

ANNALISA PARADISO

Croesus and the Lydian Navy*

An anecdote related by Herodotus in his Lydian *logos* seems to interpret in a dramatized way the relation of Lydia with the sea. The historian reports that Croesus planned to build ships in order to attack the Greeks of the isles in front of Asia Minor. When all was ready for shipbuilding, Bias of Priene (or Pittacus of Mytilene) came to Sardis. The king asked him for any news concerning Greece and the Sage answered that the people of the isles were buying up ten thousand horses, intending to make an expedition against him. Taking that for true, Croesus said he wished the gods would inspire the islanders to do that, to attack on horseback the sons of the Lydians. And the other replied that the king seemed to pray eagerly to catch the islanders riding on the mainland, but what else did he think the people of the isles were praying for, as soon as they heard he was going to build a navy, than to catch the Lydians on the sea, and so to take vengeance on him for the Greeks of the mainland whom he had enslaved? The king was pleased with this answer, understood its meaning, and stopped shipbuilding. Then he signed a pact of guest-friendship (ξείνιη) with the Ionians inhabiting the islands¹.

The story dramatizes information which seems to be historical, concerning the accord signed by Croesus with the Ionian islands. This agreement, involving diplomatic hospitality rather than military alliance, is explained as a turning point in the aggressive policy adopted by the Mermnads, and especially by Croesus, towards the Greeks. Looking for the overseas trade of the main roads of Lydia and Anatolia, Gyges captured the *asty* of Colophon: he also led a campaign against

* Nikos Birgalias has passionately cultivated a generous, and inclusive, project of a common research to be built in friendship. Those dancing days are gone, but his memory and legacy are still alive. I dedicate these pages to him.

¹ Hdt. I 27 = T71 Pedley. Cf. also Diod. IX 25 Vogel/9 fr.37.1 Cohen-Skalli (T70 Pedley) and Polyæn. I 26.

Miletus and Smyrna². Ardys seized Priene and took up an expedition against Miletus³. Alyattes finally took Smyrna and attacked Clazomenae: above all, he waged a long war against Miletus, along with his father Sadyattes and then alone⁴. None of these kings attacked the islands. When he planned to build ships, Croesus had already subjugated and made tributary to him all the Ionian, Aeolian, and Dorian cities of the mainland⁵. He obliged all of them to pay a tribute and to provide military services⁶. The planned campaign against the islanders - the Ionian islands with which agreements will be signed - should presumably aim either to make them tributary as well or to seize their ships. A parallel tradition – which has gone down to the 1st-2nd century CE *Life of Aesop* and lies in an unclear relationship of dependence with Herodotus' anecdote - provides an identical, and better focused, situation. It knows of Croesus' threat to attack Samos but entrusts to the fabulist the same role of diplomat as that played in Herodotus by one of the Sages. In this variant of the story, Croesus intended to make the Samians tributary to himself⁷.

The historical background of the anecdote is well founded and clearly includes the real existence of both a Lydian cavalry and Greek fleets. Lydia only had land forces and the Ionian islands in front of the Anatolian coast obviously founded any power on ships. Which were these Ionian islands? Certainly Samos had a navy in those days but we wonder whether Chios also had one⁸. In fact, Herodotus and Thucydides date Samian sea-power to the later days of Polycrates and Cambyses, not before⁹. All the same, Herodotus relates the Samians attacked the Lacedaemonians in warships and carried off the precious bronze crater the latter were shipping to Croesus some time before the capture of Sardis in ca. 547/6 BCE¹⁰. On the other hand, Croesus did not have naval power, nor did his predecessors. Back in the past, Diodorus, probably drawing on Castor of Rhodes, knows of a ninety-two year long Lydian and Maeonian thalassocracy soon after the Trojan War¹¹. The only tradition which could 'explain' such obscure mythical

² Hdt. I 14. On Lydian trade and its 'invention', cf. § 94.1 with Hanfmann 1983, 80-83 and Paradiso 2012.

³ Hdt. I 15.

⁴ Hdt. I 16-22.

⁵ Hdt. I 26, 3 and 27, 1; cf. I 6 and 28.

⁶ Hdt. I 6, 2 and 27, 1; Xen. *Cyr.* VI 2, 10; cf. Hdt. I 76-7 and 141.

⁷ *Vitae* G + W, 92. See Kurke 2011, 126-36.

⁸ Chios had sea-power at the time of Cyrus and Cambyses according to Poppe-Stahl and Gomme, both commenting on Thuc. I 13; it had not for Wallinga 1993, 66-67 and nn. 2 and 3.

⁹ Hdt. III 122, 2; Thuc. I 13, 3 and 6.

¹⁰ Hdt. I 70.

