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The death of Polykrates re-examined

Polykrates'in Ölümü: Yeni Bir İnceleme

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Abstract

A fresh re-examination of the Herodotean story of the death of Polykrates, the mighty tyrant of Samos, at the hands of Oroites, the rebellious Persian satrap of Lydia, in 523/522 BC, might seem an unproductive endeavour given the absence of other accounts and the large amount of modern literature already written on the topic. However, careful contextualization of the events and a better grasp of Herodotos's literary conception and techniques allow us to go beyond the tragic perspective of the events which attracted the focus of the historian of Halikarnassos. It is surmised that despite Herodotos's narrative, in the beginning, Oroites was genuinely interested in gaining Polykrates's cooperation, as he probably chose to support Bardiya/Smerdis against Kambyses. This authentic interest on the part of the Persian satrap, as well as other circumstantial facts that can be established, reveals that the trip of Polykrates to Magnesia to meet Oroites was not as blindfolded as it is depicted by Herodotos. Dissent between the two leaders, or more likely, the better alternative that the satrap found that he had in replacing Polykrates with Maiandrios at the head of Samos contributed to the terrible end of the former.

Keywords: Maiandrios, Oroites, Polykrates, Samos, Persia, tyrant

Öz

Samos'un güçlü tiranı Polykrates'in, Lidya'nın asi Pers satrapı Oroites'in elinde M.Ö. 523/522'de ölümüne ilişkin Herodotos anlatısının yeniden incelenmesi, başka kaynaklar olmaması ve halihazırda yazılmış çok sayıda modern literatür dikkate alındığına verimsiz bir çaba gibi görünebilir. Ancak olayların dikkatli bir bağlamında tartışılması ve Herodotos'un edebiyat anlayışının ve tekniklerinin daha iyi anlaşılması ile Halikarnassos tarihçisinin odaklandığı olayların trajik perspektifinin ötesine geçmek mümkündür. Herodotos'un anlatımına rağmen, başlangıçta Oroites'in Polykrates'in işbirliğini kazanmakla gerçekten ilgilendiği, muhtemelen Kambyses'e karşı Bardiya/Smerdis'i desteklemeyi seçtiği düşünülmektedir. Pers satrapının bu gerçek ilgisi ve tespit edilebilecek diğer bazı koşullar, Polykrates'in Oroites ile tanışmak için Magnesia'ya yaptığı yolculuğun Herodotos'un tasvir ettiği kadar gözleri bağlı bir eylem olmadığını ortaya koyuyor. İki lider arasındaki görüş ayrılığı ya da daha büyük ihtimalle satrapın, Samos'un başında Maiandrios'u getirmekte bulduğu daha iyi alternatif, Polykrates'in korkunç sonuna katkıda bulundu.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Polykrates, Oroites, Maiandrios, Samos, Persler, tiran

Introduction

According to Herodotos, the only major source available to us for the following events, Polykrates, the powerful tyrant of Samos, would have found his death at Magnesia on the Maiandros at the end of 523 or the beginning of 522 BC by falling into a trap set by Oroites, the Persian satrap of Lydia and Ionia, who bore him an unwarranted grudge. Oroites would have allured the Samian tyrant to the Asiatic mainland by promising him half of his treasures in exchange for his assisstance in fleeing the purported wrath of the Persian king Kambyses. Polykrates would have been persuaded to meet Oroites in Magnesia by the account of his trusted secretary, Maiandrios, who was shown by the satrap eight chests allegedly full of gold, but actually filled with stones and only superficially covered with precious metal (Hdt. 3.120-125).

This naïve way in which the otherwise astute Polykrates met his death remains one of the main historical events whose explanations advanced by Herodotos puzzle modern historians and nurtures their distrust (e.g. Shipley, 1987, p. 69; Wallinga, 1992, p. 87-88; Abramenko, 1995, p. 36, 54).

It is another one of the many instances in which Herodotos proposes affective and tragic interpretations of the events instead of the rationalised explanations that modern researchers are accustomed to (Roisman, 1985, p. 257-258; Briant, 2002, p. 139; Asheri, 2007, p. 387-388; see also Calame, 1986, p. 70-81). Polykrates is motivated by greed, whereas Oroites acts out of wickedness and envy. I would argue that modern research dismisses these emotional explanations far too easily. We cannot exclude feelings from the decision-making process of leaders, particularly in societies where power is highly personalized. The cold rationality that we expect from decision-makers as a consequence of many centuries of political thought in our societies where power is deeply institutionalized is undeniably anachronistic. Anthropological literature unequivocally shows that causes for historical events that seem incredible in light of our immediate experiences in the modern and post-modern world are in fact realistic and widespread in pre-modern societies (van Wees, 1992, p. 167-168). I would assume that out of a wider range of options available to Oroites regarding Polykrates – such as making him an ally or getting rid of him – the personal attitude of dislike towards the Samian tyrant, most probably engendered by the latter's haughtiness as a result of his *megaloprepeia*, was decisive for the ultimate turn of events.

