

## “Candaules, whom the Greeks name Myrsilus . . . ”

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**C**ANDAULES, whom the Greeks name Myrsilus, tyrant of the Sardsians, was a descendant of Alcaeus, the son of Heracles. Thus Herodotus (1.7.2) introduces us to the story of Gyges and Candaules' wife. His is the earliest surviving version, though the tale found in Nicolaus of Damascus,<sup>1</sup> who names Candaules (S)adyattes, probably goes back to Xanthus of Lydia and may be earlier and based on more authentic sources. The question of priority became a lively one with the publication of *P.Oxy.* XXIII 2382,<sup>2</sup> a literary text in three columns. The second of these yields sixteen iambic trimeters that can be read with confidence as part of a speech in which both Candaules and Gyges are mentioned; Candaules' wife, it appears, is addressing a chorus. Scholars have long suspected that the Croesus-*logos* would make a good dramatic trilogy,<sup>3</sup> and, with few dissenters, the new text was promptly identified as a tragedy.<sup>4</sup> The question of date has been more controversial: Lobel, Page, and Raubitschek<sup>5</sup> argued for the first half of the fifth century, but most have followed Latte and Kamerbeek<sup>6</sup> in dating the drama after Herodotus; Latte even suggested that it might belong to the Alexandrian *Pleias*. The argument for a pre-Herodotean date, however, has been revived by

<sup>1</sup> *FGrHist* 90F47; cf. J. G. Pedley, *Ancient Literary Sources on Sardis* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1972) no. 35.

<sup>2</sup> First published by E. Lobel, "A Greek Historical Drama," *ProcBritAc* 35 (1949) 207-16.

<sup>3</sup> Hans Fohl, *Tragische Kunst bei Herodot* (Leipzig 1913) 5-49, and J. L. Myres, "Herodotus the Tragedian," in O. Elton, ed., *A Miscellany Presented to J. M. McKay* (London 1914) 88-96.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. R. Cantarella, "Il frammento di Ossirinco su Gige," *Dioniso* 15 (1952) 3-31, and H. Lloyd-Jones, "The Gyges Fragment: a new possibility," *PCPS* 182 (1953) 36-43.

<sup>5</sup> Lobel (*supra* n.2); D. L. Page, *A New Chapter in the History of Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge 1951); A. E. Raubitschek, "Gyges in Herodotus," *CW* 48 (1955) 48-51. H. Lloyd-Jones, "Problems in Early Greek Tragedy," *Estudios sobre la tragedia griega* (Madrid 1966) 11-33, suggests that Phrynicus was the author.

<sup>6</sup> K. Latte, "Ein antikes Gygesdrama," *Eranos* 48 (1950) 136-41; J. C. Kamerbeek, "De novo fragmento in quo de Gyge et Candaule agitur," *Mnemosyne* n.s. 5 (1952) 108-15; cf. A. Lesky, *A History of Greek Literature* (London 1966) 326, 746.

Bruno Snell,<sup>7</sup> and the question is not yet closed. It is one of some importance for Herodotean studies: if the tragedy antedates the *Histories*, Herodotus could have used it as a source—though he appears not to have used one tragedy he did know, Aeschylus' *Persae*.<sup>8</sup> If the play postdates the *Histories*, its author almost certainly used Herodotus.

In previous discussion the significance of Herodotus' opening words, "Candaules whom the Greeks name Myrsilus," has not been given its due weight.<sup>9</sup> Herodotus is clearly indicating that there is a Greek story about Candaules in which he is given the name 'Myrsilus'. It is on Herodotus' authority that 'Candaules' was accepted as the authentic Lydian name of this unfortunate king.<sup>10</sup> In Plato he is anonymous, in Xanthus he is (S)adyattes.<sup>11</sup> The Greek tale in which Candaules was named Myrsilus has not survived, and we do not know who the Greeks were who gave him that name, though Archilochus may well have been one of them: Herodotus (1.12.2) notes that Archilochus animadverted upon Gyges.

Surely this is an insuperable objection to any argument that would date the contents of *P.Oxy.* 2382 before Herodotus or make the Herodotus story dependent on this fragmentary drama. The ill-fated king there is named Candaules, not Myrsilus: this is not, therefore, the Greek account that Herodotus knew. We must look elsewhere for that, and Candaules' name may provide a clue.

