

Sex, Tyranny, and Hippias' Incest Dream (Herodotos 6.107)

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In memoriam Toni Raubitschek

IN ONE OF SIGMUND FREUD'S favorite classical quotations, Iokaste tells Oidipous that "many mortals in dreams have slept with their mothers."¹ Perhaps she was right. Much later, in the second century A.D., Artemidoros collected a fair range of material from the dreams which his clients brought him for interpretation: dreams with incest shown directly, not deduced by psychoanalytical decoding.² The meanings, thought Artemidoros, varied widely according to the dreamer's circumstances and the details of the dream—for example, whether the dreamer's mother was alive or dead at the time of the dream, and what position they used. Such dreams might bode well or ill, and they are hardly ever about sex. Symbolic interpretation does much to take the shock out of them. As White suggests, "since the forbidden impulse was not disguised

¹Soph. *OT* 981–982; so also Pl. *Resp.* 9.571C–D. Freud cites the *OT* passage a number of times, usually as a proof-text for the Oedipus complex (references from *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, transl. James Strachey et al. [London 1953–74]): *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) IV 263–264; *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901) VI 178 n.2; *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1916–17) XVI 330–331, 338; "Some Additional Notes on Dream-Interpretation as a Whole" (1925) XIX 132.

²Artem. 1.79. The difference between these dreams and ours is striking, but we need not doubt on that account that the dreams really happened, as does George Devereux, *Dreams in Greek Tragedy: An Ethno-Psycho-Analytical Study* (Berkeley 1976) xxii.

in the dream images themselves, this was subsequently and necessarily accomplished through an interpretation, which attached an innocent symbolic meaning to it."³ For Freud, dreams about something else prove on analysis to be really about incest, but for Artemidoros it is the other way around.

Besides the generalizations in Sophokles and Plato and the anonymous case histories in Artemidoros, we have a few historic incest dreams on record, or rather, a few incest dreams imputed to historic figures. This paper will examine one of them. The story is doubtful, but the role of the dream in it is significant—perhaps all the more significant for being, quite likely, made up. Its significance, I shall argue, has less to do with the traditional concerns of dream interpretation—the fate and the inner thoughts of the dreamer—than with what those who told the story thought about him. Like Oidipous, our dreamer was also called a *tyrannos*; that may not be a coincidence.

When the Persians landed at Marathon in 490 B.C, they had on board as adviser and guide Hippias, who had been deposed as tyrant of Athens twenty years earlier. The night before the landing, Herodotos tells us, Hippias

had seen a strange vision in his sleep. He seemed to have intercourse with his mother, and conjectured the dream to mean that he would be restored to Athens, recover the power which he had lost, and afterwards live to a good old age in his native country. Such was the sense in which he interpreted the vision. ... He brought the fleet to anchor off Marathon, and marshalled the bands of the barbarians as they disembarked. As he was thus employed it chanced that he sneezed and at the same time coughed with more violence than was his wont.

³Robert J. White, *The Interpretation of Dreams: Oneirocritica by Artemidorus* (Park Ridge 1975) 81 n.97. Artemidoros is good at finding "innocent symbolic meaning" in disturbing dreams. For example, eating in a dream may signify wealth, so a nightmare about being thrown to wild beasts is auspicious for a poor man, "for he will be able to feed many" (2.54); a dream of eating one's father, which would certainly get a psychoanalyst's attention, may bode coming into an inheritance (5.42).

Now as he was a man advanced in years, and the greater number of his teeth were loose, it so happened that one of them was driven out with the force of the cough, and fell down into the sand. Hippias took all the pains he could to find it, but the tooth was nowhere to be seen; whereupon he fetched a deep sigh, and said to the bystanders, "After all the land is not ours, and we shall never be able to bring it under. All my share in it is the portion of which my tooth has possession." So Hippias believed that this fulfilled his dream. (Hdt. 6.107, transl. Rawlinson)

Scholarly attention given to this odd tale has focused mostly on two aspects of it. Some note the form of the story as a trick-oracle tale in which a person interprets a prophetic sign (oracle, dream, omen) as favorable but finds it fulfilled to his hurt in an unexpected and devious way.⁴ Herodotos likes such stories: Kambyses was told that he would die in Agbatana, which he thought meant the city in Media, but he met with a freak accident in the town of Agbatana in Syria; Kroisos was told to flee when a mule became king of the Medes, so he thought he was safe, but he was conquered by Kyros, whose mixed parentage (half Mede and half Persian) made him a mule figuratively.⁵ Similarly, Hippias interpreted the dream as favorable: possessing his mother meant that he would possess his motherland. According to ancient ways of thinking about dreams, this was reasonable enough. That is how Artemidoros (1.79) interprets incest dreams experienced by politicians, and similar dreams with similar meanings are imputed to other

⁴Roland Crahay, *La littérature oraculaire chez Hérodote* (Paris 1956) 255–256; Peter Frisch, *Die Träume bei Herodot* (Meisenheim am Glan 1968) 25–27. Frisch 27 notes this dream as "der einzige trügerische Traum bei Herodot," but dreams in Herodotos are often misinterpreted: Edmond Lévy, "Le rêve chez Hérodote," *Ktema* 20 (1995) 17–27.