On the other hand, of course, emotions are not the only factors that influence historical events and it is quite frustrating that the rational side of the decisions is obscured by Herodotos's

preference for portraying historical figures and events as tragic. We may never get to the fortunate point where we could be certain of the validity of the reconstructions that we propose to supplement Herodotus's explanations with the more pragmatic considerations that we are accustomed to. This happens all the more as we shall see how the difficulties in his account stem not only from his perspective on the causality of historical events but also by the biases of his sources.

Notwithstanding the limitations of the available evidence, which have already given rise to a variety of speculative contributions on the subject, I believe it is worthwhile to risk taking a fresh look at this problem. Rereading Herodotos's Book 3 and comparing the events with later contacts between West Asiatic Persian satraps and Greek leaders could prove valuable for better understanding how and why Polykrates's downfall occurred.

The Samian *logos* in Book III

Herodotos's Book III is arguably the most complex and accomplished of all in terms of narrative art, intricacy, and underlying philosophical reflections (Asheri, 2007, p. 381-394). Persian and Greek histories are masterfully interwoven: instead of two main separate *logoi* that concentrate on the Persian, respectively Greek events of the decade 530-520 BC, the focus shifts for several times between the two narrative threads, proving the great literary ability of Herodotos. Nonetheless, there is an unquestionable Samian *logos* that emerges from its three separate parts (*pace* Immerwahr, 1957, p. 313-314): 3.39-60 (the reign of Polykrates up to the revolt of the troops sent to Egypt and the Spartan siege of Samos), 120-128 (the deaths of Polykrates and Oroites), 138-149 (the Persian conquest of Samos). Certainly, it is much less developed than the previous Lydian or Egyptian *logoi*, where Herodotos records the history and ethnography of these lands and examines how they fell under the Persian yoke. But the Samian *logos* should still be placed in the category of the accounts dedicated to the great powers subdued by Persia, whose aim was to illustrate the terrible might of the empire defeated by the Hellenic league in 480-479 BC. Whereas the ethnographic part of the other *logoi* is absent for the obvious reason that the Samians were Greeks, all other features are met: Samos is explicitly referred to as a great power, aiming at a certain point at forging an empire for itself (Hdt. 3.39.2, 122.2), its fall under Persian control is due to the *hybris* of its leaders, it features three man-made wonders (*thaumata* – Hdt. 3.60), etc.

The reason why Herodotos ranked Samos virtually on par with much more powerful states is not wholly clear. The fact that Samos was a thalassocracy, compared to the others that were

mainly land powers, is a potential explanation. His intimate knowledge of Samian history, given his strong connections to the island (Mitchell, 1975, p. 75-76), certainly mattered much. The debates over the actual contribution of each *polis* to the Greek cause during the Persian wars might have also been an influential factor. In fact, a deeper examination of the *Histories* reveals many accusations of medism, numerous attempts of exculpation from such charges, a great deal of endeavours of aggrandizing one's own role in the defeat of the enemies (Baragwanath, 2008, p. 203-239; Rung, 2013). It is the great merit of Margaret Mitchell to have shown how the Samian traditions recorded by Herodotos were significantly shaped by the desire to remove the stain brought by potential charges of medism (Mitchell, 1975, esp. p. 79-80). I contend that much of the story of Polykrates is shaped by the Samians' willingness to avoid being confronted with another episode of conspicuous medism beyond the later treason perpetrated at Lade. Moreover, even though most of Herodotos's informants from Samos were likely descendants of aristocratic families that were opposed to Polykrates, I assume that the calamities the city endured for four decades after the fall of the tyrant lessened animosity toward him and even contributed to the emergence of a neutral and possibly even slightly positive image of him among large swathes of the Samian population (Asheri, 2007, p. 509): after all, Samos never again achieved the prosperity and the influence that it had attained under Polykrates's rule.

