like his gratitude tended to be both arbitrary and overwhelming."

¹² Legrand 1951, 82 n. 2: "Si Xerxès entrant en campagne passa entre les tronçons du corps d'une victime, d'une victime humaine, ce dut être en accomplissement d'un rite propriétaire destiné à accroître ses chances de succès."

¹³ Usher 1988, 30: "Pythios' eldest son was killed for

perhaps two reasons: to punish Pythios for his presumption and to provide a prize sacrificial victim at the start of the expedition." Cf. also Eitrem 1947, 41 with n. 1.

¹⁴ How and Wells 1936, 145: "Gobineau (Hist. des Perses, II. 195) remarks that it was a Persian custom to make those one wished to preserve from harm pass between two parts of a sacrificial animal (cf. Gen. XV. 10,17; Jer. XXXIV. 18,19); the more valuable the victim the greater the efficacy of the charm. Thus the slaughter of the son of Pythios might be a propitiatory sacrifice for the army. But the whole story has the look of a legend." See already Macon 1908, 59: "The form and expression of the whole story are essentially Greek, and the parallel in 4.84 (Dareios and Oiobazos) discounts it. Yet we may reasonably hesitate to dismiss the story of Pythios as a pure fabrication."

cussed in a wider historical context. For there are some similar reports from classical antiquity and one from the Ancient Near East showing striking parallels. Let us start with the most ancient one. In the Hittite texts originating from the archives of Hattuša-Boğazköy there exists a ritual for the Hittite army remembered for its parallels to the story of Herodotus. The course of this ritual is recorded in the following way:

If the troops are defeated by the enemy, they perform the far-side-of-the-river-ritual. On the far side of the river, they cut in half a person, a billy-goat, a puppy and a piglet. Half of each they place on this side and half on that side. In front they build a gate of hawthorn. Overtop they draw a rope. In front of this, on either side, they light a fire. The troops go through the middle. When they reach the river, they splash them with water. Afterwards they perform the ritual of the battlefield for them in the usual way.¹⁵

Looking for a possible influence concerning the motifs of the two stories we have to analyse the similarities according to some special criteria. If we want to make some kind of influence plausible we need a more complex structure than a simple motif. The motif has to be embedded in a superior structure that goes further than a vague resemblance. It has to form a pattern, a “Motivkette,” “segments de trame complexes,” also including the context and the people involved.¹⁶

The central motif in both texts is obvious. It is the killing and severing of a person. But this single motif is enlarged and a few other elements are attached to it. The person is not only severed in two parts but in each case “cut through in the middle” (μέσον διαταμεῖν versus *iš-tar-na ar-ḫa ku-ra-an-zi*). Both parts of the body are set up respec-

tively at opposite sites to form a kind of passage. (διαταμνόμενος δὲ τὰ ἡμίτομα διαθεῖναι τὸ μὲν ἐπὶ δεξιᾷ τῆς ὁδοῦ τὸ δ' ἐπ' ἄριστερά versus *ke-e-z* MAS^{HI.A} *ti-ia-an-zi ki-i-iz-zi-ia* MAS^{HI.A} *ti-an-zi*). Moreover both stories combine this passage with a ritual action (μετὰ ταῦτα διρξήει ὁ στρατός versus *nu-kán* ERÍN^{MES.HI.A} *iš-tar-na ar-ḫa pa-an-zi*). And finally in both cases the same group is involved: an army (στρατός versus ERÍN^{MES.HI.A}).

On the other hand there seem to be some differences we should not pass over. The Hittite ritual is presented in a more detailed way. In Herodotus we miss the triumphal arch made of hawthorn and the stretching of a rope. Equally, purification in the river is not mentioned and there is only a human sacrifice, whereas the Hittite ritual also refers to a billy-goat, a piglet and a puppy. However, these differences are not very serious. The Hittite text just offers an extended and specified version but no discrepancy. Both stories present in their kernel a pattern of motifs which is specific and complex enough to postulate a close relationship.

There is, though, one exception to this statement which is important for the interpretation. The occasion, the motive and the place of the action are completely different. The action described in the Hittite version clearly has the character of a ritual not just performed once. The whole plot is strictly standardized – bound to specific measures and instructions which guarantee success. This ritual character also becomes obvious in the fact that the action is combined with a special place. Finally the Hittite text bluntly states the reason for the ritual: “If the troops are defeated by the enemy” The interpretation and the context of the

¹⁵ KUB XVII 28 IV 45-56 = CTH 426.2 following the translation of Beal 1995, 74. The text was transliterated and translated by Kümmel 1967, 151f.

¹⁶ Warren and Wellek 1956, 258. Albright 1957, 67.

HAMPL 1987, 35f. Kullmann 1991, 426f. Tigay 1993. Bernabé 1995, 15f. See also Mondy 1990. Motte and Pirenne-Delforge 1994.

ritual *do not cause* problems. There exists a largely accepted *communis opinio* that the ritual is a “Durchschreitungszauber” which serves for the “Reinigung des durch eine Niederlage befleckten hethitischen Heeres.”¹⁷ In Herodotus the action is set in motion spontaneously. It is described as a single act of revenge and atrocity. The place seems arbitrary and the only recognizable motive is punishment of a subject by an autocratic despot. The story in the Histories has a personal character and looks like a novella. As previously hinted, the interpretation of the story is different and *does cause* considerable problems.