¹¹ Diod. VII 11 Vogel/7 fr. 9 Cohen-Skalli; Cast. *FGrHist/BNJ* 250, T 1.

data would be Herodotus' report on the Lydian expedition to the western Mediterranean Sea and the foundation of the Tyrrhenian colony in the ancient times of King Atys, the eponym of the Atyads who reigned in Lydia before the Heraclids¹². However, this tradition was unknown to the best authority on Lydian history, Xanthus of Lydia, and Herodotus himself located the shipbuilding in Greek Smyrna, so backdating to mythical times the lack of Lydian harbours¹³. In historical times, the kings of Lydia certainly did not have a maritime power. That explains the long land siege Alyattes laid to Miletus, that is against people who were masters of the sea so that the Lydians could not resort to a naval blockade¹⁴. The absence of a Lydian navy also explains what prevented Alyattes and Croesus from punishing, on two occasions, the Samians who had stolen, thanks to their warships, some 'goods' sent to Lydia from Corinth and Sparta. Those 'goods' were both the young sons of the Corcyraeans Periander sent to Alyattes to be made eunuchs and then saved by the Samians, and the crater sent by the Lacedaemonians and then either stolen by the Samians (according to the Spartans) or sold by the people who were carrying it (according to the Samians)¹⁵. The military servitudes imposed on Greek poleis certainly provided Croesus with military contingents. Yet, if such servitudes also involved the fleets, we completely lack information about sea operations led by Croesus.

On the other hand, the existence of an excellent Lydian cavalry in Croesus' time is also founded on historical evidence. Indeed, the reputation of Lydian horsemanship is more ancient and well attested in Greek sources such as Homer, Mimnermus, Bacchylides, and Pindar¹⁶. Xanthus of Lydia, transmitted by Nicolaus of Damascus, relates that King Ardys, three generations before Gyges (ca. 680 - ca. 645 BCE), ordered a census of the army to be made and the number of the horsemen was found to be around 30,000. Xanthus may have transmitted an 'official' number, drawn from the Lydian archives and therefore too high¹⁷. However, that number is indirectly strengthened by further information. Xanthus reports that, in Gyges' time, the Smyrnaean poet Magnes sang of the bravery of the Lydians in a cavalry battle – ἐν ἰππομαχίᾳ – against the Amazons¹⁸. Herodotus'

¹² Myres 1906, 127-130 with Hdt. I 94, 2-7, at 6.

¹³ Xanth. *Lyd. FGrH/BNJ* 765, F 16.

¹⁴ Hdt. I 17-18.

¹⁵ Hdt. III 48 (the boys) and I 70 (the crater).

¹⁶ Hom. *Il.* IV 141-5; Mimn. fr.14 West²/15 Allen; Bacchyl. III 23-4, and Pind. fr. 206 Maehler.

¹⁷ Nic. Dam. *FGrHist* 90, F 44/Xanth. *Lyd. BNJ* 765, F 34a, § 7 (Lydian archives) and § 10 (census), with Talamo 1979, 134-138.

¹⁸ Nic. Dam. *FGrHist* 90, F 62 = Xanth. *Lyd. BNJ* 765, F 38.

praise of Lydian horsemanship is entirely focused on Croesus' time and culminates with a warm eulogy of it¹⁹. In Herodotus' narrative, Lydian cavalry plays a key role before the last fight between Croesus and Cyrus (when the Lydian dreamt of horses which ate snakes²⁰), during the battle (when the Lydians were defeated because the scent of the camels disturbed their animals²¹) and soon after it (when they were deprived of war weapons, including their horses²²). Archaeological findings do match such an excellent reputation and its results in Lydian culture. Direct evidence for Lydian horsemanship consists of iron bits and bronze bridle attachments from Sardis, the latter being sometimes decorated with Nomadic motifs, probably of Cimmerian or Scythian origin²³. More nuanced should be the interpretation of pottery, which may belong to Greek, or Greek-inspired, workshops. The fragments of a seventh-century (third quarter) relief-ware vase, excavated at Sardis in 1914, show what should be a magnificent parade of non-armed riders, separately modelled in gray clay and then applied to the vase itself²⁴. The horsemen should be all dressed in a short, belted and checkered chiton (a garment of Oriental stuffs?); the horses, surely of 'Asiatic' breed, show heavy chests, broad necks, but long and thin legs. The vase was of Greek, not Oriental, inspiration: it was made either in an Ionian *atelier* of the coast or else by a Greek potter working in Sardis, but it reproduced non-Greek riders. An image more allusive to a specifically Lydian context may be found on an architectural terracotta decorative type - reportedly from Düver in Pisidia - which shows a rider mounted on a rearing horse, wearing an earring and oriental trousers²⁵.