The foreign policy of Polykrates up to the Spartan siege of Samos

The main traits of his early foreign policy can be quite reasonably reconstituted based on the beginning of the Herodotean Samian *logos* (Hdt. 3.39). Taking advantage of the disarray of the mainland communities of Ionia after the Persian conquest and the still feeble Persian authority in Western Anatolia, Polykrates emerged as the undisputed hegemon of the Eastern Aegean waters, at least. As Samian piracy flourished under his rule, he became a nuisance for the Greek subjects of the Great King and the interests of the Persians alike. The taunt of Mitrobates and Kranaspes that Oroites was unable to do away with the tyrant, included by Herodotos later in his account (Hdt. 3.120.2-3), should be dated to the very beginning of Polykrates's reign because otherwise, after the means of the tyrant grew, the mockery that he conducted a coup with only 15 people would have been misplaced. The war against Polykrates waged by the Milesians and the Mytileneans (incidentally some of the few Greek communities under Persian rule still having significant navies because of their peaceful submission to the Great King)[1]

[1] Note also that the Mytileneans were eager to deliver Paktyes to the Persians for a good price in the 540s (Hdt. 1.160.1-3) and that the Persian ambassadors to the Egyptians besieged in Memphis were transported in a Mytilenean ship (Hdt. 3.13.1, 14.4-5)

should probably be equated to the failed attack of Cyrus against Samos mentioned by Malalas[2] and interpreted as a joint Persian-East Greek endeavour to remove the annoyance represented by Polykrates's predatory policy. The alliance with Amasis should have started quite early, too, strengthening Polykrates's position against the menace from the mainland. It is the climax of Polykrates's power, alluded to in the story of the ring, and attained through an anti-Persian policy adopted not because of a great attachment to freedom, but from wholly opportunistic reasons (Ure, 1922, p. 71-72; Wallinga, 1992, p. 84-87).

The availability of the Phoenician fleet to the Persians after the polities of Trans-Euphrates pledged allegiance to them completely altered the maritime balance of power in the whole Eastern Mediterranean, the Aegean included[3]. Even with the financial support of Amasis and the presumable backing of Sparta, Polykrates's navy was no match for the combined fleets of the Phoenicians, Cypriots, and the Greeks under the Persian yoke. As Kambyses probably made it clear to Polykrates that he would not attack Egypt leaving behind a powerful unfriendly fleet, the Samian tyrant had to renounce the policy he conducted up to that point and changed sides. By implausibly arguing that Amasis broke the agreements with Polykrates and connecting the tyrant's overture to Kambyses with the intention to get rid of his opponents, the Herodotean account seeks to conceal that, in fact, Polykrates abandoned the alliance with the pharaoh and chose instead submission to the Great King, probably not as comprehensive as that of the Greeks of Asia, but still significant, as he was required to send troops for the campaign against the Egyptians like any other Hellenic city in the empire[4].

The account of the rebellion against him and of the Spartan attack against Samos should also be critically assessed and emended. It is hardly plausible that Polykrates himself would have given his opponents the great opportunity to revolt by providing them with 40 triremes and

[2] Malalas 6.158, citing as his direct source Julius Africanus and as primary source Pythagoras of Samos. Kedrenos 138c.

[3] This is not a proven fact, only an assumption but quite a probable one, see Hdt. 1.143.1, 3.19 and e.g. Burn, 1962, p. 83-84 and Wallinga, 1992, p. 121. Unfortunately, there are no details about the acquisition of Trans-Euphrates by Persia, it can only be placed between October 539 BC, when Kyros entered Babylon, and 525 BC, when Kambyses invaded Egypt. Given that Kyros is credited with the repatriation of the Jews to Jerusalem, a date during the late 530s should be regarded as the most plausible for the completion of the durable installation of the Persians in the whole area between the Euphrates and Egypt. *Cf.* Dandamaev, 1989, p. 59-65. However, the creation of the Persian fleet, based on the navies of the coastal subjects, should be credited to Kambyses (Hdt. 3.34.4, with Wallinga, 1992, p. 118-126 and Briant, 2002, p. 53), and thus the volte-face of Polykrates's foreign policy should be dated around 528-526 BC (see also Tozzi, 1980).