⁵Hdt. 3.64; 1.55.1–56.1, 91.5–6. These are examples of common patterns in oracle tales, called respectively (after examples in Shakespeare) the Jerusalem Chamber and Birnam Wood types by Joseph Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle* (Berkeley 1978) 58–65.

historic figures.⁶ Hippias is doomed to disappointment, however, because his symbolic dream receives merely symbolic fulfillment: only his tooth regains a place in Attika.

Other scholars have focused on the symbolism of Hippias' dream and the loss of his tooth. Thus the incest in Hippias' dream has been taken as a sign of his impending death, his final union with mother earth.⁷ The tooth has been taken variously as an omen of death or loss, a phallic symbol in a symbolic castration, and metaphoric semen deposited in the earth.⁸

This study will look at the story from a wider angle, with more attention to Hippias' situation at Marathon, and incidentally with more attention to the nastiness of the incest. Our concern will be less with Hippias' fortunes or inner thoughts than with what the dream is doing in Herodotos' narrative and with what it might mean to the historian and his audience.

What was Hippias doing at Marathon in the first place, and why did he guide the Persian fleet there, of all places? Herodotos gives him tactical reasons: it was close to Eretria, which the Persians attacked before moving against Athens, and it was a good place for cavalry (Hdt. 6.102). But the picture of Hippias at Marathon would likely raise other associations as well, for he was attempting to follow in his father's footsteps. Hippias' father Peisistratos had seized power as tyrant in Athens three times (Hdt. 1.59–64, *Ath. Pol.* 13–15). The first two times, he relied heavily on his Athenian partisans and allies, but his support broke down, and he was expelled. On his third attempt, he planned better, he took his time, and he used a different

⁶Julius Caesar, either early in his career when he was quaestor in Spain (Suet. *Iul.* 7.2; Dio Cass. 37.52.2, 41.24.2) or shortly before he crossed the Rubicon (Plut. *Caes.* 32.6); the Messenian leader Komon (Paus. 4.26.3).

⁷Crahay (*supra* n.4); but Hippias does not die in Herodotos' narrative.

⁸The views of, respectively, Campbell Bonner, "The Omen in Herodotus VI. 107," *CP* 1 (1906) 235–238 (with some folklore parallels rather distant from Hippias' situation); Frisch (*supra* n.4) 26, further developed by Justin Glenn, "The Dream of Hippias," *RSC* 20 Suppl. (1972) 5–7; and R. Drew Griffith, "Hippias' Missing Tooth (Hdt. 6. 107)," *AHB* 8 (1994) 121–122.

strategy. He went abroad and made money and contacts, which after ten years enabled him to raise an army. He then landed at Marathon, defeated the Athenian army at Pallene, took over the city, and ruled peacefully until his death.

Hippias' situation in 490 was different from his father's decades earlier, but in broad outline and in a few details such as arriving from Eretria (Hdt. 1.62.1, 6.102), he was trying to repeat his father's success: return to Athens, as tyrant, by landing at Marathon, with a foreign army at his back.⁹ This is not to suggest that Hippias' strategy was determined by any unconscious Oedipal wishes. But the parallels could well have been noted by Athenians at the time. Hippias' putative dream underlines them: Hippias was trying to take his father's place in one way; no wonder, then, that he should dream of taking his father's place in another. The parallel is prejudicial, not neutral. Hippias' dream involved something shameful and forbidden; such, by implication, were his ambitions and strategy. "The incestuous dream implies a grim verdict on tyranny, ranking it with the foulest crimes."¹⁰

Not only does Hippias' dream show him acting like his father; it also shows him acting like a tyrant. To understand this, we need to examine the sex lives of Greek tyrants (at least as portrayed in legend, literature, and anecdote), which were thought to be lurid and varied. Historically, tyrants were a

⁹John Hart, *Herodotus and Greek History* (London 1982) 92: "Hippias, now an old man, may well have been living in the past."

¹⁰Reginald Walter Macan, *Herodotus: The Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Books* II (London 1895) 154. Interpreting the dream as an implied criticism of Hippias would be in keeping with Greek dream-interpretation. Despite his fondness for explaining away disturbing features of dreams (*supra* n.3), Artemidoros sometimes interprets shameful, disgusting events in dreams as evidence of something shameful and disgusting in the dreamer's character or his impending fate. This colors some of his interpretations of dreams involving illicit sex (Artem. 1.78–80), and he lays down a principle (although he readily admits exceptions) that dreams involving acts contrary to nature and custom are generally inauspicious (4.2). For example, removing temple property is wrong except for priests and seers, so dreams of temple-robbing are auspicious for priests and seers but inauspicious for anyone else (3.3).

mixed lot, many of them capable rulers. But Greek writers also developed a picture of the stock tyrant, who achieves excessive power and falls into *hybris* and license. Sometimes, *hybris* and license extend to the bedroom. This, in classical tyrannography, can take several forms, marked repeatedly by three intertwined themes—too tightly intertwined to be sharply distinguished in our discussion. Since a tyrant holds unrestricted power and is accountable to no one, he can have sex with anyone he pleases: he enjoys complete license. Since he can use his considerable power to compel submission, he may engage in sex with a view to bullying and degrading his sex objects and their families. This corresponds to our ideas of sexual abuse and sexual harassment and is sometimes described as *hybris* rather than *eros*.¹¹ Finally, since tyrants also disregard *nomoi*, they may commit other kinds of sexual transgressions as well, exotic or abnormal acts contrary to law and custom. "Perversion of sex (as it might be called) is in fact characteristic of tyrants."¹² They would be well represented in a Greek version of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*.