Thanks to historical data, Herodotus' anecdote works like an *aition*. In the minimal space of a quick dialogue, the short story mixes up historical and moral features: information about the treaties of guest-friendship and the power of both Lydia and the Ionian isles with wise advice of either Bias or Pittacus. As is well known, the Delphic tradition which goes down to Herodotus and then to Ephorus associates the name of Croesus with the most illustrious Greek intellectuals, and above all with some of the Sages, not only Bias and Pittacus but also Solon and

¹⁹ Hdt. I 79.

²⁰ Hdt. I 78. The oracle of Telmessus interpreted the horses as a reference to the Persians: however, it may have forced the more natural identification of the horses with the Lydians after the event. See Griffiths 2001, 161-165.

²¹ Hdt. I 80.

²² Hdt. I 155.

²³ Greenewalt jr. 2010, 218, nr. 48-50, fig. 6.

²⁴ Hanfmann 1945, 570-81; Greenewalt 1979, 20-1.

²⁵ Greenewalt jr. 2010, 217 and 221, fig. 5. Riders figure on a marble panel from Bin Tepe (Hanfmann and Ramage 1978, 156 n. 231, fig. 401) and a bridled horse head decorates the fragment of a lebes or a crater (Greenewalt jr. 2010, 221, fig. 4.)

Thales, almost all of them introduced as visitors at the court of Sardis²⁶. Ephorus/Diodorus reports that Pittacus met Croesus and refused the gift of as much money from his treasury as he might wish to take, claiming he had already twice as much as he wished, since he had inherited an estate from his brother²⁷. Such an out-of-scale comparison implies of course freedom from avarice and independence from the king. Dignity and the sense of a peer relationship also weave the Herodotean story. It does exploit the motif of the wise adviser of a tyrant but more precisely a variant of it²⁸. In a sense, the dialogue and Bias' (or Pittacus') advice recall either the meeting and the advice given by Solon to Croesus²⁹ or the advice given to the king by his Lydian fellow Sandanis, who tried to divert him from the war against Cyrus³⁰. However, Bias' attitude seems different. He neither gives Croesus a moral lesson nor does he speak in order to protect him. Bias offers advice to the king, but that advice is primarily, or even solely, intended to protect the islanders. In that sense, it is not even advice: it is only a ruse, that is a deceptive and interested manipulation of reality.

The identity of the Greek protagonist of the story was already challenged by ancient tradition, which suggested to Herodotus two names, and even let drop a third name, that of Aesop as Croesus' interlocutor in what appears to be a further variant of the story itself, in a multiplication of names and situations which is typical of 'liquid' traditions. In Herodotus, the initiative of the meeting is attributed to either Bias or Pittacus: possibly, an older tradition mentioned Pittacus, then it was rearranged and switched the protagonist, choosing Bias for evident chronological reasons. Pittacus – a contemporary of Alyattes, from Aeolian Mitylene – was not the best placed to discourage Croesus from attacking the Ionian islands³¹. At first view, Bias does not seem so either, since he was a contemporary of Croesus and Cyrus but came from Priene, since, in similar traditions, Sages usually represent their own cities³². So, the accent appears only to fall on the cultural (and not historical) identity of the protagonist. Nonetheless, the anecdote may be included in a long tradition which makes of Bias not only a clever advocate and a brilliant orator until the last day of his life, but also a far-sighted

²⁶ Hdt. I 27-33 and 75, 3. See also Ephor. *FGrH/BNJ* 70, F 181 and Diod. IX 25-28 Vogel/9, fr. 37-39 Cohen-Skali, with Parmeggiani 2011, 298-302.

²⁷ Diod. IX 12, 2 Vogel/9, fr.19 Cohen-Skali. On Diodorus' dependence on Ephorus, cf. Schwartz 1903, coll. 678-679.

²⁸ Bischoff 1965², 315; Lattimore 1939, 25, 30-31, 34-35.

²⁹ Hdt. I 32, 7.

³⁰ Hdt. I 71, 2-4.

³¹ Diog. Laert. I 79 dates Pittacus' *floruit* to the 42th Olympiad (612/11-609/8 BCE) and his death to the third year of the 52nd Olympiad, i.e. 570/69 BCE.

³² Cf. Plut. *Quaest. Gr.* 20, 296ab and Diog. Laert. I 25 and 83-4, with Kurke 2011, 127.

politician, able to exploit all the ruses of speech and action for noble political aims³³. Bias achieved a diplomatic success as ambassador of Priene at Samos on the occasion of a war that had broken out between the two of them and such a success may explain why tradition chose him to mediate between Croesus and the Ionian islands³⁴. His quality of global defender of the Ionian interests also comes to light in the political advice he gave to the Ionians defeated by Harpagus, exhorting them to leave all together for Sardinia and found there a city³⁵. However, it is a different biographical feature which most suits the protagonist of the encounter with Croesus. While reporting the siege of Priene by Alyattes, Diogenes Laertius describes the double cunning solution adopted by Bias: he fattened two mules and drove them towards the enemy camp. Seeing them, Alyattes was disappointed to learn that the prosperity of the besieged also extended to their animals, so he decided to make a truce. Bias made some heaps of sand and covered them with wheat, then he showed them to the king's ambassador and finally Alyattes made peace with Priene³⁶. The structure and meaning of this anecdote fit well the story of Bias' speech to Croesus. In both, through either action or speech, Bias forges a magnificent reality. He creates an illusion able to impress and cheat the adversary, who is always a Lydian king, through the deliberately boastful exaggeration of power, a technique for inducing the other to believe one is more powerful than he really is and so aiming to negotiate a greater result. This is the meaning of both the false wealth in animals and crops and the equally false land power in cavalry, claimed for the islanders.