[4] Hdt. 3.44.1. See Ruberto, 2008, with previous literature, about the exact nature of the relationship between Kambyses and Polykrates. Carty, 2015, p. 183-184, 211-212 rejects this passage without a proper fundament, while others, like Balcer, 1995, p. 65 and Abramenko, 1995, p. 42-48 grossly exaggerate the extent of the relationship.

allowing them to sail together: this would be no ruse to do away with internal enemies, but outright suicide[5]. Consequently, we should admit that the crews sent to support Kambyses in his invasion of Egypt were dispatched for good, without any intention of getting rid of them. The uprising could have been at least partly caused by internal matters, but it is tempting to assume that the sudden change of foreign policy was its main trigger. It would not be surprising if the revolt was ignited and sponsored by the Egyptians, taking into consideration that during the alliance between them and Samos they should have fostered other contacts on the island, too. The Egyptian hand could also be behind the Spartan decision to attack Polykrates, as an ally of Persia (*cf.* Andrewes 1956, p. 122; *pace* Berve, 1967, p. 587; de Libero, 1996, p. 282, n. 167): besides the perfect synchronism between the Lakedaimonian campaign against Samos and the Persian expedition against Egypt, one of the reasons mentioned by Herodotos for the campaign was the seizure by the Samians of a corselet sent as a dedication by Amasis to Sparta[6]. As expected for an account based on local Samian traditions derived from some of the rebels, Herodotos emphasizes the latter as the reason for the events of 525 BC, but it seems more attractive to me to picture them as an attempt of Egypt to strike back against their treacherous ally and to create a diversion for the Persians in the Aegean.

The turmoil in the Persian Empire and the death of Polykrates

Polykrates survived this trial but had to cope with another rapid change in the balance of power, triggered by the quick progress of Kambyses's illness[7] and his failed military attempts against Carthage, the Siwa oasis and Ethiopia (Hdt. 3.17-26), eventually culminating with the usurpation of his younger brother Bardiya or Smerdis – whether the genuine Achaemenid or the magus Gaumata that falsely assumed his identity[8] is less important – that started on 11

[5] Surprisingly enough, there are only a few modern scholars who doubt the Herodotean account at this point: e.g. Asheri, 2007, p. 443. One important thing is the actual number of triremes dispatched by Polykrates, as 40 seems to be too high, considering that the whole fleet of Polykrates was estimated at 100 penteconters (Hdt. 3.39.3) and the returning Samians were deemed to be few compared to the hired soldiers and one thousand archers serving under Polykrates (Hdt. 3.45.3). Note also that 60 Samian triremes took part at the more important battle of Lade in 494 BC (Hdt. 6.8.1). The larger the number of triremes, the less credible becomes the Herodotean account that Polykrates sent them to Egypt nurturing the hope that he would get rid of their crews.

[6] Hdt. 3.47. The gift was indeed sent almost twenty years before (see White, 1954, p. 37 and Cadoux, 1956, p. 105-106), but it is not precluded that contacts between Amasis and Sparta were still in place later.

[7] Hdt. 3.30.1, 33, 38.1. The sanity and suitability as a monarch of Kambyses are questions revisited by modern scholars who suspect that his unfavourable portrait in Herodotos was heavily influenced by the propaganda that sought to legitimize Dareios on the throne of Persia and by Egyptian resentment: Dandamaev, 1989, p. 99-102; Briant, 2002, p. 55-61, 97-98. Nonetheless, it cannot be disputed that the popularity of Kambyses hit a low after his failures in Africa and turmoil seemed imminent, irrespective of his health.

[8] Modern scholars (e.g. Dandamaev, 1989, p. 87-92, with previous literature; Briant, 2002, p. 100-105) suppose that the story of Gaumata who assumed the identity of Bardiya/Smerdis, found in most ancient written sources, starting with the Behistun inscription and Herodotos, is highly problematic and serves too well Dareios's purpose to depict himself as a legitimate ruler to be true. Nonetheless, there is no ancient record out of the main four

March 522 BC according to the Behistun inscription (DB 1.11, with Dandamaev, 1989, p. 92-93). It certainly looks like unrest against Kambyses started brewing much time before it actually erupted (DB 1.10, with Briant, 2022, p. 102-103; see also Abramenko, 1995, p. 40). Kambyses's suspicions towards his brother Bardiya/Smerdis (Hdt. 3.30, 65.2-3) and the "mad" actions against members of the Persian royal family and high aristocracy are an undisputable indication that some nobles were actively plotting to replace the former with the latter (Briant, 2002, p. 103). Oroites's fear that the king wished him dead (Hdt. 3.122.3) is easily explainable if the satrap was part of a developing conspiracy against Kambyses during the aggravation of his illness or, less plausible, already pondered at that time to take advantage of the turmoil to carve an independent kingdom for himself in Anatolia (Boffo, 1979, p. 95, n. 38; Abramenko, 1995, p. 39-41).

