

Divorce Tyranny or Disown Athens:
A Reading of Chilon's Advice in Herodotus 1.59.3

This paper revisits the passage 1.59.3 from Herodotus' *Histories*, arguing that Chilon's presence and advice in this episode hold thematic and structural significance beyond his role as a wise adviser capable of interpreting prodigies. Chilon's presence is closely related to aspects of both Croesus' survey of Athens and Sparta, and Aristagoras' homogenous research recounted in Book 5. By tying Chilon with the main body of Herodotus' narrative, this paper argues that Herodotus' characters and their surveys serve as a vehicle for Herodotus' consistent discussion of the two crucial *poleis* up to the Greco-Persian Wars.

Book 1 of Herodotus' *Histories* narrates an anachronistic encounter between Chilon and Hippocrates in the immediate wake of a prodigy of the fireless boiling of a meat pot at the Olympic Games. Without clear reference to the prodigy, Chilon advises Hippocrates to avoid marriage if single, divorce if married, and disown any child (Hdt. 1.59.3). Previous scholarship has explained the fictional nature of this episode based on source limitations or set narrative techniques: Herodotus' indiscriminate use of his sources (Waterfield, 2008), the identity of Chilon as one of the Seven Sages and tyrant-killer (Asheri et al., 2007), and the recurring presence of a prodigy before the birth of an absolute ruler (Dewald and Munson, 2022). This paper offers a new interpretation of this episode by providing a closer examination of Chilon's words and drawing attention to his relations to other characters and speeches in Croesus' and Aristagoras' surveys.

In section 1, I examine the thematic functions of Chilon and Hippocrates' encounter by arguing that this scene mirrors aspects of Herodotus' wider discussion of tyranny. First, I look at the language of divorce in Chilon's advice and suggest that the same set of verbs and spatial concepts is applied to Pisistratus' ascension and exile. Then, I argue that Chilon's suggestions do not simply foreshadow Pisistratus' establishment of tyranny in Athens, but also indicate Herodotus' attitude toward the Athenians' permissiveness of Pisistratus' rise. Here, I compare the Athenians' silent

idleness in response to Pisistratus' preparation for retaking Athens (Hdt. 1.62.2) and Socleas' heroic use of speech against the restoration of the Peisistratid tyranny in Athens (Hdt. 5.92). Through this comparison, I intend to demonstrate that Herodotus does not portray the Athenians as innocent victims destined to face Pisistratus' tyranny. Besides, Herodotus shows Sparta's shifting stance on Athenian tyranny, which echoes a topical concern about the Spartan king Pausanias' intention to tyrannize entire Greece.

In section 2, I identify two main structural functions in Chilon's characterization. First, within the *logos* of Pisistratus, I argue that Chilon's advice set the stage for Pisistratus' oddity in his second legitimate marriage. To begin with, Chilon's advice in essence concerns the violation of the conventional institution of marriage in Classical Athens. Pisistratus' second legal marriage replicates the hypothetical scenario set up by Chilon's advice, and the tyrant's reluctance to have a child with the daughter of Megakles shows alignment with this same advice, at the expense of an alliance with a powerful yet accursed family. Furthermore, I consider the bridging roles of Chilon's anachronistic presence in the two inquiries of Athens and Sparta made by Croesus and Aristagoras. I call attention to Chilon's role as ephor under Anaxandridas, whose reign also marks the beginning of Croesus' investigation of Sparta in Book 1 and Aristagoras' entire research in Book 5. The structural continuity between Croesus' and Aristagoras' inquiries is further strengthened by the contemporary advice about divorcing a guiltless wife given by Chilon's fellow ephors to Anaxandridas.

In conclusion, this paper makes three points. First, the unusual nature of Pisistratus' transgression of marital norms is reconfirmed by Hippocrates' dismissal of Chilon's advice. Second, Chilon's identity and suggestions on divorce bridge the very beginning of Croesus' inquiry with other homogenous surveys. Third, the neglect of Chilon's advice speaks to the Athenians' responsibility for the rise of Pisistratus. In future work, I intend to keep exploring the relationship between Croesus' and Aristagoras' research, and map Herodotus' own historical inquiry onto his construction of the internal investigations which his characters pursue.

Selected Bibliography

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