The dialogue between Croesus and Bias raises a symbolic opposition of the horse to the sea. It effects a radical, and simplified, separation between land and sea, between two different and historical powers (Lydian cavalry and Greek fleets), and the two peoples who are meant to excel in each of them: Lydia and, globally considered, the Greek islanders³⁷. The latter are meant not as Ionians but as a compact political body of Greeks who buy horses all together and in full agreement (συνωνέοντα) and with whom Croesus seems to sign only one treaty of guest-friendship (Ξεινίη, in the singular). A further opposition is rhetorically provided by the geographical reversal of those powers, which fictionally attributes a navy to Lydia and a cavalry to the Greek isles. Bias, the expert orator, has recourse to a brilliant device, the *reductio ad absurdum*. Through it, he opposes, on

³³ Diog. Laert. I 84.

³⁴ Aristot. fr. 576 Rose, *IG* XII. 6, 155, ll.15-23. See also Plut. *Quaest. Gr.* 20, 296ab.

³⁵ Hdt. I 170.

³⁶ Diog. Laert. I 83. The ruse is attributed to Thrasybulus on the occasion of Alyattes' siege of Miletus by Hdt. I 21-2.

³⁷ On the distinction, and even the opposition, between islands and mainland in ancient Greek thought, with reference to the Croesus-Bias episode, see Ceccarelli 1996, 45-46; Payen 1997, 282, 288-289; Constantakopoulou 2007, 17; Fantasia 2009, 13 and n.2.

the one hand, the absurd cavalry of the islanders to the real Lydian one and, on the other hand, the real fleets of the Greek isles to Croesus' navy to be. By opposing these four elements, Bias puts on the same plane, as members of the rhetorical quartet, the inexistent Greek cavalry and a Lydian navy already in preparation. The *absurdum* which founds the oppositions of the two couples of four elements stresses of course the first of them, the image of insular cavalry. As well as at Priene besieged by Alyattes, Bias forges here a false and powerful image of the islanders' cavalry, whose illusory existence is only founded on the real image of the ongoing Lydian navy to which it is indirectly compared, so acquiring the same reality status. By this means, Bias suggests a captious argument he proposes however as true: the danger that this – inexistent! – insular cavalry may represent for Croesus and his horsemen. The opposition of the fallacious cavalry of the isles to the real Lydian one only helps to introduce a second opposition, the most important, which aims to impress the king: that of the real fleet of the islanders vs. Croesus' future navy. The second opposition is also somehow fictional, as it puts on the same plane a reality in construction (Croesus' fleet) to a partial reality, which is introduced however as powerful and global (the fleets of some Ionian islands rather than an allied insular fleet). So, the 'insular fleet' ends by playing rhetorically rather than historically the same strong and absolute role as Lydian cavalry within the structure of Bias' speech.

Thus, Herodotus' encounter-story seems to be a fictional anecdote intentionally organized around two famous personages. We cannot doubt the historical truth of its basic elements, namely Lydian cavalry and at least the sea-power of Samos. We doubt of course the encounter itself, whose historicity is undermined by the multiplication of the Greek protagonists. May we also doubt the main information, the shipbuilding project and its partial fulfilment, which sometimes has been looked at sceptically but never concretely challenged and discussed in detail³⁸? Of course, the project concerned the equipment of a navy. Vessels already allowed the Lydians to sail on diplomatic routes through both the Aegean and the Mediterranean Sea³⁹. Theoretically, Croesus can have planned to build a powerful navy to be moored in the Trojan harbour of Adramytteion he controlled, since he had been its governor before becoming king⁴⁰. He could have done it thanks to the

³⁸ Croesus' menace is admitted by La Bua 1977, 15; Lombardo 1980, 189; Asheri, *ad locum*. Others (e.g. Schubert 1884, 65; Radet 1893, 215-216; Hirsch 1986, 226-227; Briquel 1991, 85 n. 297; Carusi 2003, 253; Ceccarelli 1996, 45 n.16; Kurke 2011, 126-136; Branscome 2015, 245-251, at 246) are more sceptical about Croesus' defiance to Ionian sea-power, or simply analyse the whole episode as an anecdote, so in a different perspective.