The murder of Mitrobates, the rival satrap of Hellespontine Phrygia, and of his son Kranaspes and all the other violent acts referred to by Herodotos (Hdt. 3.126.2) are more difficult to interpret in the same vein. Herodotus dates them "after the death of Kambyses and the reign of the Magi", in times of turmoil, when he was in Sardis and "did not help the Persians in any way to regain the power taken from them by the Medes" (Hdt. 3.126.1), but before Dareios took power or very early in his reign (Hdt. 3.127.1). Most often, modern scholars take these temporal references to mean that Oroites committed the crimes imputed to him mostly during the revolt of Fravartiš in Media, from December 522 to the late spring of 521 BC and that he sought independence like other rebels who revolted when they learned about the death of Bardiya/Smerdis, on 29 September 522 BC (Burn, 1962, p. 106-107; Boffo, 1979, p. 88, n. 15, 104). This rejection of Dareios as king might have been caused by self-interest, but it could just as well be explained as deriving from Oroites's former loyalty to Bardiya/Smerdis. We should even wonder if part of these deeds were not committed by him after the death of Kambyses, but before the death of Bardiya, to strengthen the latter's position in his confrontation with Dareios. The remark that he "did not help the Persians in any way to regain the power taken from them by the Medes" seems to be a reference to the purported exhortation of Kambyses to the Persian nobles gathered around his deathbed "to prevent sovereignty being taken back by the Medes" (Hdt. 3.65.6, see also Asheri, 2007, p. 509), i.e. by the presumable magi, than to the revolt of Fravartiš.

narrating the events (Darius's Behistun Inscription, Herodotos, Ktesias, and Justin) stating that Dareios deposed the real Bardiya/Smerdis.

Oroites was not alone in having high expectations from the impending turmoil in the empire. Polykrates, who probably had to abandon his former conquests of Aegean and Anatolian cities (Hdt. 3.39.4) when he pledged allegiance to Kambyses, saw the opportunity to gain back Ionia and the islands, as inescapably emphasized by Herodotos (Hdt. 3.122).

The Herodotean version that Oroites entered negotiations with Polykrates to secure a refuge for him and his wealth is not to be given credit as such. How could Oroites have entrusted himself to a tyrant who killed his Lydian suppliants – exiles fleeing his rule over the Lydian satrapy and whose surrender he probably demanded – and confiscated their movable properties[9]? Moreover, would not he be afraid of Polykrates selling him to Kambyses? Oroites's request is so implausible that we might think it is a literary device aimed at placing additional emphasis on the blindness of Polykrates.

Nonetheless, Herodotos's account of how Oroites approached Polykrates could have some substance, especially if we admit that the king was already suspecting Kambyses of plotting against him. Instead of meeting the fate of the Persians executed by Kambyses in Egypt, the satrap of Sardis could have hoped, at least in theory, that Polykrates's ambition to gain Ionia and the islands would give him some chances of survival. Besides the wealth that he would have taken with him to Samos, Oroites himself would have been a valuable asset in Polykrates's quest to get Ionia, given his connections and influence not only in Anatolia but also in Persia. The fact that the satrap descended from Sardis to Magnesia on the Maiandros, closer to the sea and to Samos in particular could be a hint of the seriousness of his proposal or, even better, of his intention to have a personal meeting with Polykrates on a ground where the latter would have felt safer than in Sardis (*cf.* Barron, 1961, p. 331). Moreover, the descent to Magnesia seems to have also been genuinely connected with the fear of Kambyses, as the satrap returned to Sardis only after the king's death[10].

[9] Diod. 10.16.4. See similar doubts in Roisman, 1985, p. 261. Carty, 2015, p. 208-209 advances the hypothesis that these Lydians were members of the embassy sent by Oroites to Polykrates, whom the latter ignored (Hdt. 3.121). While this assumption does not stand up to closer scrutiny, it can be envisaged though, following Barron, 1961, p. 331, that a diplomatic mission sent by Oroites asked for the return of the exiles. Such a scenario is plausible considering the actions taken earlier by Mazares to get the Lydian rebel Paktyes from Mytilene and Chios, narrated in Hdt. 1.160.