We may begin with some general statements about the things tyrants do. In Herodotos' debate on constitutions, Otanes' speech against monarchy develops an anticipation of Lord Acton's dictum that absolute power corrupts absolutely: a man who gets it into his hands forgets himself and does as he pleases. The most serious of his abuses are that he "upsets the

¹¹ For the *hybris*-not-*eros* formulation, see Plut. *Mor.* 251 A and 768 E (quoting a tragic fragment), Arist. *Pol.* 1311b19–20. On *hybris* in bed, see further N. R. E. Fisher, *Hybris: A Study in the Values of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greece* (Warminster 1992) 28–29, 104–111.

¹² Henry R. Immerwahr, *Form and Thought in Herodotus* (Cleveland 1966) 285 n.135. On sexual misconduct by tyrants, see also Brian M. Lavelle, *The Sorrow and the Pity: A Prolegomenon to a History of Athens Under the Peisistratids*, c. 560–510 B.C. (*Historia Einzelschr.* 80 [Stuttgart 1993]) 119–121. Immerwahr also makes a more pointed brief adumbration of my argument on Hippias' dream at 254 n.51: "The motif identifying the relation of a tyrant with his city as incest with his mother may be a development from the *topos* that a tyrant 'rapes women' (3.80.5)."

traditional laws, rapes women (βιάται γυναῖκας), and puts men to death without trial" (Hdt. 3.80.5). The speaker of [Dem.] 17.3 echoes Otanes on two out of three points: people under a tyranny are apt to be put to death without trial and have their wives and children outraged (ὕβριζομένους). The Theseus of Euripides' *Suppliants* makes a similar point: "Why bring up daughters properly in your house for a tyrant's pleasure whenever he wants, a grief for those who raise them? I'd rather die than see my children bedded by force" (Eur. *Supp.* 452–455). According to Polybios, tyranny arose in early states out of kingship when hereditary kings, secure in their power and wealth, turned to gratifying their desires "and supposed that rulers ought to have different clothing from their subjects, and different pleasures in food and the ways of serving it, and indulgence in sex without refusal, even with people with whom it was not proper" (Polyb. 6.7.6–8). Likewise, aristocrats secure in their position made the same mistake, "some of them turning to raping women and kidnapping boys" (Polyb. 6.8.5). So also with would-be tyrants in Plato. The possessor of the ring of Gyges, assured of tyrannical power, might with impunity "go into houses and sleep with whomever he wanted" (Pl. *Resp.* 1.360B–C). The tyrannical man of *Republic* 9 might not actually do such things; he is not a ruling tyrant, he merely has a tyrannical soul, that is, one governed by appetite rather than by reason. But the principle is there. In his dreams (which for Plato as for Freud represent hidden wishes), he "does not shrink from trying to sleep with his mother or with anyone else, man, god, or animal" (9.571C–D). In waking life, he is given to "festivals, wild parties, feasts, *hetairai*, and all that sort of thing—all the things of the soul which the indwelling tyrant Eros directs" (573D). Eros beguiles him into doing "tyrannical things" (τῶν τυραννικῶν) such as mistreating his parents (574B–C). Plato's "tyrant Eros," then, acts like the tyrant of Otanes' speech. So does the tyrant of Lucian's *Kataplous* (26), who went about "ruining

virgins, shaming youths," and putting men to death without trial—among them "men who were plotted against because of their pretty wives, or who complained over the *hybris* done to their kidnapped sons." So also in Lucian's *Tyrannicide* (5, 10): a tyrant drags off young men, wives, and girls to satisfy his lust.

This is the stock theme of the tyrant's lust and abuse of power. We also find variations. Aristotle considers how a tyrant can stay in power by acting less like a tyrant. Among other things, "it must be clear that he does not commit outrages (ὕβριζοντα) against any of his subjects, either boy or girl, nor does anyone about him" (Arist. *Pol.* 1314b24–26; so also 1315b14–24, Isoc. 3.36–37. Ath. 540E expresses surprise that Polykrates did not similarly take advantage of his position). Xenophon's Hieron takes a different tack and debunks the common notion that tyrants enjoy immense wealth, power, and luxury. Travel is risky when you have to worry about plots behind your back, praise from courtiers is suspect, and a steady diet of gourmet food becomes tiresome (Xen. *Hieron* 1.11–25). As for τὰ ἀφροδίσια (1.26–38), a tyrant can only marry beneath himself, and affairs with women who are already under his control are unsatisfying. Affairs with boys are no more rewarding, for similar but more complex reasons: a tyrant cannot know the delights of longing when he can gratify his desire immediately, and he does not know whether his beloved's favors are granted willingly or under compulsion. "The tyrant can never be sure that he is loved" (τῷ δὲ τυράννῳ οὐποτ' ἔστι πιστεῦσαι, ὡς φιλεῖται, 1.37). Besides, disaffected mistresses and boyfriends sometimes join in assassination plots (we will consider some examples shortly). Plutarch (*Mor.* 253C–E) tells how the citizens of Elis played a different variation on the theme when they assassinated their tyrant Aristotimos. At first, they wanted to rape his daughters and then kill them (πάντως μὲν ἀνελεῖν, αἰκίσασθαι δὲ καὶ καθυβρίσαι πρότερον), but then they decided against raping them because that would be "acting like

tyrants" (τολμῶσι καὶ ἀσελγαίνουσι τοῖς τυράννοις ὅμοια). So they acted like democrats and allowed the girls to commit suicide with their virginity intact. (The Lokrians, according to Ath. 541D–E, showed less restraint when they overthrew Dionysios the Younger. They raped his wife and children, tortured them, killed them, cut them up, ate them, and threw the leftover bits into the sea.)