³⁹ For Lydia's links with Delphi, Athens, Boeotia, Corinth and above all Sparta, its own ally, cf. Hdt. I 6, 2; 53, 3; 56, 2; 65-70; 77; 82-3.

⁴⁰ Hanfmann 1983, 245, n. 65. Cf. Nic. Dam. *FGrH/BNJ* 90, F 65 = Xanth. *Lyd. BNJ* 765, F

plentiful timber of the interior and the skilled labour which he could rely on. Lydian vegetation included an abundance of trees such as varieties of *Quercus* (oak), *Pinus* (pine), and *Cedrus* (cedar) in the eastern part of the country and on the slopes of mountain ranges such as Mt. Tmolus⁴¹. Naval craftsmanship obviously requires specialized skills but Croesus could have enrolled Ionian dockyard hands and, after all, such a solution is appealed to by the mythical story of Lydian ship-building in Greek Smyrna at the time of the Tyrrhenian colonization⁴². Moreover, Croesus had at his disposal excellent craftsmen who could specialize in it. In a different field, the skills of Lydian artisans were praised. The foundation charter of the palace of Darius I at Susa (*DsF*) shows that during the construction of the palace itself Lydian craftsmen worked as masons and carpenters⁴³. Accordingly, Croesus' project would not have been materially impossible to fulfil. Its strategic aim would have been to match the naval power of the Greek islands, in order to keep on assuring Lydian markets to the sea.

If Croesus did start the plan, the point of course is to understand why and when he stopped it. One thinks immediately of the Medo-Persian war as the main reason which distracted him from equipping a navy⁴⁴. Such a war risked the treaty Alyattes and Cyaxares had signed in 585 BCE, which fixed the border between Media and Lydia at the river Halys⁴⁵. The *Chronicle of Nabonidus* dates Cyrus' capture of Ecbatana to the seventh year of Nabonidus' reign, that is to 550/549 BCE⁴⁶. However, it only deals with Astyages' response to Cyrus' rebellion, so with the last stage of the war. Another eastern source, the *Nabonidus Cylinder from Sippar*, dates the beginning of the war three years earlier, to 553 BCE⁴⁷. Cyrus overthrew the Mede Astyages not through a quick campaign but at the end of three years of hard fighting which only found a solution when Ecbatana was seized. According to Greek sources as well - Herodotus and Ctesias - Cyrus was defeated in the course of the war but also prevailed at least in a battle some time before the happy end⁴⁸. All these data substantially agree with Herodotus' global

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⁴¹ Cf. Hanfmann 1983, 6-7 and Roosevelt 2009, 48-49. According to a letter of Antiochos III citizens were allowed to cut wood from the royal forests of Tarantzoï during the reconstruction of Sardis of 213 BCE: cf. Gauthier 1989, 13-15.

⁴² Hdt. I 94, 6.

⁴³ *DsF* §§ 12-13: Kuhrt 2007, 492.

⁴⁴ How-Wells, *ad locum*.

⁴⁵ Hdt. I 72, 2; 73-4.

⁴⁶ *The Nabonidus Chronicle* II 1-4: Grayson 1975, 106. See Briant 1996, 41-3 and Kuhrt 2007, 47-53.

⁴⁷ Kuhrt 2007, 56-7.

⁴⁸ Hdt. I 127, 3; 128, 1; Nic. Dam. *FGrH/BNJ* 90, F 66, §§ 28-30 (= Ctes. F8d* §§ 28-30 Lenfant).

reconstruction of the events. In Herodotus' chronology, that is in the succession of the events recorded by his narrative, the shipbuilding plan is dated after the conquest of the Greek cities of the mainland, which is dated in turn to the first period of Croesus' reign⁴⁹. After Croesus' encounter with Bias (I 27), Herodotus mainly records the meeting with Solon (I 29-33), then a private sorrow (the tragic death of the king's son Atys: I 34-45) and, two years later, the fatal turning point, Cyrus' conquest of Media (I 46), followed three years later by Croesus' attack on Cyrus and the capture of Sardis⁵⁰. In I 46 Herodotus suggests that Croesus only worried about the eastern events and stopped his mourning after Cyrus' victory over the Medes, and even some time after it, when he realized that the Persian power was increasing and decided to forestall it before it became too great. At ch.73, however, still Herodotus attributes to Croesus not a defensive and slow strategy, but an attack against Cyrus, mainly for the sake of more land in addition to his own (καὶ γῆς ἡμέρω προσκτήσασθαι πρὸς τὴν ἑωυτοῦ μοῖραν βουλόμενος). An imperialistic attack is conceivable and has been even claimed as the true reason which induced Croesus to start the war, so restarting the aggressive politics of his father Alyattes⁵¹. It could imply an earlier attention to the eastern events, to be dated some time after 553 and before 550 BCE, when the outcome of the war between Cyrus and Astyages was still uncertain but Cyrus turned out to be successful, rather than after 550/549 BCE, when the Persian definitively prevailed over the Medes, or even afterwards, when Croesus would have realized the danger of the increasing Persian power⁵². If so, Croesus' attention to the Medo-Persian war should be dated precisely during the two years of mourning, started in ca. 552 BCE, which could also be meant as a long period of vigilant waiting and remote preparation. Accordingly, the events which had been happening to the east of Lydia since 553 BCE could have dissuaded Croesus from shipbuilding and persuaded him to assure or even extend the eastern border of his kingdom rather than the western, suddenly become less attractive from a strategical point of view. If it was historical, shipbuilding must have been planned and partially fulfilled between ca. 560 BCE (the beginning of Croesus' reign⁵³) or, better, some time (years?) after 560 BCE (certainly after Croesus took his revenge against his enemies and vanquished the Greek mainland) and some time between 553 and 550 BCE, when both a private sorrow and Cyrus' revolt against Astyages distracted