[10] Hdt. 3.126.1: "After the death of Kambyses and the rule of the Magi, Oroites stayed in Sardis". The news of Kambyses's death that occurred in July might have reached Oroites roughly at the same time as the information on the military defeat of Bardiya/Smerdis, sometime before his execution on 22 September (see Briant, 2002, p. 113-114), given the great distances in the empire, the short period of time between the events and that Dareios had the interest to prevent any more Persian nobles joining Bardiya.

This notice leads us however to the more plausible hypothesis that the request recorded by Herodotos – if it was ever formulated in this manner (Asheri, 2007, p. 508) – was actually just part of a greater bargain that Oroites had in mind and that required a tête-à-tête of the two leaders. Oroites not only needed to prevent any attack from behind (as assumed in Boffo, 1979, p. 103; Abramenko, 1995, p. 41) during the confrontation between Kambyses and Bardiya/Smerdis but also needed a fleet to counter a potential assault of the royal navy and even to try to organize a diversion in the Mediterranean that would have helped the usurper: the only fleet available was of course that of Samos. Some mercenary complements to Oroites's troops could have also been envisaged[11].

In exchange for the alliance, Oroites would have had to provide money – as suggested by the coffers filled with stones covered by gold – and perhaps make some territorial concessions on the coast. This should not come as too great a surprise. Bardiya/Smerdis is said to have been very popular among the subdued peoples, but not among the Persians themselves, mainly because he exempted all subjects for three years from military service and tribute (Hdt. 3.67)[12]. Some relatively minor territorial adjustments at the western fringes of the empire would not have mattered much and Oroites himself would not have felt bad about the losses, provided he would have got Phrygia, as he eventually did.

The prize was certainly big. But was it big enough – in case Polykrates was aware of Oroites's real negotiation intentions – to make the tyrant discard any precautions, as implied by Herodotos?

First, it does not seem that he ignored taking strong safeguards for this encounter. The meeting place at Magnesia was close to his domains, allowing for a quick retreat in case of emergency. He was also followed by a large retinue (Hdt. 3.125.1, see also Roisman, 1985, p. 262). Maiandrios's mission on the mainland was probably not that much a matter of inspecting chests with money that in the end turned out to be full of stones – a rather common literary trope employed in other historical cases, too[13] – but rather part of the customary preparations on the

[11] The foundation of Polykrates's (and later Maiandrios's) power was partly represented by his mercenaries (*epikouroi misthōtoi*, see Hdt. 3.39.3, 45.3, 54.2, 145.2, 146.3-4), so it is plausible that Samos could have acted as a hub for hiring such soldiers. In hiring Greek mercenaries, Oroites would have followed the example of his autochthonous predecessors in Lydia, Kroisos (Hdt. 1.77.4, Ephoros of Kyme *FGrHist* 70 fr. 58a-c; Diod. Sic. 9.32, Nic. Dam. *FGrHist* 90 fr. 65) and Paktyes (Hdt. 1.154, 156.2, 1.161).

[12] See also Aisch. *Pers.* 774-775: "Fifth to rule was Mardos, a disgrace to the fatherland and the ancient throne".

[13] Nep. *Hann.* 9, also, in a quite different manner, Thuc. 6.6.3, 46.3-4. See also Boffo, 1979, p. 96, n. 5, *pace* Roisman 1985, 262. Moreover, admitting that Maiandrios fell for the trick, how could one tell, besides Oroites and a few of his servants, that the chests were filled with stones and not with gold? On the other hand, if Maiandrios was not duped after all, in which circumstances would he tell about the trick, thus admitting that he intentionally

side of Polykrates for mitigating the risks of the conference. Meetings between leaders of different polities, sometimes at war against each other, were not uncommon and certainly based on some preliminary protocols, involving the choice of the place, the number of followers for each leader, and the pledges (*dexiai*) to be exchanged. An illustrative example is the meeting between Agesilaos and Pharnabazos in 395 BC, arranged by their common guest-friend, Apollophanes of Kyzikos: in Xenophon's version, it was the latter who initiated the talks for the meeting, in Plutarch's it was Pharnabazos who asked for it (Xen. *Hell.* 4.1.29-38; Plut. *Vit. Ages.* 12.1-13.1.). The latter situation resembles quite well the case of Polykrates and Oroites, with Myrsos, son of Gyges, a Lydian probably based in the region of the lower Maiandros river (Iancu, 2023, p. 154), playing the role of Apollophanes. It does not mean that risks were always fully alleviated, as demonstrated by the arrest of Alkibiades by Tissaphernes after the battle of Abydos in 411 BC (Xen. *Hell.* 1.1.9; Plut. *Vit. Alc.* 27.4-5) and by the treacherous mass slaughter of the Greek captains during their parlay with the same Tissaphernes after the battle of Cunaxa of 401 BC (Xen. *An.* 2.5), yet most leaders would have felt that threats could be at least partially mitigated through the customary precautions listed above. This was certainly the case with Polykrates who, after all, was not even at war with Oroites. It is quite evident then that Herodotos (or his sources) deliberately understated the preliminary preparations undertaken by Polykrates for dramatic reasons: a much too cautious tyrant would have made for a poor tragic hero.