All these passages show in one way or another a reaction against the idea that a tyrant can gratify his lust at will. Aristotle finds it imprudent, Xenophon finds it overrated, and the Eleans rise (slightly) above it. All show, then, that the idea was there to be reacted against.

So far, we have been discussing tyrants and tyranny in general. We find the same themes in tales about particular tyrants, and a few (included to fill out our picture) about monarchs, oligarchs, and tyrants' henchmen. The tales are of doubtful historic value, but that is not our concern. We are dealing not with the facts of tyranny but with its image—not with what tyrants and their ilk really did, but with what people thought, feared, and fantasized that they did. Whatever their activities in real life, tyrants in legend and anecdote often act just as Otanes says they will, harassing and abusing their subjects sexually.

Plutarch compiles edifying tales of female virtue menaced by lustful tyrants or their underlings. The ladies responded by preferring death—their own, their ravishers', or both—to dishonor.¹³ Nisaïos of Syracuse was said to be given to ostentation, luxury, and *hybris* against women and children (Theopomp. *FGrHist* 115 F 187 = Ath. 436A–B). Aristotimos of Elis had maidens dragged off to be outraged (*ad stuprum*, Just. 26.1). Dionysios the Younger had a large room strewn with thyme and roses and summoned Lokrian maidens there to

¹³Plut. *Mor.* 250F–251C, 257E–258C (the story is also in 768B–D), 258D–F; see also Paus. 8.47.6.

gratify him (Ath. 541C–D). A group of Rhodian oligarchs disgraced upper-class ladies and corrupted boys and youths. They also played dice for freeborn women of the citizen class, with the loser assigned to procure the lady at stake for the winner (Theopomp. F 121 = Ath. 444F–445A). Hostile orators found it easy to impute outrages against women and children to tyrants and the like: so Chaireas about the Four Hundred (Thuc. 8.74.3, 86.3), Lysias and Isokrates about the Thirty (Lys. 12.98, Isoc. 4.114), and for that matter Hypereides about the Macedonians (Hypereid. 6.20, 36) and Aischines about Timarchos when he held a post on Andros (Aeschin. 1.107). Perhaps making such charges was too easy, for Chaireas (says Thucydides) was lying, and Lysias and Hypereides speak only of thwarted (hence unverifiable) intentions, of what would have happened had not something intervened. No matter; they could expect people to believe that tyrants did such things.

As with real tyrants, so with tragic ones. Aigisthos did outrageous things with the women of Argos (Eur. *El.* 945–948). The Zeus of the *Prometheus Bound*, who is repeatedly referred to as a tyrant,¹⁴ goes after Io in a tyrannical way ([Aesch.] *PV* 645–672): persuasion at first, then a threat of force when persuasion fails. Being no ordinary human tyrant, he can use dreams for persuasion, oracles as go-betweens, and the thunderbolt for the threat of force, but the dynamics are the same. Io's narrative of her family's growing alarm and helplessness captures the fear Greeks must have felt over how tyrants could use their power. For that matter, what about Oidipous, the incestuous *tyrannos*? It may be objected that Oidipous is a proven and respected ruler, not a tyrant in the

¹⁴ τύραννος and cognates at [Aesch.] *PV* 10, 222, 224, 305, 310, 357, 736, 756, 761, 909, 942, 957, 996, mostly spoken by Prometheus of Zeus and his regime. On Zeus as tyrant, see further George Thomson, "Ζεὺς τύραννος: A Note on the *Prometheus Vincitus*," *CR* 43 (1929) 3–5, and *Aeschylus: The Prometheus Bound* (Cambridge 1932) 6–10; Anthony J. Podlecki, *The Political Background of Aeschylean Tragedy* (Ann Arbor 1966) 101–122.

bad sense, and that his incest is committed unwittingly and unintentionally. But tyranny is much talked about in the play. τυραννίς and cognates appear repeatedly, mostly of sovereign power in Thebes,¹⁵ and not always in a neutral sense. The Chorus worries about the connection between tyranny and *hybris* (OT 873, whatever text we adopt), and Oidipous comes close to condemning Teiresias and Kreon to death without trial, which is one of the worst of tyrannical abuses according to Otanes' speech (Hdt. 3.80.5) Here are pieces of the tyrannical pattern. The incest, witting or not, shows more of the pattern: tyrants do strange things in bed.