An analysis of the Herodotean story also has to include the parallels from other classical sources which have attracted more attention. In this respect some scholars have especially referred to rituals connected with the severing of animals.¹⁸ There principally severed dogs play an important part.¹⁹ Yet if this single motif is enlarged to a pattern composed of the elements “‘Durchschreitungszauber’-severing-army” the parallel examples diminish perceptibly. The remaining examples are set only in Macedonia.²⁰ They seem to consist of at least two different parts.²¹ Only the first one has a close relationship to the Hittite ritual and the Herodotean story. The texts suggest that the primary cause for this ritual lies in the demand for a *lustratio*, a purificatory rite

which should remove defilement.²² This means that the ritual has essentially a retrograde view and not a prophylactic one.²³ The second part to which our sources only refer incidentally, or even not at all, shows a kind of manoeuvre performed by two unarmed groups of the army. This ritual should perhaps guarantee success of a future campaign.²⁴

If all the cited examples are placed together one has to look first for the nature of their relationship to each other. We can deny a close relationship and argue for an independent genesis of each motif. Even a common Aryan origin can be discussed.²⁵

On the other hand, a more diffusionistic cross-cultural view can be proposed. In this case we reckon with a Near Eastern origin for the ritual which spread out to the west. But what role does the story of Pythios play in this connection?

Herodotus can be seen as an independent witness for a Persian purificatory rite transmitting a ritual similar to the Hittite one. The context is explained with the Hittite ritual in the background. The discrepancies are rather neglected and the ritual actions are regarded more or less the same. Herodotus is said to have handed down a kind of purificatory rite which Xerxes actually performed before leaving Sardes with his army. This interpretation has met with nearly unanimous approval.²⁶

¹⁷ Haas 1994, 899. Cf. also Masson 1950, 23f. Haas 1987-1990, 247. Collins 1990, 219f. Beal 1995, 74f. Wilhelm 1993-1997, 61.

¹⁸ Hellmann 1931. Eitrem 1947. Masson 1950. Collins 1990. Karavites 1992, 63f. Hatzopoulos 1994, 89f. Kienast 1996, 292. Lorenz 1999, chapter 10.2.3 “Magie in Griechenland: Fruchtbarkeits- und Abwehrzauber.”

¹⁹ Cf. generally Lonsdale 1979. Day 1988. Lorenz 1999, argues for an oriental origin of these rituals.

²⁰ Macedonia: Polyb. XXIII,10. Liv. XL,6. Curt. Ruf. X,9,12ff. Plut. Alex. 31. Arr. Succ. 1, 4 (FrgHist 156). Hesych. s. v. Ξονθίκα. The elements also figure in the dream of Sabacos as reported by Hdt. II.139 and Diod. I.65. Cf. S. West 1987, 262-67. In Apollodor III 173, what is less clearly a “Durchschreitungszauber” is re-

corded: Peleus conquers Iolcus, has the slanderous queen Astydameia chopped up and marches with his army across the pieces.

²¹ Hatzopoulos 1994, 90.

²² Hellmann 1931, 202. Granier 1931, 22. Hatzopoulos 1994, 90. See also Eisenhut 1969.

²³ For a different view stressing the prophylactic aspect cf. Nilsson 1906, 405f. R. Parker 1983, 22. See also Pritchett 1979, 196-202.

²⁴ Granier 1931, 23: “Zauber für erhofftes Kriegsglück”. Nilsson 1906, 403f.

²⁵ Eitrem 1947, 41 n. 1. Hatzopoulos 1994, 90. See also Masson 1950, 24f.

²⁶ Cf. Eitrem 1947, 41 with n. 1. Collins 1990, 224. Faraone 1993, 71 n. 45. Karavites 1992, 63f. Kienast

Contrary to this view one can give more weight to the discrepancies between the rituals described and the story of Herodotus. The connections are only seen on a literary level. Herodotus (or his source) did have knowledge of a ritual similar to the Hittite one. But he did not understand it and formed something completely new with the material he had at hand. In this case the Histories testify to a literary motif adapted from a ritual, and the story shows the Herodotean hand. This possibility is far less often taken into account. As a rule it is only indicated as a possibility and the consequences for Herodotus, his working methods and the – now disputable – historicity of Xerxes' punishment are not discussed.²⁷

Which explanation should be preferred?

I admit that the answer to this question is very difficult and depends to a high degree on the general idea one has of a lot of different topics such as the very question of oriental influence on the occident as well as the nature and extent of this influence, the working methods of Herodotus, and so on. Some of these questions are heavily disputed. It is clear that it can never be excluded that Herodotus and the Hittite ritual do not belong to a common context or that the Persian army really performed a purificatory rite at the beginning of its campaign.

But on the other hand we can adduce some arguments for the opposite solution. First the story of Pythios and his son shows some features that Hartmut Erbse called "herodoteische Gestaltungskraft."²⁸ Erbse could prove that many elements of the picture of the despotic king Xerxes are of Herodotean origin.²⁹ Many other scholars have already pointed to this fact.³⁰ So the alleged tyrannic character of the Achaemenid³¹ should be put into question. The story presents Xerxes as evil-doer par excellence. It is set in motion with a very characteristic element in the Herodotean opus. In the Histories heavenly signs cause historical actions in many cases.³² Whoever neglects these signs or is not able to interpret them in the right way is condemned to fail, either as a tragic figure or as an evil-doer.³³ Xerxes and his Μόγχοι do not understand the sign correctly.³⁴ They are too blind to see the warning. Pythios does and his son is executed cruelly. The punishment as described by Herodotus has only one additional element the Hittite ritual does not mention. It is emphatically stressed that the victim is male and the eldest son of a family. Thus the wickedness of Xerxes is underscored in many ways.³⁵ We should also note the fact that Xerxes has already agreed to fulfill Pythios' wish. He is presented as a man who does not keep his word. So the campaign against Greece starts with a despotic act violating normally accepted moral or religious principles, a misinterpretation of a

1996, 292f.