⁴⁹ Hdt. I 6 and 26.

⁵⁰ The three extra years of kingship, allegedly granted to Croesus by the Delphic god, could only be reckoned from Cyrus' victory over Astyages. Cf. Hdt. I 91.

⁵¹ Beloch 1924, 371; La Bua 1977, 32-5. Still at the eve of the war, the Persians did not represent a threat for Lydia in the opinion of Lydian Sandanis: cf. Hdt. I 71.

⁵² On Croesus' war preparations in 549 BCE, cf. instead Schubert 1884, 92 and Radet 1893, 244.

⁵³ Croesus was defeated ca. 547/6 BCE, after reigning for fourteen years and fourteen days (Hdt. I 86): so, his reign began ca. 560 BCE. On 547/6 BCE as the date for the capture of Sardis of *The Nabonidus Chronicle* II 16-17 (Grayson 1975, 107 and 282), see now Rollinger 2008.

his attention. It must have been the last military plan involving the Greeks of the western border. Consequently, it seems possible that Croesus did programme, and partially fulfil, a concrete plan of building a navy to attack the islanders, before giving it up when his attention was driven to the events which were happening on the eastern border. It seems also possible that a Greek tradition reshaped the story of Croesus' renunciation of the plan, by ruling out the true reason (the war between Cyrus and Astyages and the interest it aroused) and inventing in place of it a patriotic role for a Greek Sage, so including him directly and powerfully in the great Lydian history and indirectly in the main history of the Lydian relationship with Media through the anecdote of his successful diplomatic encounter with the Lydian king.

This reconstruction shows however some weak points, so that we cannot completely exclude a different scenario for Croesus' relationship to the Greek seapowers and may even challenge the Herodotean information on the king's project and above all its fulfilment. The starting point is that Herodotus does not know about a merely theoretical project Croesus would have easily given up. He knows of a concrete, and quite advanced, plan of shipbuilding, involving big investments, which the king seems oddly to abandon soon after the diplomatic meeting with Bias. But if the encounter-story is not believable in itself, we have to look for a more important reason behind Croesus' sudden decision to stop the ongoing project. 'All was ready for shipbuilding' (ἐόντων δέ οἱ πάντων ἐτοιμῶν ἐς τὴν ναυπηγίην), so openly declared, means that at least both the material (the cut wood) and the labour (the skilful carpenters) - in a word, the navy yards - were ready to start such a high profile project. Croesus could have renounced it to devote his attention and energies to the Medo-Persian war if it had already broken out. However, the shipbuilding plan is chronologically separated from that war by at least one or more events. Though dimly, Herodotus condenses in ch. 28 precious information about one or more military campaigns Croesus led after the meeting with Bias and before the visit of Solon to Sardis. The chapter is introduced through χρόνου δὲ ἐπιγινόμενου καὶ κατεστραμμένων σχεδὸν πάντων τῶν ἐντὸς Ἄλλου ποταμοῦ οἰκημένων, 'as time went on and almost all the peoples west of the Halys had been subjected', followed by the list of the subdued peoples. The list shows that the greatest part of those campaigns had not been conducted by Croesus *after* stopping dockyards. Most of them had been carried out either by the previous Mermnads or by Croesus himself in the past: see, for instance, the mention in the list of Ionians, Dorians, and Aeolians (subjugated by more than one Mermnad and also by Croesus at the beginning of his reign) and that of the Carians, subdued by Alyattes. However, the inclusion of the list in ch. 28 and the *incipit* itself mean that Croesus achieved one or more campaigns (for