Zeus' pursuit of Io brings us to one of the chief fears of the tyrant's libido, the ways a tyrant could use his power against the reluctant. Philip V of Makedonia was (or so ran the story) a shameless womanizer. If women refused him, he would take noisy bands of revelers (κῶμοι) to their houses for a sort of obnoxious serenade. He also harassed their sons and husbands.¹⁶ Tyrants could be expected to break up lovers, or try to.¹⁷ The story of Harmodios and Aristogeiton is the best-known example. Hipparchos, Hippias' brother, repeatedly made overtures to Harmodios and was rejected, or so runs Thucydides' version (Thuc. 6.54.1–4, 56.1–2; cf. *Ath. Pol.* 18.2). Harmodios' lover Aristogeiton feared that Hipparchos would take by force what he could not win by persuasion, so he plotted to assassinate Hipparchos. The fear was not justified by the event (Hipparchos settled for a vindictive insult against Harmodios' sister), but it was reasonable given expectations about how a tyrant in such a situation would act. In a similar but less famous

¹⁵Soph. OT 128, 380, 408, 514, 535, 541, 588 (*bis*), 592, 799, 873, 925, 939, 1043, 1095.

¹⁶Polyb. 10.26.2–6; Liv. 27.31.5–8, 32.21.24.

¹⁷Plut. *Mor.* 760B–D, with some anecdotes (exceptions that illustrate the rule) about Alexander refusing to exercise *droit de tyran* because a courtier of his was genuinely in love with the lady in question (cf. Kyros' restraint with a beautiful captive, Xen. *Cyr.* 5.1.2–18, 6.1.31–49). On the opposition of tyranny and love affairs, see also Pl. *Symp.* 182B–D.

story from Herakleia in Italy, Antileon killed an unnamed tyrant who was putting pressure on his beloved, Hipparinos (Parth. 7).

Sometimes the victims struck back. A tyrant's *hybris*, especially sexual *hybris*, against his subjects was a prime motive for assassination. Aristotle notes that *πολλὰ δ' ἐπιθέσεις γεγέννηται καὶ διὰ τὸ εἰς τὸ σῶμα αἰσχύνεσθαι τῶν μονάρχων τινάς* (*Pol.* 1311b7–8) and devotes a section of the *Politics* to the matter (1311a23–b37). Plut. *Mor.* 768E–F makes the same point with many of the same anecdotes, Dio Chrys. 6.44 also mentions the idea, and there are examples from other sources as well.¹⁸ The assassination of Hipparchos is only one example out of many. Euagoras, the ruler of Cyprus, was assassinated by an outraged eunuch in the upshot of a sex scandal.¹⁹ The assassins of Archelaos of Makedonia included two of his former male lovers who felt used and mistreated (Arist. *Pol.* 1311b8–21, Plut. *Mor.* 768F)—although in other versions, the cause was a coup d'état ([Pl.] *Alc.* 2 141D) or a hunting accident (Diod. 14.37.6). Periander of Ambrakia paid with his life for an insult, asking his boyfriend if he had gotten pregnant yet (Arist. *Pol.* 1311a40–b2, Plut. *Mor.* 768F); for the young favorite sleeping with a tyrant was one thing, but being treated as a woman by one was another. Aristodemos of Kymai was assassinated with some help from a resentful mistress (Plut. *Mor.* 262A–D). Alexander of Pherai was assassinated with some help from both a resentful wife and her brother, a resentful boyfriend (Plut. *Pel.* 35.3–7, *Mor.* 768F).

Hybris is a broad term. Once it is established that tyrants

¹⁸Some, no doubt, in the compilation entitled "Revenge-Killing of Tyrants" (τυράννων ἀναιρέσεις ἐκ τιμωρίας) by Aristotle's pupil Phainias of Eresos (Ath. 90E–F, 438C); fragments, including Parth. 7 noted above, in Fritz Wehrli, *Die Schule des Aristoteles* IX (Basel 1957) 13.

¹⁹The details are obscure and variously reported: Arist. *Pol.* 1311b5–7, Theopomp. *FGrHist* 115 F 103.12, Diod. 15.47.8 (who mistakenly makes Nikokles the victim).

commit it against women and boys, we find tales of *hybris* in many forms, often with sexual overtones. These cases are not confined to rape and sexual harassment, but they are similarly insulting and apt to provoke similar resentment. This does much to explain why Sokles' denunciation of tyranny in Herodotos culminates in the story of what happened when Melissa, the dead wife of Periander of Corinth, appeared to him in a dream and complained that she was cold in the underworld. Periander provided for her by summoning the leading women of Corinth to a festival in their finest gowns, ordering his bodyguards to strip them, and burning their clothes as an offering to Melissa (Hdt. 5.92η; Diog. Laert. 1.96 records another version). This action, which Sokles cites as the crowning example of tyrannical excess and abuse, strikes some as ludicrous and anticlimactic,²⁰ but it touches a sensitive nerve in the Greek male consciousness. It is power turned against defenseless womanhood, a symbolic rape, recalling the worst of the tyrant's misdeeds in Otanes' speech. Hipparchos' insult against Harmodios' sister, when he declared her unfit to bear the basket in the Panathenaia, led to his assassination. This was certainly *hybris* against a woman, an assault on her honor if not on her person.²¹ Peisistratos committed a different sort of insult when he married Megakles' daughter to seal a political alliance the second time he seized power in Athens. He had children by a previous marriage and did not want to have more, so he had intercourse with her οὐ κατὰ νόμον (Hdt. 1.61.1)—that is, in an irregular way, but the

²⁰Kenneth H. Waters, *Herodotos on Tyrants and Despots: A Study in Objectivity* (Historia Einzelschr. 15 [Wiesbaden 1971]) 14; Hart (*supra* n.9) 52.