²⁷ Beal 1995, 75 n. 38.

²⁸ Erbse 1992.

²⁹ Erbse 1992, 74, 78f. 86f.

³⁰ Bichler 1984, 13. Walser 1984, 49f. Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1989. Nielsen 1997, 67-77.

³¹ Cf. e. g. Hinz 1967, 2099, 2101. Hinz 1976, 7, 17. Mayrhofer, 1970, 161.

³² Kirchberg 1965.

³³ Nicolai 1986.

³⁴ Note that this eclipse does not accord with the calculations of modern astronomers. Cf. How and Wells 1936,

144f. Pritchett 1979, 109. Mosshammer 1981, 153. Wenskus 1990, 59f. Reinhardt ³1983, 359: "Um das Datum haben unsere Chronologen sich umsonst bemüht, die Finsternis hat ihren Ort in der Novelle". S. West 1987, 265 n. 17 stresses the contrast to Hdt. I.74, where "Lydians and Medes are moved to make peace as a result of an eclipse."

³⁵ Note also the contrast to the reaction of the pious Nubian king Sabacos who prefers giving up his rule over Egypt rather than committing an act like Xerxes did (Hdt. II.139).

heavenly sign – and the audience of the Histories knows what it means.

But there is a further element in the story which might show the Herodotean genius. It is not isolated in the novella itself but has – as the general disposition of Xerxes – reference to the arrangement of the whole work. There exists general agreement that Herodotus connects the rise and fall of the Persian empire with the character of the ruling kings. This conception includes an opposition of the character and the behaviour of Darius and Xerxes.³⁶ With Darius the empire has reached its climax. With Xerxes stagnation starts. This opposition is indirectly indicated in our story in two ways. Pythios does not appear in the novella for the first time. He is already introduced in an earlier episode as a proven friend of the Persian king when he entertained Xerxes and the whole army hospitably and provided the king of his own free will with money for the campaign against Greece. It is also related that he once acted the same way towards Darius when he made the precious present of a plane tree and a vine in gold (VII.27-29).³⁷ The reader might be reminded of this golden tree when Xerxes plants a similar one before his campaign

(VII.31). On the other hand, at the beginning of Darius' Scythian campaign there is found a story very similar to our novella (IV.84). The Persian Oibazos asks Darius to release one of his three sons from joining the expedition. Darius has all three sons stay at home, but they are executed. The two stories clearly relate to each other.³⁸ In my opinion Herodotus wanted to show the increase of hubris under the rule of Xerxes. For in this case the number of the killed is not of the same weight as the violation of divine laws, such as ignoring heavenly signs and breaking one's word.³⁹

So the story has many elements common to the Histories as a whole which might be regarded as of Herodotean origin.⁴⁰ If this is the case we are at least entitled to ask whether Herodotus did not have information about a ritual similar to the Hittite one and whether he did not form something completely new which was exactly fitted to the spirit of his work. If we want to reach safer ground for this question we have only one possibility: to look for other rituals or actions with a probable oriental background to which the Halicarnassean gave a new shape in his work.⁴¹

III. Ascalon and the Scythian invasion in Asia

In Book I. 103-106 Herodotus describes the emergence of the Scythians in the Ancient Near East. After having beaten the Medes

under their king Cyaxares, there follows a period of 28 years which Herodotus sketches as Scythian domination all over Asia.⁴²

³⁶ Rollinger 1998a. Rollinger 1999e.

³⁷ Cf. Balcer 1984, 202, 220.

³⁸ Reinhardt ³1983, 358f. Bornitz 1967, 127f. See also Pritchett 1979, 200 n. 150.

³⁹ Cf. Kienast 1996, 293 n. 23 who argued the other way.

⁴⁰ Note that there are also other examples in the Histories showing the connection between the killing of children and a martial event in the background: I.73 (The Scythians prepare for king Cyaxares a 'meal of Atreus'), I.86 (Croesus and 2 times 7 Lydian youngsters shall be burnt on the pyre). I.119 (King Astyages prepares for Harpagos

a 'meal of Atreus'). II.107 (Two sons of king Sesostris are burnt to save the father's life). III.11 (Greek and Carian mercenaries fighting for Egypt slaughter the sons of the traitor Phanes before the battle of Pelusion). III.147 (Otanes has native children killed at Samos). VII.107 (Boges kills his own children and commits suicide). VII.114 (Xerxes has native boys and girls be buried alive at Ἐννέα ὄδοι). Cf. Rollinger 1999c.

⁴¹ Cf. Tigay 1993. Bernabé 1995, 17f.

⁴² For the chronological system of Herodotus concerning the Ancient Near East cf. Burkert 1995. Ivantchik 1993,

Apart from characterizing their rule as insolent he does not relate anything about this period with one single exception. The Scythians try to conquer Egypt. In Palestine the Egyptian king Psammetich comes to them and with gifts and entreaties he induces them to retire.⁴³ Not until now does the central occurrence of the raid come to pass:

On their return, passing through Ascalon, a city of Syria, the greater part of them went their way without doing any damage; but some few who lagged behind pillaged the temple of Celestial Venus (Aphrodite Urania). I have inquired and find that the temple at Ascalon is the most ancient of all the temples of this goddess; for the one in Cyprus, as the Cyprians themselves admit, was built in imitation of it; and that in Cythèra was erected by the Phœnicians, who belong to this part of Syria. The Scythians who plundered the temple were punished by the goddess with the female sickness, which still attaches to their posterity. They themselves confess that they are afflicted with the disease for this reason, and travellers who visit Scythia can see what sort of a disease it is. Those who suffer from it are called Enarees.⁴⁴