instance to Bithynia or other lands of the catalogue⁵⁴) and so completed the conquest of almost all Anatolia within the Halys *after* the encounter with Bias and *before* the Medo-Persian war. Evidently he did it in fulfilment of the treaty of 585 BCE which only recognized the virtual border between Lydia and Media. On his part, the Median Cyaxares did the same, when he unified under his dominion all of Asia that was beyond the river Halys⁵⁵. In ch. 28, the accent seems to fall on both new and old conquests, that is annexions to Lydia by the Mermnads and Croesus himself, along with an update on the geopolitical situation of the Lydian kingdom at the time of the latter, when those people, whether or not actively subdued by him, were anyway all subjected to him (cf. ὑπ' ἑωυτῷ εἶχε καταστρεψάμενος ὁ Κροῖσος). Also the inclusion of ch. 28 after ch. 26 (on Croesus' attack on the Greek coast) and ch. 27 (on the immediately following project to wage war against the islanders⁵⁶) seems to confirm that, according to Herodotus, Croesus did lead some military expeditions in Anatolia before receiving Solon and the other Greek intellectuals, welcoming the Phrygian Adrastus, undergoing the loss of his beloved son Atys, plunging into a deep mourning of two years and finally taking an interest in Cyrus' and Astyages' war⁵⁷. Accordingly, Croesus would have relinquished an advanced plan for no cogent reasons, since that plan would not have been stopped by the attention paid to the Medo-Persian war - either the wait for an attack or the apprehension the war could arouse - but by some minor campaigns he would have decided to fight without any urgent need and even authorized by an international agreement, abandoning expensive investments in order to concentrate funds on the eastern border which was not even in danger. But why would he have changed his mind and suddenly decided to choose a different war theatre and attack Anatolian peoples in place of the Ionian islands? The reasons for such a refusal remain unclear.

It seems unlikely that Croesus concretely started a shipbuilding plan. Besides the reasons listed above, we must recognize that he had not a compelling interest in attacking the Greek islands, since he had already subjected the cities of the mainland and the politics of the Mermnads concerning the west border of the

⁵⁴ Strab. XII 4, 3 knows of a campaign led by Croesus to Bithynia. Strabo's text, wrongly suspected as corrupt and variously restored, has been accepted instead by Radt 2004, 484. Hdt. VII 30, 2 recalls a pillar set up by Croesus at Cydrara, that he locates between Colossae and the borders of Phrygia and Lydia. The pillar marked the boundary through an inscription, that supposes a campaign which fixed different borders. See Zgusta 1984 § 641 and § 1399.

⁵⁵ Hdt. I 103, 2.

⁵⁶ Cf. τὸ ἐνθεύτεν at § 27.1.

⁵⁷ Cf. the restart of ch. 29 κατεστραμμένων δὲ τούτων καὶ προσεπικτωμένου Κροίσου Λυδοῖσι, ἀπικνέονται ἐς Σάρδις ... οἱ πάντες ἐκ τῆς Ἑλλάδος σοφισταί. Such a restart proves that the *incipit* of ch. 28 helps to date the Greek intellectuals' visits.

kingdom were never merely military. They were also focused on the geopolitics of the Aegean Sea. The Aegean completed through its harbours the roads which crossed Asia Minor and joined to Greece a country which was both philhellenic since at least the days of Gyges and interested in having good commercial and diplomatic relations with the main Greek cities. In other words, the Aegean was meant as a resource both to be controlled through military means and to befriend through all the systems able to develop war into peace⁵⁸. In such a perspective, this natural border should be assured and reinforced but not entirely militarized, so that most political and military attention could be devoted to the east border, historically the more problematical as the usual target of military attacks (for instance, by both the Cimmerians and the Medes⁵⁹). On Croesus' Aegean politics an important role may also have been played by the Ionian sea-powers and the eventuality of an entente among them. Herodotus knows of Samos, Miletus, Phocaea, and perhaps Chios as thalassocracies⁶⁰. Thucydides attributes to them the control of the sea, at least for some time, while fighting with Cyrus⁶¹. Elsewhere Herodotus argues that the Ionian islands surrendered to the Persians for fear of the same fate as the Ionians of the mainland⁶². Yet, he himself also maintains the Ionian islands had nothing to fear from the Persian power which could not yet rely, in those days, on the Phoenicians' fleet⁶³. So, the ancient testimonies are not univocal, but one cannot help but notice that Mytilene and Chios seem to have acted from a strong position at the time of Pactyes' revolt, both asking something in exchange for the latter's delivery to the Persians⁶⁴. Thus, important Ionian navies existed and could be perceived as powerful. Bias' suggestion to the Ionians to leave for Sardinia with the 'common fleet' (κοινὸς στόλος) seems to support this conclusion⁶⁵. An Ionian 'common fleet' could be a real danger for the Lydian king. It is true that the Ionians, and generally speaking the Greeks of Asia Minor, refused to put on an united front on at least two occasions, when they gave support to crown prince Croesus, struggling for the throne, and not to his Greek half-brother Pantaleon, and when they did not bring help to Miletus in war with Sadyattes and Alyattes, except for Chios⁶⁶. However, the role played by the islanders' fleet in Bias' fictional speech to Croesus confirms it could be perceived as dangerous, unless the story itself lacks any sense. A direct threat to all the Ionian sea-powers, founded on an advanced shipbuilding program and deeply involving

⁵⁸ This is the interpretation of Herodotus himself in I 6, 2.