²¹Thuc. 6.56.1. The nature of the insult is unclear, but declaring the girl unfit may have contained an innuendo that she was no longer a virgin—a public affront to her chastity which her brother was bound to avenge: so Brian M. Lavelle, "The Nature of Hipparchos' Insult to Harmodios," *AJP* 107 (1986) 318–331. As Frank Romer has suggested to me, it might have been even worse. Tyrants seduce and debauch, and Hipparchos had recently tried, without success, to seduce Harmodios: what was Harmodios to think that the scorned Hipparchos had done to his sister that he would know about her virginity?

phrasing gives us another twist on the tyrant's disregard of sexual (and other) *nomoi*. The insult here was that Peisistratos was using his aristocratic wife for pleasure rather than (in the words of the classical Athenian formula for marriage) "for the procreation of legitimate offspring." Her father was enraged and felt that he was being dishonored (ἀτιμάζεσθαι), so he drove his one-time partner out of Athens.

Most of these tyrant tales involve hybristic sex, sex under pressure or compulsion. The stories prey on fears of what a tyrant might do with unlimited power. Peisistratos' "unlawful" relations with Megakles' daughter, however, bring us to another theme in the picture of tyranny. Tyrants practice outlandish and perverted forms of sex. Periander of Corinth is said to have committed incest with his mother.²² He sent 300 Kerkyraian youths from good families to Sardis to be castrated (Hdt. 3.48). He also killed his wife Melissa (Hdt. 3.50.1), "persuaded by the slanders of his concubines, whom he later burned" (Diog. Laert. 1.94), and committed necrophilia with her corpse (Hdt. 5.92η3). Periander was a magnet for tales of tyrannical outrages, and this selection covers a wide range of *nomoi* violated. Harder to assess is the outrage perpetrated by Aristodemos of Kymai, who, according to Plutarch, "outdid himself in baseness by his unjust conduct towards women and free-born boys" (ἦν μὲν ἐν ταῖς περὶ γυναικας καὶ παῖδας ἐλευθέρους ἀδικίαις αὐτὸς ἑαυτοῦ μοχθηρότερος, *Mor.* 261F). What did he do that was so terrible? He made the boys grow their hair long and wear jewelry like girls, and he made the girls dress like boys. Whatever Aristodemos' purposes (which Plutarch does not explain), this enforced cross-dressing was a violation of sexual *nomoi* in another sense, the customs and practice in dressing for the two sexes. Dionysios of Syracuse married two wives in one day (Diod. 14.44.5–45.1, Plut. *Dion*

²²Diog. Laert. 1.96 (1.94–96 gives most of the anecdotes on Periander cited below); Parth. 17.

3.2). Gernet has argued that tyrants' political marriages had their roots in archaic marriage patterns.²³ This is an important study, but not equally strong in all its parts, and Gernet's evidence that these archaic marriage patterns included bigamy (as distinguished from having a wife and a concubine) is scanty, uncertain, and rather dependent on myth for evidence. By prevailing community standards in the fourth century, Dionysios' double wedding was extraordinary enough to cause comment, including reports (preserved by Plutarch) that he shared his nights equally between his wives and kept it a secret which marriage he consummated first. As a tyrant, he was living on a different plane from ordinary men.

Sexual transgressions also show up in Herodotos' stories of eastern monarchs, who often show tyrannical traits. In Herodotos' telling, Kambyses married two of his sisters and killed one of them (Hdt. 3.31–32). Mykerinos raped his daughter (2.131); two other kings of Egypt, Rhampsinitos and Cheops, were said to have prostituted theirs (2.121ε2, 126). Indeed, Herodotos frames his work with two stories of sexual transgressions by autocrats. In the beginning, Kandaules contrived to have his minister Gyges see his wife naked (1.8–12). Near the end, Xerxes fell in love with his sister-in-law and had an affair with her daughter, his niece, who was also married to Xerxes' son (9.108–113). In both cases, the monarch's illicit desires had explosive consequences. The parallels, and the significance of framing the *Histories* with these stories, have been well discussed by Wolff.²⁴ At the subregal level, Artayktes, who ruled Sestos like a tyrant (ἐτυράννευε) for Xerxes, desecrated the shrine of Protesilaos. Among other enormities, "he copulated with women in the sanctuary" (9.116.3), "brought women into

²³Louis Gernet, "Marriages of Tyrants," in *The Anthropology of Ancient Greece* (Baltimore 1981) 289–302 (originally published 1954).

²⁴Erwin Wolff, "Das Weib des Masistes," *Hermes* 92 (1964) 51–58 = Walter Marg, ed., *Herodot: Eine Auswahl aus der neueren Forschung* (Wege der Forschung 26³ [Darmstadt 1982]) 668–678.

the temple and committed lawless acts (ᾠθέμιστα) with them" (7.33). For this the Greeks put him to death.