In contrast to the story of Pythius, the historicity of Scythian domination in Asia and their raid to the borders of Egypt has more often been doubted.⁴⁵ The reason for this rejection is obvious. Apart from two possible references in the biblical book of

Jeremiah,⁴⁶ no oriental source mentions a Scythian campaign to Palestine or even a Scythian domination over Syria. Most often the problem is simply transferred to a local source which Herodotus could have followed. The question of whether there could be a special reason for Herodotus to connect the Scythians with the sanctuary of Ascalon is hardly posed.⁴⁷ So we should look for the components of the story and try to analyse what Herodotus might have done with them. I want to direct attention to one element of the tale which seems to be immune from reckoning with an oriental origin: the Enarees and their θήλεα νοῦσος. These Enarees figure a second time in the “Scythian logos” of the Histories.⁴⁸ There they are called ἀνδρόγυνοι acting as fortune-tellers (IV.67.2). In a broader context we are informed about these persons in the Pseudo-Hippocratic treatise ΠΕΡΙ ΑΕΡΩΝ ΥΔΑΤΩΝ ΤΟΠΩΝ chapter 22,⁴⁹ where they are called Anarieis, which is generally agreed to represent the same word as Enarees.⁵⁰ Their characteristic features are doing women’s work, wearing women’s clothes and speaking like women. That is why they are called εὐνουχία. They enjoy great esteem and it seems that especially noble and rich Scythians are engaged in such a position. The author gives two different reasons for this phenomenon. The first one is a vague and

108ff. V. Parker 1995. Bichler 1999, chapters “Von der mythischen Zeit zum Einfall der Kimmerier und Skythen” and “Die skythische Herrschaft über Asien”. See also Bichler and Rollinger 1999.

⁴³ What Burkert 1998, 184 with n. 133 (p. 254), paraphrased “do ut abeas”.

⁴⁴ I.105.2-4 following the translation of Rawlinson 1952, 25.

⁴⁵ Cf. e. g. V. Parker 1995, 27: “Die Absurdität einer drei Jahrzehnte währenden Herrschaft der Skythen über Vorderasien während der Glanzzeit des assyrischen Reiches unter Aššurbanipal liegt auf der Hand”.

⁴⁶ Jeremiah 6, 22-23; 47, 2-3. The Scythians do not figure there explicitly but as an anonymous enemy coming from the north armed with bows riding on horses and equipped with chariots! V. Parker 1995, 27 n. 81, also

adduces Jeremiah 47, 4-7 and Zephaniah 2,4-7 but these lines describe in an apocalyptic vision the showdown with the Philistines. In this context Philistine cities are also mentioned but Ascalon is only one of them and is not presented at “prominenter Stelle” as Parker states.

⁴⁷ Asheri 1988, 332. V. Parker 1995, 27f. Köckert 1997. Burkert 1998, 141.

⁴⁸ For the “Scythian logos” cf. generally Hartog 1988. Sieberer 1995, 161-213.

⁴⁹ Cf. Jouanna 1996. Diller 1970, 72-77. Ballabriga 1986. See also Arist. EN 1150b 14.

⁵⁰ Cf. Meuli 1935, 131, referring to a possible etymology: “Es is eine adjektivische Bildung von zend. skr. *nar, nara* ‘homo’ mit dem privativem *a*, die ‘Unmännlichen’ also.” But cf. also S. West 1999, 83 n. 37 pointing to the possibility of a “Greek Volksetymologie”.

popular one and looks like it has an indigenous origin. In this case an anonymous deity is held responsible for the transformation. The author denies this explanation and presents a second version. The Anarieis are said to have performed riding excessively and to have lost their procreative capacity. This rationalizing explanation obviously has a Greek background and can be disregarded in analysing the institution of the Enarees/Anarieis. Also, the opinion that the Anareis are being punished for their state's actions is secondary. Although this might express the author's view, it does not fit very well with his statement that Anarieis are especially wealthy people.

Even if we do not share the opinion of Karl Meuli and many other scholars, that these Anarieis/Enarees represent shamans⁵¹ it seems certain that these people performed some kind of transvestism in ritual context.⁵² So we have to reckon with this phe-

nomenon in Scythia at the time of Herodotus and that the learned Greek world had knowledge of this institution. But what does this idea have to do with the Ancient Near East? Let me say nothing at all,⁵³ and yet in the work of Herodotus, probably a lot.

Let us first have a look at the literary motif structure. As compared to the Hippocratic treatise the Herodotean one is enlarged. It represents three constituent elements: sex reversal, punishment (divine wrath)⁵⁴ and Aphrodite Urania. Only the first one has its clear parallel in the Hippocratic text. The second is at least indicated there. The third is lacking totally.⁵⁵

It might be interesting to note that we can show exactly these three elements in an oriental context. There exist some noteworthy rituals connected with the Mesopotamian goddess Ištar for whom Aphrodite Urania can easily be understood as representing an *interpretatio Graeca*.⁵⁶ From the

⁵¹ Meuli 1935, 127-53. Lorenz 1990, 198. Corcella 1993, 287. Margreth 1993. Burkert 1998, 245 n. 54.