Secondly, Polykrates ought to have had some rational reasons for considering that Oroites needed him alive and would not have acted against his own interests by doing him harm. They are difficult to grasp considering that Herodotos's account is modelled on literary tropes and valuable details are missing. The most pervasive reason could have been that he somehow thought himself indispensable to Oroites. For instance, Polykrates could have reasoned that he was the only leader able to marshal a fleet, independent of Kambyses, large enough to enable Oroites to achieve his goals. Additionally, it is possible that he believed Oroites was already running out of time and was too embroiled in the plot against Kambyses to seek alternative ways of accomplishing his objectives.

misled Polykrates? He could have boasted about his contribution to the demise of Polykrates either right after it, when he allegedly pleaded for installing isonomy in Samos, or in Sparta, trying to improve his credentials with the old enemies of the tyrant. But how can it be explained then that Herodotos did not mention Maiandrios's treachery?

The wording of Herodotos implies that Polykrates was killed right after he arrived at Magnesia and there were no meaningful discussions between the two leaders[14]. The alternative scenario that the bargain between Oroites and Polykrates in Magnesia went wrong and led to the latter's death seems not to be supported by Herodotos's account. If there were indeed some issues of contention that led to Oroites's decision to execute the Samian tyrant just as he reached Magnesia, they should have arisen in negotiations led through intermediaries – Myrsos, son of Gyges, to be sure, and probably Maiandrios, during his inspection mission (de Libero, 1996, p. 284). Too great material resources and territorial concessions asked by Polykrates through his secretary, doubled by the veiled threat that he could reveal to Kambyses the whole plot and decisively side with him, could certainly have enraged Oroites against someone who had been a foe of Persia and himself for quite a long time before the late submission to the Great King.

Anyway, the sudden execution of Polykrates suggests that Oroites – if he ever acted in good faith in his dealings with Polykrates, as I presume – somehow changed his mind sometime before the event. The most plausible cause for this change of plan on his part was that he got a better alternative than that of bargaining with the ambitious Samian tyrant. The name of this alternative was Maiandrios, who had been left in charge by Polykrates over Samos[15]. As many other scholars pointed out before, his involvement in the whole affair and the fact that he was the main beneficiary of Polykrates's death renders him suspect of treason (Luc. *Charon* 14; Barron, 1961, p. 332-333; Boffo, 1979, p. 95-96, n. 42, 103; Hart, 1982, p. 60; p. Roisman, 1985, p. 262-264, with previous literature; *pace* Berve, 1967, p. 587; La Bua, 1975, p. 56-57). His intention to cement a strong connection between himself and Zeus Eleutherios might even be interpreted as an almost open admission that he was part of the plot that led to Polykrates's death (Hdt. 3.142.2, 4). We should not be misled by his fake rejection of tyrannical power (Hdt. 3.142.3-4, with Waters, 1971, p. 29; Hart, 1982, p. 60) and his exculpation that it was not him, but his brother Lykaretos, who killed the notable citizens that he treacherously seized in the first place (Hdt. 3.143). These deeds recorded in a passage containing many laudatory statements about Maiandrios might well be his own later justifications presented during his exile at Sparta, a city with an avowed anti-tyrannical stance and connections with many Samian aristocratic families (Hdt. 3.148)[16].

[14] Hdt. 3.125.2: "But as he arrived in Magnesia, he was badly slaughtered" (ἀπικόμενος δὲ ἐς τὴν Μαγνησίην ὁ Πολυκράτης διεφθάρη κακῶς).
[15] Hdt. 3.142.1-3. An alternative or a complementary explanation could be the disbandment of the royal navy (or at least of its Greek component), sometime after the expedition against Ethiopia, as recorded in Hdt. 3.25.7.
[16] The banishment of Maiandrios from Sparta might have been prompted not only by allegations of corruption but also by his former record as a tyrant and the grudge that other Samians bore him.