Sexual transgression is not the stock tyrant's main vice. Aristotle has little to say about it, considering how much he has to say about tyranny. It does not much interest Plato's aspiring tyrant, Thrasymachos in the *Republic*, or his soulmate, Kallikles in the *Gorgias*. Kallikles advocates using power to gratify desire and pursue pleasure (*Grg.* 491D–500A; the usual words are ἐπιθυμία and ἡδονή), and lust plays an important part in Sokrates' discussion of the tyrannical soul in *Republic* 9. But neither Kallikles nor Thrasymachos is much focused on sex. They both have more sober and sinister things on their minds. Writers of the archaic period stress the tyrant's wealth more than his sexual opportunities.²⁵ The tyrant's sexual transgressions get more attention from writers with a flair for drama, such as Herodotos, Plutarch, and Lucian. Still, illicit sex is a part of a nexus of power, corruption, and abuse which appears in much Greek thinking on tyranny and does much to explain Herodotos' tale of Hippias' dream.²⁶

Illicit sex expresses and dramatizes some of the leading ideas about tyranny, ideas which we have found illustrated both in and out of Herodotos. A tyrant can live as he pleases, and that includes having sex with anyone he pleases; lack of

²⁵ Archil. fr.19, Solon fr.33.5–7 West. On wealth and the attractions of tyranny, see W. R. Connor, "Tyrannis Polis," in J. D'Arms and J. Eadie, edd., *Ancient and Modern: Essays in Honor of Gerald F. Else* (Ann Arbor 1977) 95–109, esp. 98–101; J. L. O'Neil, "The Semantic Usage of *Tyrannos* and Related Words," *Antichthon* 20 (1986) 26–40, esp. 28–30.

²⁶ The nexus of abnormalities and perversions associated with tyrants extends a good deal further: see J.-P. Vernant, "From Oedipus to Periander: Lameness, Tyranny, Incest in Legend and History," *Arethusa* 15 (1982) 19–38; Michael H. Jameson, "Labda, Lambda, Labdakos," in Mario A. Del Chiaro, ed., *Corinthiaca: Studies in Honor of Darrell A. Amyx* (Columbia 1986) 3–11; and (ranging most widely) Daniel Ogden, *The Crooked Kings of Ancient Greece* (London 1997).

restraint lets lust run rampant.²⁷ A tyrant commits *hybris*, including rape and sexual harassment. A tyrant disregards *nomoi*: as a piece of political theory, this means that he disregards juridical *nomoi*, governing arbitrarily and not respecting the rule of law.²⁸ In a more melodramatic or rhetorical mode, it can mean that he disregards sexual *nomoi*, the proper standards of behavior. The tyrant stands apart from the rest of humanity, enviable for the power and freedom he enjoys but terrifying because he breaks all the rules and might break them against us. Hippias' dream associates him with one element in the nexus of power, abuse, and sexual transgression; hence it implicates him in the others.

Fuller consideration of what Hippias' dream does in Herodotos' text brings us to the question of Herodotos' politics. Herodotos exhibits a fairly low opinion of Peisistratos and his sons.²⁹ He begins his story of Peisistratos with an omen warning Peisistratos' father not to have a son at all (1.59.1–3), and his account of the tyrant's rise to power (1.59–64) focuses heavily on the dramatic and sensational: Peisistratos' various tricks to seize power; his mistreatment of Megakles' daughter; his reliance on mercenaries, money, foreign support, and hostages to secure his position. Hippias, at least after his brother's assassination, ruled harshly (5.55, 6.123.2). Herodotos has little to say about the tyranny's accomplishments. The only specific

²⁷On the tyrant's power and license more generally, see James F. McGlew, *Tyranny and Political Culture in Ancient Greece* (Ithaca 1993) 24–35.

²⁸Thus Otanes notes that the tyrant is "not held accountable" (ἀνευθύνην Hdt. 3.80.3; a magistrate in a democracy, on the other hand, is "accountable," ἐπεύθυνον 80.6). In his triad of the worst abuses (80.5), two—upsetting the νόμια πάτρια and putting men to death without trial—involve disregarding the rule of law; is the third, raping women, so different?

²⁹The following discussion will, I hope, make it clear why I cannot agree with Stewart Flory, *The Archaic Smile of Herodotus* (Detroit 1987) 127–128, that Peisistratos is an example of the "Herodotean philosopher king" (121), whose tricks in rising to power are vindicated by his good rule. Philosopher king is too grand a name for what Flory finds in the text, and the "class" has only one other full-fledged member, Deiokes.

achievements he records to Peisistratos' credit are two minor ones, the purification of Delos (1.64.2) and the conquest of Sigeion (5.94.1). Our other sources are more detailed and generous (Thuc. 6.54.5–6, *Ath.Pol.* 16).