⁵² Cf. Dowden 1980, 486-90, and the ample critique by Zhmud 1997, 107-16. This criticism is doubtless qualified. But the explanation Zhmud 1997, 113, himself gives is certainly also incorrect. He seems to think that θήλεα νοῦσος does not represent merely transvestism but real castration and argues for the existence of Scythian eunuchs. Zhmud refers to Herodotus I.105 and interprets the story as an historical event:

In die richtige Richtung führt uns wohl der Hinweis Herodots in I,105. Die Enareer haben der Göttin Aphrodite gedient, deren Kult die Skythen nach ihren eigenen Worten aus der syrischen Stadt Askalon übernommen haben. In dieser Aphrodite ist leicht die Göttin Ishtar zu erkennen, deren Kult von Eunuchen besorgt wurde.

But the historicity of this invasion is very dubious. And whether the cultic personnel of Ištar were eunuchs is founded on very slight evidence and is at least as doubtful as the existence of Scythian shamans. See below n. 62. Moreover Zhmud overlooks the fact that Herodotus I.105.4 mentions descendants (ἐκγονοί) of the Scythian Enarees (See also Meuli 1935, 129). Dowden 1980, 489, already expressed this view: "Et il n'y a aucune raison que les Scythes pendant leurs 28 années de domination de l'Asie n'aient pas emprunté ce petit trait – après tout, la présence de deux sortes de prophètes à fonction similaire parmi eux pourrait bien signifier que l'un était un nouveau venu." But contrary to Zhmud he did not define

the Enarees as eunuchs but as "travestis." For defining the Enarees as "Transsexuelle" see already Hampl 1979, 250, also arguing against the view that the Scythians were in reality suffering from a (hereditary) disease. For this view cf. Lieber 1996 who believes that "the ancient accounts present a true-to-life picture of an endemic form of a hereditary disease now known as haemochromatosis."

⁵³ As defined by Dowden 1980, 489 and Zhmud 1997, 113. See the preceding note.

⁵⁴ Cf. M. L. West 1997, 124-28.

⁵⁵ The Aphrodite mentioned in IV.67.2 has nothing to do with the genesis of the bisexuality of the Enarees. Besides, it is not without problems to explain the connection between Aphrodite and the science of μαντική – a pretty unusual trait of the goddess – to which Herodotus is referring here. Cf. Corcella 1993, 287. Pirenne-Delforge 1994 does not treat this passage. It is probable that Aphrodite was only installed in this position to create a loose connection to I.105. Cf. below.

⁵⁶ Pirenne-Delforge 1994, 437f. Bonnet 1996, 89f. But note that the explicit equations are testified to in later times. Cf. Burkert 1992, 20. Graf 1994, 118, 122. Wyatt 1994, 208. Haider, Hutter and Kreuzer 1996, 146, 153, 155. Ctesias (FGrHist 688, 1b.2) = Diod. II.4.2-5 testifies to the cult of the goddess Derceto in Ascalon, which is the apocopated form of Atargatis. Cf. Drijver 1995, 213. But see also Barstad 1995, 1687. Derceto is presented as the mother of Semiramis so there also existed a close connection to Mesopotamia. Cf. also

early Old-Babylonian period continuing to the late first millennium BC of Seleucid Mesopotamia there is evidence that the goddess Inanna-Ištar had the power of changing sex. Brigitte Groneberg has collected the relevant sources on this topic.⁵⁷ The extant material suggests that in ritual ceremonies women and men participating were changing roles. The rituals included exchange of clothes and attributes.⁵⁸ In a passage of the canonic Balaḡ-composition ÚRU ĀM-MA-IR-RA-BI originating from the library of Ashurbanipal this idea is also documented:

She (Ištar) changes the right side into the left side,
she changes the left side into the right side,
she turns a man into a woman,
she turns a woman into a man,
she adorns a man as a woman,
she adorns a woman as a man⁵⁹

On the other side there is a kind of spe-

cialised cult personnel called in Akkadian *assinū* and *kurgarrū* who seem to have not changed roles just for a certain occasion but for an even longer period of time.⁶⁰ They dressed in a feminine way with a special hairstyle. They performed ecstatic rituals and mimic spectacles and spoke in a special way. Their behaviour comes very close to that of transvestites playing their roles even in real life.⁶¹ We do not know if a real (i.e., physical) change of sex was also effected⁶² but at least in one group of texts the power of the goddess Ištar effecting this kind of transformation is well attested.⁶³

Up to now we could only prove with certainty a pair of motifs consisting of Ištar and a ritual of changing the clothes. We have missed a definite indication of changing sex connected with this goddess and the motif of punishment. However all these characteristic elements are attested well in

Asheri 1988, 332. Note that Hdt. I.131,199 equates Aphrodite with Μόλυττα, which is the Assyrian goddess Mullissu, spouse of Aššur. See below n. 97.

⁵⁷ Groneberg 1986. Cf. generally Abusch 1994.

⁵⁸ Cf. now Groneberg 1997, XIII, XVI, 134, 136, 140-42, 150, and 26f the text "Ištar-Louvre" Col. II, 1-20. See also Groneberg 1997a and Groneberg 1997b.

⁵⁹ Tablet 20, 65-70 following the translation of Sjöberg 1975, 225. The brackets are omitted according to the text edition of Volk 1989, 143f.