"The Greeks" may have been right about the name. The similarity of 'Myrsilus' and the Hittite name 'Mursilis' has frequently been noted,<sup>12</sup> and memories of King Mursilis II<sup>13</sup> of the Hittite New Kingdom may have been lively enough to account for it. The Lydians were, it seems, the people known to the Hittites as the *Masha* (Homer's *Maiones*). The last king of the Heraclid (otherwise Tylonid) dynasty, which fell *ca* 700 B.C., has perhaps a better claim to be 'Myrsilus' than 'Candaules,' though the latter was a Lydian name: it was borne, for instance, by the father of Xanthus the historian.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>7</sup> "Gyges und Kroisos als Tragödien-Figuren," *ZPE* 12 (1973) 197–205.

<sup>8</sup> W. W. How and J. Wells, *A Commentary on Herodotus I* (Oxford 1928) 21, suggest that Herodotus used Aeschylus for scenes of the Persian court, but the dissimilarities seem to outweigh the parallels.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. J. A. S. Evans, "Herodotus and the Gyges Drama," *Athenaeum* 33 (1955) 333–36.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. H. Gelzer, "Das Zeitalter des Gyges," *RhM* 35 (1881) 517 n.2.

<sup>11</sup> *Resp.* 2.359c–360b (=Pedley [*supra* n.1] no. 36); Nic. Dam. (*supra* n.1).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. How and Wells (*supra* n.8) *ad* 1.7.2.

<sup>13</sup> O. R. Gurney, *The Hittites* (Harmondsworth 1952) 23f; R. D. Barnett, *CAH*<sup>3</sup> II.1 (1975) 438f; J. G. Macqueen, *The Hittites and their Contemporaries in Asia Minor* (London 1975) 59.

<sup>14</sup> *Suda*, s.v. "Xanthus."

There was also a Lydian god named Candaules, who was equated with Hermes:<sup>15</sup> Hipponax<sup>16</sup> calls the latter *κυνάγχης* (dog-throttler)—appropriately in this context, for Candaules is made up of two Indo-European roots meaning ‘dog’ and ‘to strangle’,<sup>17</sup> and he seems to have received sacrificial meals of dog meat.<sup>18</sup> ‘Candaules’ may have been a sacral name for the king.<sup>19</sup> The reason why Herodotus preferred it, we may suspect, was that it sounded authentically Lydian, whereas ‘Myrsilus’ did not. ‘Myrsilus’ was the Lesbian form of ‘Myrsilus’, and was the name of the tyrant whom the Lesbian poet Alcaeus hated.<sup>20</sup> Rightly or wrongly, to the Greek ear in the fifth century ‘Myrsilus’ sounded Greek, not Lydian.

It is impossible to recover the Greek story about ‘Myrsilus’, *alias* Candaules, that Herodotus knew. Herodotus notes Archilochus’ mention of Gyges, but falls short of saying that Archilochus told the story of Candaules’ wife. In a surviving fragment Archilochus expresses scorn for Gyges’ wealth<sup>21</sup> and may have remarked upon Candaules’ wife as well, since she was the instrument by which Gyges acquired his wealth; but for what it is worth we have the evidence of Rufinus,<sup>22</sup> quoting Iuba Artigraphus, that Herodotus was referring merely to the passage that we have. The Lesbian form of ‘Myrsilus’ might point us to a Lesbian tradition, possibly Alcaeus, but this is pure conjecture. All we can say with certainty is that there was a tradition about Candaules among the eastern Greeks, in which Candaules was named ‘Myrsilus’; but we have no compelling reason to think that this Greek story was the same as that which Herodotus tells.

It is, in fact, hard to find a good folktale parallel for Herodotus’ story. In this it is unlike the Gyges-story in Plato’s *Republic*. Among folktale motifs there is a wealth of husbands cuckolded by trickery, and magic talismans abound, like the ring of Gyges that made him

<sup>15</sup> G. M. A. Hanfmann and W. E. Mierse, *Sardis from Prehistoric to Roman Times* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1983) 94, 133.

<sup>16</sup> M. L. West, ed., *Iambi et Elegi Graeci I* (Oxford 1971) fr.3a; *cf.* How and Wells (*supra* n.8) *ad* Hdt. 1.7.2.

<sup>17</sup> Prehn, *RE* 10.2 (1919) 1860 s.v. “Kandaulas”; C. H. Greenewalt, Jr., *Ritual Dinners in Early Historic Sardis* (Berkeley 1978) 45 n.20.