Oroites's benefits from replacing Polykrates with Maiandrios were significant. In the best-case scenario, he would have obtained the support of the entire Samian fleet at much lower financial costs and certainly with no territorial concessions from someone who sought to strengthen his newly acquired rule. In the worst-case scenario, he would have eliminated the potential risk of Polykrates joining Kambyses against him and the island would have fallen into civil war: he would have still been able to secure the support of at least part of the Samian fleet due to his money, much needed in such circumstances. The fact that Oroites was still interested to the highest degree in securing support from Samos is partially demonstrated by his leniency toward the Samians who followed Polykrates to Magnesia, as he set them free, unlike the foreigners, whom he enslaved (Hdt. 3.125.3).

There are no hints of later military collaboration between Oroites and Maiandrios. However, the report available to Dareios on the large power of Oroites, containing information about his one thousand-strong Persian and his rule over Phrygia, Lydia, and Ionia, might have been more detailed than the version reproduced by Herodotos (Hdt. 3.127.1). The indirect dominion over Samos exercised through the tyranny of Maiandrios could have been another element prompting Dareios to act cautiously against the rebellious satrap.

An even more important clue about the cooperation between Oroites and Maiandrios is that Dareios decided to subdue Samos immediately after he had eliminated Oroites[17]. It is difficult to trust Herodotos that Dareios determined to invade Samos out of gratitude to Syloson (Hdt. 3.139-140, with Roisman, 1985, p. 267-268). The timing of the conquest, very soon after the execution of Oroites, points to a deliberate decision of Dareios to do away with a collaborator of the latter (Hart, 1982, p. 60) and to prevent further attempts of his westernmost provinces to

[17] Oroites's death is dated in Hdt. 3.127.1 when "everything was still in confusion" and Dareios "was still new to the royal power", so not too long after September 522 BC, probably in the first half of 521 BC, particularly if we interpret Otanes's inaction against the Medes (Hdt. 3.126.1) as a reference to the revolt of Fravartiš, crushed in the late spring of 521 BC, and not to the usurpation of Bardiya/Smerdis (see above). The army of Otanes is said to have set sail against Samos just before the Babylonians revolted (Hdt. 3.150.1) – the revolt that was quelled only after a twenty-month siege (Hdt. 3.153). On the other hand, the Behistun inscription and the Babylonian tablets record two separate revolts, in October-December 522 BC and August-December 521 BC, see de Liagre Böhl, 1968, p. 150-152. It is quite probable that Herodotos conflates the two revolts and extends their duration, based on the account of Zopyros, the Persian deserter to Athens who was a grandson of that Zopyros who is the main character of the Herodotean account focused on Babylon (Hdt. 3.160, see also Dandamaev, 1989, p. 124). On the other hand, the departure of the Persian army led by Otanes to Samos should probably be correlated with the start of the second Babylonian revolt, therefore in the summer of 521 BC. Consequently, the ousting of Maiandrios took place right after the demise of Oroites. See also La Bua, 1975, p. 81-83; Tölle-Kastenbein, 1976, p. 45. *Pace* Andrewes, 1956, p. 123; Burn, 1962, p. 129; Mitchell, 1975, p. 86; Dandamaev, 1989, p. 127, 147-148, who date the Persian conquest of Samos in 517 BC, based on Eusebios's unreliable list of thalassocracies (*Chron.* 1.225, with White, 1954, p. 39-40). The chronological problem is discussed at length in Roisman, 1985, p. 275-277.

revolt against the central authority by eliminating those forces that could support such secessions.

Concluding remarks

Herodotos's dramatized depiction of the death of Polykrates obscures part of the historical events that led to his end and their actual significance. It appears more likely that the fall of the tyrant did not occur as a consequence of Oroites's ambition to remove an insolent competitor but due to the failure of the two leaders to establish cooperation in the troubled context at the end of Kambyses's reign.

The story of Oroites and Polykrates is only the beginning of a longer sequence of (attempted) partnerships that eventually failed between powerful (and at times rebellious) Persian satraps in Anatolia and their Greek clients[18].

[18] E.g. Pammenes was arrested and probably executed by Artabazos on the suspicion that he was secretly corresponding with the Great King (Polyaenus, *Strat.* 7.33.2 and Diod. Sic. 16.34.1, with Rop, 2019, p. 128, n. 34), the Greek mercenaries of Kyros the Younger were close to open mutiny because it was concealed to them that they were marching against Artaxerxes II (Xen. *An.* 1.3.1-21, 4.11-13, with Rop, 2019, p. 71-75).

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