⁶⁰ Like the Enarees/Anarieis, the *assinū* and *kurgarrū* have in recent years been interpreted as shamans. Cf. Maul 1992, 163. Groneberg 1997, 153. Groneberg 1997b. Even if there are strong similarities the criteria given for the definition of shamanism by Zhmud 1997, 107-16 show the problems connected with this terminology. So there are some important features apart from chronological and geographical aspects the *assinū* and *kurgarrū* do not share with Siberian shamans. Concerning the social esteem for the *assinū* and *kurgarrū* there seem to exist some considerable differences. So the first one could also reap mockery and derision. Cf. Edzard 1987. Lambert 1992, 148-153 believes that at least some of the *assinū* and *kurgarrū* were prostitutes, lived in "slummy conditions and were despised". See also Maul 1992, 162f, Malul 1992, 51-56, 64-67 and Nissinen 1998, 33f. If this is true this aspect would distinguish them considerably from shamans. Note further that shamans never form a "caste" like the *assinū* and *kurgarrū* do (Zhmud 1997, 113). But contrary to the views cited above, the *assinū* and *kurgarrū* have also been seen as some kind of 'saints.' Cf. Parpola 1997, 56 who described the cult of Ištar as

... an esoteric mystery religion whose devotees strove for eternal life by following the path of salvation set by the goddess. Asceticism, meditation, self-mortification and even self-castration were conspicuous features of this cult, whose ideal was an androgynous saint transcending all passions of the flesh and whose goal was union with god during this lifetime ... As in the myth of Ištar's descent, salvation and eternal life was not for everybody. Only the precious few who attained the required spiritual perfection were allowed through the narrow gate of heaven.

⁶¹ Groneberg 1986, 35f. Groneberg 1986b. Groneberg 1997, 152. Cf. generally Henshaw 1994, 284-311. Leick 1994, 157-69. Roscoe 1996, 213-17. Nissinen 1998, 28-35. For their capability of transgressing the limits between the world of the living and the dead, their awful "aura" and their function in expelling demons of illness, cf. Maul 1992. See also Malul 1992, 67.

⁶² Cf. the sceptical view of Sjöberg 1975, 226 and Volk 1989, 182. Lambert 1992, 148-53, believes that the *assinū* were eunuchs. Similarly Parpola 1997, 55: "androgynous, sexless creature." Malul 1992, 55 speaks about "people with clear sexual deficiencies and preferences." Roscoe 1996, 220-30, and Nissinen 1998, 31, 35, stress the importance of the category of a "third gender." For eunuchs at the Assyrian court see Grayson 1995.

⁶³ Note that there seems to be evidence that some of the *assinū* and *kurgarrū* are not only attested to have families but also to simulate the act of giving birth. Maul 1992, 168 n. 38. Lambert 1992, 151. Herodotus I.105.4 mentions that the Enarees also had offspring.

the curse formulas of Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions and treaties.

In an inscription, Esarhaddon threatens anybody who would try to destroy his monument with the following words: “May Ištar, mistress of combat and battle, turn him from a man into a woman.”⁶⁴

Similar examples are already attested in the time of Tukulti-Ninurta I. They also appear in the inscriptions of Ashurbanipal.⁶⁵ As the rituals connected with Ištar show,⁶⁶ the procedure of breaking the bow and the comparison with a spindle⁶⁷ can also be interpreted as losing virility.⁶⁸ Both elements are also depicted in relief either as an act of punishment⁶⁹ or as an attribute of womanhood.⁷⁰

But these ideas are not confined to Mesopotamia proper. At least with the expansion of the Neo-Assyrian empire, these conceptions spread to Syria in the west. In this respect the treaty between the Assyrian king Aššur-nerari V (754-745) and Mati'-ilu, king of Arpad includes an outstanding curse:

If Mati'-ilu sins against this treaty with Aššur-nerari, king of Assyria, may Mati'-ilu become a prostitute (^{mi}*harimtu*), his soldiers (LÚ*.ERIM.[MEŠ]), women (MÍ.MEŠ), may they receive [a gift] in the square of their cities like any prostitute (^{mi}*harimtu*), may one country push them to the next; may Mati'-ilu's (sex) life be that of a mule, his wives ex-

tremely old; may Ištar, the goddess of men, the lady of women, take away their bow, bring them to shame, and make them bitterly weep: ‘Woe, we have sinned against the treaty of of Aššur-nerari, king of Assyria’.⁷¹

The curse has exactly the same complex of motifs we find in the story of Herodotus: Ištar-punishment-changing of sex. And it is even enlarged for one element the Histories also present. In both texts it is a group of soldiers being punished.⁷² So in each case we have a complex structure of four coherent motifs! Can this be mere chance?

We can suggest that the curse refers to conceptions both parties are familiar with. Only this way is its effectiveness guaranteed. In a treaty of Esarhaddon with Baal, king of Tyre the curse invokes Ištar in her Syrian manifestation as Astarte to break the bow of the enemy.⁷³ So we can postulate that ideas connecting Ištar-Astarte with a potency of changing sex were common in Syria at least since the 8th century BC. Even if we cannot prove the existence of a similar cult in that region for this early time,⁷⁴ a later reference to a similar cultic procedure in an adjacent territory might be a clue that it also existed in Syria itself, which might have had the function of a missing link between east and west. Apart from Herodotus at least Philochoros (FGrHist 328) testifies to a cult of “Venus barbata”⁷⁵ in Cy-

⁶⁴ Borger 1956, 99 (line 55-56).

⁶⁵ Cf. CAD S 286, s. v. *sinnišāniš*. See also Groneberg 1986, 40.

⁶⁶ Groneberg 1997, 26: “Ištar-Louvre” Col. II, 6: “*sinništum kī zikri šaknat ušpatam tukiāl qašta*.” Col. II 18: “*ukiālū* (scil. *assinū*) *pilakki*.”

⁶⁷ Parpola and Watanabe 1988, 56 (line 616A-617). Ištar is not mentioned here by name but probably connected with the scene. Cf. Groneberg 1986, 40. Groneberg 1986b, 189f. Groneberg 1997, 126. Malul 1992, 51-56.