⁵⁹ Hdt. I 15 and 74.

⁶⁰ Phocaea: Hdt. I 163-4 and 166; I 168.

⁶¹ Thuc. I 13 and 16.

⁶² Hdt. I 169, 2.

⁶³ Hdt. I 143, 1.

⁶⁴ Hdt. I 160-1, with Boffo 1983, 45.

⁶⁵ Hdt. I 170.

⁶⁶ Hdt. I 92 and Nic. Dam. *FGrH/BNJ* 90, F 65 (= Xanth. Lyd. *BNJ* 765, F 41a); Hdt. I 18, 3.

the islanders' interests, would have modified the political, military, and commercial equilibrium of the zone and probably the strategies of the Ionians as well, making them join forces against Croesus as they did against Cyrus only some years afterwards, with the exception of Miletus. At worst, this may have been a concrete possibility that Croesus may have taken into account before planning such a policy towards the islands.

Thus, it is easy to surmise that, long after Lydia subdued the Greek cities of the mainland and signed accords with the islands, a tradition was shaped or re-shaped around Bias and his decisive intervention on King Croesus, on the model of other diplomatic missions of the Sage. That tradition needed a counterpart, an enemy, to be exalted. It needed an ongoing plan, a project under way to be stopped in order to let the Greek protagonist steal the show. An important part of such a tradition may have been to forge a plan that could be stopped and the plan cannot have been anything else than navy building, given that Lydia had no sea-power but was meant as the counterpart of the Greek islands which had fleets. The image of the Ionians' common fleet through which Bias warns Croesus may depend on, or mirror, the image of the 'common fleet' (κοινὸς στόλος) through which Bias suggested to the Ionians, defeated by Harpagus, to leave for Sardinia so as to be free from slavery and enjoy prosperity (καὶ οὕτω ἀπαλλαχθέντας σφέας δουλοσύνης εὐδαιμονήσειν). Herodotus, who related this advice, highly praised it, commenting favourably on the prosperity (εὐδαιμονοίειν) it might have brought, had the Ionians followed it⁶⁷. Possibly, the advice featured in the 2,000 line poem that Bias, according to Diogenes Laertius, devoted to Ionia and the way of making it prosperous (τίνα μάλιστα ἂν τρόπον εὐδαιμονοίη). It may have been alluded to in the epigraph on his grave which honoured him as a κόσμον Ἰωσι μέγαν⁶⁸. The tradition about Bias' intervention with Croesus could rely directly or indirectly on Bias' advice to the Ionians, as the shared image of Greek 'slavery' to either Croesus or Cyrus allows us to suppose: cf. τοὺς σὺ δουλώσας ἔχεις, said by Bias to Croesus at ch. 27, and both ἀπαλλαχθέντας .. δουλοσύνης and μένουσι δέ σφι ἐν τῇ Ἰωνίῃ .. οὐκ .. ἐλευθερίῃν ἔτι ἔσομένην, said by Bias to the Ionians at ch. 170. Alternatively, this tradition on Croesus and Bias may have been originated in Ionian circles, probably from Chios or Miletus or else from Samos, which welcomed the Sage as an ambassador and was better focused in the *Life of Aesop*. However, the (extra-Delphic) image of the Greek 'slavery' to Croesus is not exclusive but also appears in other contexts and above all in Herodotus' general interpretation of the relationship between Croesus and the Greeks of Asia⁶⁹.

⁶⁷ Hdt. I 170. On this episode, see Cusumano 1999.

⁶⁸ Diog. Laert. I 185.

⁶⁹ Hdt. I 6, 2-3; I 28; I 92, 1; I 169, 2. On the Greek sources used by Herodotus in the Lydian *logos*, see Talamo 1985, 150-63; Lombardo 1990, 171-214, esp. 184-5; Flower 1991, 57-77. For the source on Greek enslavement by Croesus as Milesian, see La Bua 1977, 21.

To conclude, Croesus' plan of building a navy can be challenged. It can be interpreted as a structural element of a fictional story. In other words, the navy plan could have had a function only in the economy of the anecdote: that of founding and boosting a role for a Greek Sage *versus* the Lydian king.

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Abstract

Herodotus 1.27 knows of a shipbuilding project, planned by Croesus and stopped after a meeting of the king with either Bias or Pittacus. The historicity of such a plan may be challenged. It may be interpreted as a fictional story, aiming to boost the role of a Greek Sage in front of the Lydian king. A role for a Greek able to influence the great Near Eastern history.