<sup>18</sup> Greenewalt (*supra* n.17) 45–55; *cf.* N. Robertson, “Hittite Ritual at Sardis,” *ClassAnt* 1 (1982) 122–40.

<sup>19</sup> How and Wells (*supra* n.8) *ad* 1.7.2.

<sup>20</sup> See H. Berve, *Die Tyrannis bei den Griechen I* (Munich 1967) 92f, who notes the oriental origin of Myrsilus’ name; *cf.* A. Heubeck, *Beiträge zur Namenforschung I* (Heidelberg 1949) 50, 270f.

<sup>21</sup> West (*supra* n.16) fr.19 (=Pedley [*supra* n.1] no. 40).

<sup>22</sup> Quoted by West (*supra* n.16); *cf.* Lloyd-Jones (*supra* n.4), who points to the possibility of Archilochus as a source, but fails to produce convincing evidence.

invisible, or the *tarnkappe* of Hades<sup>23</sup>—the parallel is Plato's own (*Resp.* 10.612B)—that allows seducers to enter bedchambers unnoticed. But the story of Candaules in Herodotus is unique: a folktale in which the hero's passion for his wife leads him to invite another man into his bedchamber to see her naked. Pedley<sup>24</sup> has argued that this story must be Greek, for no easterner would summon a courtier to view his wife unclothed, nor would he turn to Delphi for confirmation of his throne. But the best parallel is, in fact, oriental: it is the story from the Book of Esther (1.10–12) of how Ahasuerus (Xerxes) summoned his wife Vashti to display her beauty before his court, and she, like Candaules' wife, took offence. But Ahasuerus ordered Vashti to display herself in regal costume, while Candaules displayed his wife naked, and it was this that violated the customs of Lydia. The Candaules of Herodotus who brought destruction on himself, and was indirectly responsible for the destiny of the Mermnad house that decreed its fall after five generations, is probably a Herodotean creation.

It is hard to define the source of Herodotus' story of Candaules, but the implication of "Candaules, whom the Greeks name Myrsilus" is that he considered it a Lydian one. The tradition in Xanthus<sup>25</sup> told of a shift of power from the ruling dynasty to the Mermnads: a rival family or clan that survived the fall of Croesus, made its peace with the Persians, and retained its wealth, if not its power. As he does in Herodotus, Gyges murdered (S)adyattes in his bedchamber, took over his queen and his throne, and was confirmed by a Delphic oracle. The Delphic connection was probably beyond dispute, for Gyges' dedications there were witness to it,<sup>26</sup> and the Delphic tradition would not underestimate the influence of the oracle upon Lydian affairs.

Out of this or something like it, Herodotus had fashioned the story of the doomed Heraclid king who was "destined to meet an evil fate." No magic talisman was necessary to introduce Gyges into his bedchamber; it was Candaules' own violation of the customs of Lydia that led to his death and the subsequent rise of the Mermnads, who

<sup>23</sup> S. Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*<sup>2</sup> (Bloomington 1966). Gyges' ring (Thompson D1361.15) is a fairly common motif, though the magic cap that renders a person invisible is even more common. Thompson K1349.10 is an Indian myth of admission into a woman's bedchamber by means of a *tarnkappe*: a close parallel to Plato's Gyges-myth.

<sup>24</sup> J. G. Pedley, *Sardis in the Age of Croesus* (Norman 1968) 36.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. H. Herter, "Von Xanthos dem Lyder zu Aineias von Gaza: Tylon und andere Auferweckte," *RhM* 108 (1965) 189–212, esp. 189f.

<sup>26</sup> Hdt. 1.13–14; cf. How and Wells, *ad loc.*

were in turn doomed to suffer retribution in the fifth generation. Croesus, like Sophocles' Oedipus, was living out a family curse unrecognized by himself.<sup>27</sup> The parallel with Sophocles is striking, but the two authors belonged to the same intellectual milieu: we should resist the temptation to make Herodotus' Croesus-*logos* dependent upon a dramatic original. As for the 'Myrsilus' of the Greek tradition, Herodotus rejected the name as too obviously Greek. He preferred the name 'Candaules' because it was authentically Lydian.

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley 1971) 104-28; for a similar view, R. Coleman, "The Rôle of the Chorus in Sophocles' *Antigone*," *PCPS* n.s. 18 (1972) 4-27.