⁶⁸ Ištar or Astarte breaking the bow: Parpola and Watanabe 1988, 22f (lines 20'-21'); 27 (lines IV 18'-19'); 48 (lines 453-54); other deities: l.c., 53 (lines 573-75).

⁶⁹ Parpola and Watanabe 1988, 48 fig. 15.

⁷⁰ Cf. e.g. Rollinger 1996, 209 Abb. 2.

⁷¹ V 8-15, following the translation of Parpola and Watanabe 1988, 12.

⁷² It might be noteworthy that there exists a Neo-Assyrian ritual where the *assinū* and *kurgarū* together with the king are engaged in beating an enemy symbolically. Cf. Menzel 1981, Vol. 2, T82-T89.

⁷³ Parpola and Watanabe 1988, 27 (line V 18'). A similar idea seems already to be intended in David's curse to Joab (2 Sam 3:29) where the expression “one who holds the spindle” designates a person's status as being effeminate. Cf. Malul 1992.

⁷⁴ Wyatt 1995, 211f.

⁷⁵ In a hymn of Ashurbanipal to Ištar of Nineveh, the goddess is praised as wearing a beard (*ziqni zaqnat*). Cf. Livingstone 1989, 18, Nr. 7, line 6.

prus with men and women also changing clothes.⁷⁶

I would like to ask if Herodotus had knowledge about the transvestism in the cult of a feminine Ištar-Astarte-goddess in Syria (and possible Cyprus) and her capacity of changing sex, and the use of this power in the context of a punishing curse? He certainly knew about a similar institution in Scythia and it probably was this similarity that gave him the idea about a connection where in reality none existed. Let us remember that the Herodotean story of the Scythian invasion in Asia lacks, with a high degree of probability, historical truth, and that the campaign to the borders of Egypt and the following occurrence in Ascalon is the only noteworthy event Herodotus tells us about this alleged period of

Scythian domination.⁷⁷ So I would propose that this invasion is a simple construction. It may have used a local oriental Syrian tradition surviving in Jeremiah 6:22f, 47:2f, which dealt with an anonymous foe assaulting from the north.⁷⁸ As the story of the raid of Sennacherib to the borders of Egypt shows (II.141)⁷⁹ Herodotus might have had access to such a tradition of “Levantine storytelling.”⁸⁰ He formed a new story with an aetiological function and a “historical setting”⁸¹ inserting the “Nordvolk” pure and simple, the Scythians, as invaders and explaining a Scythian phenomenon by an oriental origin.⁸² That is the reason why a prominent Syrian city figured as the pivotal point in the story.⁸³

I do not believe that Herodotus had access to original Assyrian, Babylonian or

⁷⁶ F 184. Cf. Farnell 1971, 628, 755, Pirenne-Delforge 1994, 68, 324, 350f and the commentary of Jacoby 1954, 552f. See also generally Drijvers 1995, 214f. Graf 1995, 122. Rudhardt 1992. There are also other cults with rituals involving changing sex but not connected with a goddess like Ištar-Astarte-Aphrodite-Venus. There might be the possibility that the Karkamišean Kubaba had such a power but the textual evidence is quite uncertain. Cf. Hawkins 1981, 173, 29 a, ii and 29 b i with commentary [I would like to thank Claudia Posani, Padua for drawing my attention on this text]. In any case the behaviour of the galli, the cultic personnel of the goddess Cybele comes very close to that of the *assinū* and *kurgarū*. Cf. Sanders 1972 and Lane 1996. Nissinen 1998, 32, holds that a historical connection between these groups is “easily imaginable” whereas Roscoe 1996, 197, 219 argues for “largely independent inventions.” Burkert 1979, 110 proposes a Sumero-Akkadian etymology for the galli, connecting them with the *gal₃-lá* (Sum.), *gallū* (Akk.), a Mesopotamian demon. However, it seems more probable to think about a relation to another class of effeminate priests called *gala* (Sum.), *kalū* (Akk.). Cf. generally Schretter 1990, 124-136. Plutarch (Quaest. Graec. 58) knows of a priest of Heracles at Antimacheia on the island of Kos wearing a woman’s garb and fastening upon his head a woman’s head-dress before he begins his sacrifice. Cf. Loraux 1985, 187f. For the *Hybristika* in Argos see Pirenne-Delforge 1994, 156f, 453f. But these examples lack the threefold motif-complex Ištar-punishment-changing of sex, so they have to be excluded here.

⁷⁷ Cf. Dowden 1980, 489: “Enfin, il semble que les Enareës n’aient été remarquables que pour une chose - leur travestissement.”

⁷⁸ The possible constituent elements of the story are dealt with by Koch 1993. Originating from Ugaritic

mythology some biblical texts show a “šafôn-Motiv samt den damit verbundenen Elementen eines übernationalen göttlichen Herrschaftssitzes und der Abwehr eines mythisch-anonymen feindlichen Ansturmes aus dem nord-syrischen Bereich” (l.c., 176). This motif even spreads farther to the south and a *Kάσσιον ὄρος* is located around the mid first century BC in the east of the Egyptian delta (Hdt. III.5). Cf. l. c. 181, 213-17. Note that Hdt. III.5 also connects the monster Typhon with this location. Manilius (Astr. 4.579-82) relates that Typhon pursued the goddess of Cythéra who Hdt. I.105 identifies with Aphrodite of Ascalon. See Pirenne-Delforge 1994, 217-20.

⁷⁹ S. West 1987, 267-71. Cf. now generally for the campaign of Sennacherib to Palestine, Frahm 1997. Loretz 1996.

⁸⁰ S. West 1987, 262. The relationships between Herodotus and some parts of the Old Testament have been stressed in recent studies. But there is no consensus about the crucial question who was influencing whom. Compare the different views expressed by Mandell and Freedman 1993 and Nielsen 1997.

⁸¹ The principle seems the same as the one S. West 1987 showed in Herodotus’ forming the tale of the rodents and Sennacherib’s attack on Egypt (II.141). Cf. l.c. 271: “A story which properly belongs to the timeless context of cult has been given a historical setting.”

⁸² For the popularity of the thesis *ex oriente lux* in Herodotus cf. Zhmud 1997, 59.

⁸³ In this case the hellenistic foundation of Scythopolis (Beth Shean) must not be understood as a memory of a Scythian settlement in the past (more than 300 years ago!) – cf. Asheri 1988, 332 – but rather as a tribute to a good and well-known story. Note that Herodotus I.105.4 mentioning the offspring of the Enarees might almost have caused such a speculation.

Hittite documents.⁸⁴ I do not believe even that his knowledge of Mesopotamian history and customs is very good. And least of all I cannot believe that for this fact only the “oriental dragomans” should be held responsible. Rather, I think that the stories cited above belong to a kind of literary “gene pool” in the Near East.⁸⁵ Its existence was based on the close relationships of the smaller and bigger states in the first millennium BC. The Greeks won more and more access to this area where trade and the travels of mercenary troops played an important role.⁸⁶ It is important to note that the two examples cited do not represent conceptions limited to a social élite. They belong to the sphere of magic and religious ideas which together with popular tale patterns were pervasive.⁸⁷ Billie Jean Collins stressed that the Hittite severing rituals were part of the popular religion, “performed for the army of the common people, never, it seems, for the royal family.”⁸⁸ Stefan Maul and Brigitte Groneberg emphasized the role of transvestism in the cult of Ištar and its function in official feasts and rituals.⁸⁹

So we are dealing with far-reaching ideas that Herodotus might have got in contact with. Since Otto Regenbogen a great number of scholars have stressed Herodotus’ ability to work with the information he collected.⁹⁰ Hartmut Erbse has clearly expressed what the Herodotean genius, the

“Herodoteische Gestaltungskraft” as he calls it, means for the genesis of the work.⁹¹ And Justus Cobet has shown that Herodotus is more than a prototype of a modern historian but that his work almost stands between poetry and scientific prose.⁹² In this respect the confrontation between the “liar school” Herodotus and the more traditional view of the “truthful historian” Herodotus shows two wrong possibilities. Herodotus is neither historian nor liar in the modern sense. He has gathered information of different quality and he has worked it up to a fascinating opus which is his own product. Information from the Ancient Near East does play an important role in this work but it appears in Herodotean disguise and the modern historian should use it carefully.⁹³ Herodotus is impressed by oriental technical knowledge (II.109),⁹⁴ the ability to dig canals, and he has some knowledge about the size of the metropolis Babylon and the building material used.⁹⁵ He has heard about special ships on the Euphrates⁹⁶ and knows the correct Assyrian name of the goddess Ninlil(tu), Mulissu.⁹⁷ Oriental dream oracles seem to have left their mark in his work.⁹⁸ He is well informed about the names of early rulers in Media, Scythia and Persia and his knowledge gets better the closer the events come to his own time.⁹⁹ Relating the circumstances of the accession of Darius he even seems to have had access to official records.¹⁰⁰ But all of this information is

⁸⁴ Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1994, 52-54 even maintained that Herodotus used Babylonian chronographic literature. For the “Assyrioi Logoi” cf. Zawadzki 1984. See also S. West 1987, 267 n. 28.

⁸⁵ Griffiths 1987, 42.

⁸⁶ Brinkman 1988. Ehrhardt 1990. Röllig 1992. Haider 1996. Rollinger 1996, 202-210. Mayer 1996, 470-473. Waldbaum 1997. Erath 1997. Rollinger 1999d.

⁸⁷ Note that the most sources Groneberg 1986 adduces originate from the first millennium.

⁸⁸ Collins 1990, 219.

⁸⁹ Maul 1992. Groneberg 1997. Groneberg 1997b.

⁹⁰ Regenbogen 1930.

⁹¹ Erbse 1992.

⁹² Cobet 1971.

⁹³ This has often been misunderstood. Cf. e. g. Dalley 1998, 109f. Nobody denies that Herodotus’ work contains “authentic Mesopotamian material”. But this does not automatically mean that his stories simply reflect history nor that he actually visited the sites he is talking about.

⁹⁴ Wenskus 1990, 71.

⁹⁵ Rollinger 1993, 183f.

⁹⁶ Fales 1993, 86-88.

⁹⁷ Dalley 1979. Parpola 1980, 177f n. 21. Stol 1994.

⁹⁸ Bichler 1985.

⁹⁹ Rollinger 1999b.

¹⁰⁰ Rollinger 1998b.

packed up in an Herodotean context.¹⁰¹

As with any time when we deal with the problem of literary parallels it is hardly possible to have absolute confidence in proposing a relationship between one and another.¹⁰² I have tried to reach a high degree of confidence in arguing with the complexity of motif structures and the existence

of what Jeffrey Tigay called “circumstantial evidence.”¹⁰³ Moreover if we consider an important factor the number of parallels from the same source found in the same author we should at least reckon with this probability not only for Homer and Hesiod but also for Herodotus.

¹⁰¹ Köhnken 1980. Köhnken 1990.

¹⁰² Bernabé 1995, 19.

¹⁰³ Tigay 1993.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- DDD K. van der Toorn, B. Becking and P. W. van der Horst (Eds.), *Dictionary of deities and demons in the bible*. Leiden - New York - Köln 1995.