When it comes to passing judgment on the regime, Herodotos credits Peisistratos with good government within a constitutional framework: "Not upsetting the existing public offices or changing the laws, he governed the city according to established arrangements, managing things fine and well" (1.59.6); he was not, then, a stereotypical law-defying tyrant.³⁰ Nevertheless, Herodotos repeatedly contrasts his regime unfavorably with freedom: to Peisistratos' supporters "tyranny was more welcome than freedom" (1.62.1), the Delphic oracle told the Spartans to "free Athens" (5.63.1), Hippias' opponents "wished to be free" (5.64.2), Hippias' overthrow made Athens "free from tyrants" (5.55; cf. 5.65.5, 6.123.2).³¹ More important, Herodotos believes that Peisistratos' rule "held the Athenians down" (his usual word for it is *κατέχω*) and prevented their becoming a real power in Greek affairs. He begins his digression on the rise of Peisistratos by saying that Kroisos found Athens "held down and torn apart" (*κατεχόμενον τε καὶ διεσπασμένον*) by the regime (1.59.1), hence not an attractive ally.³² The digression closes with the same word in ring composition:

³⁰This agrees with other judgments on the regime: Peisistratos followed the established laws but saw to it that his own supporters held office (Thuc. 6.54.6); he ruled "more like a citizen than like a tyrant," *πολιτικῶς μᾶλλον ἢ τυραννικῶς* (*Ath.Pol.* 14.3; so also 16.2).

³¹Similarly, the Milesians were not eager to receive another tyrant after Aristagoras since they had tasted freedom (Hdt. 6.5.1); Maiandrios tried to end tyranny on Samos but failed because the Samians "did not wish to be free" (3.143.2). For the antithesis generally, see O'Neil (*supra* n.25) 30–31. Herodotos is capable of more nuanced views on one-man rule versus democracy (see *infra* nn.36–37), but his way of formulating the difference in these passages is highly tendentious.

³²Flory (*supra* n.29) 128 interprets this phrase to mean "'torn by factionalism,' but ... 'held in check,' by Pisistratus." But this twists Herodotos' Greek and ignores his use of *κατέχω* elsewhere.

"Kroisos learned that these things were holding down (κατέχοντα) the Athenians" (1.65.1). Athenian power did not grow until after the tyranny: "When they were under the tyrants, the Athenians were no better in war than any of their neighbors, but once they were rid of tyrants they were first by far. This shows that when they were held down they were slackers and cowards (κατεχόμενοι μὲν ἔθελοκάκειον) since they were working for a master, but when they were set free, each of them was eager to work for himself" (5.78).³³ This growth of their power worried the Spartans, who "saw that the Athenians were growing and were not at all ready to obey them, and considered that the people of Attika might become equal to themselves, whereas they had been weak and ready to obey when they were held down by tyranny" (κατεχόμενον δὲ ὑπὸ τυραννίδος, 5.91.1). Accordingly, they took steps to put Hippias back in power but were thwarted when their allies refused to support them.

All this is of a piece with Herodotos' view of tyranny generally. On the whole, Herodotos presents tyranny as a bad thing.³⁴ We may qualify this view if we like: he is no single-minded foe of tyranny, for he can find both good and bad in most leaders and constitutions;³⁵ he allows for the possibility of

³³This judgment shows remarkably little attention to Peisistratos' wide-ranging foreign policy, which would have little point or effect if Athens under Peisistratos had been all that weak. Indeed, Herodotos qualifies this often-quoted judgment in another passage, less widely quoted: "Athens, although great before, became greater when it was rid of tyrants" (5.66.1).

³⁴Recent champions of this old view include Donald Lateiner, "Herodotean Historiographical Patterning: 'The Constitutional Debate,'" *QS* 15 (1984) 257–284, revised as chapter 8 of his *The Historical Method of Herodotus* (Toronto 1989) (strongly supportive); and Filippo Càssola, "Erodoto e la tirannide," in F. Broilo, ed., *Xenia: Scritti in onore di P. Treves* (Rome 1985) 25–35 (with some valuable and judicious qualifications).

³⁵Well argued by Hermann Strasburger, "Herodot und das perikleische Athen," *Historia* 4 (1955) 1–25 = Marg (*supra* n.24) 574–608; partial rebuttal in F. D. Harvey, "The Political Sympathies of Herodotus," *Historia* 15 (1966) 254–255.

good one-man rule;³⁶ he does not cut all his tyrants out with the same cookie-cutter or engage in unremitting tyrant-bashing.³⁷ Still, despite these qualifications, an anti-tyrant point of view emerges. Herodotos' narrative is colored by stock ideas of the tyrant's license and *hybris*, and tyrants in Herodotos often act pretty much as Otanes says they will.³⁸ Indeed, many of our examples of the stock ideas have been drawn from Herodotos. Herodotos often, although not always, uses τυραννίς and cognates in the bad sense, implying arbitrary rule and despotism.³⁹ He is said to have been involved in antityrannical activities himself: the *Souda*'s entries on Herodotos and his kinsman Panyassis report a tradition that Lygdamis, the tyrant of Halikarnassos, exiled the former and killed the latter, and that Herodotos later joined in overthrowing Lygdamis.

In Herodotos' text, then, tyranny in general is bad, and the Peisistratids are not particularly good. This is not to say that Herodotos came to his task determined to vilify them. He was not so single-minded or one-sided a writer, and the result is not altogether a vilification. Much of the vilifying may have been done before he arrived on the scene, by a tradition colored by

³⁶John N. Davie, "Herodotus and Aristophanes on Monarchy," *G&R* 26 (1979) 160–168; Flory (*supra* n.29) 119–149 is often telling but puts the historian too far over on the monarchist side.

³⁷Waters (*supra* n.20); Vivienne J. Gray, "Herodotus and Images of Tyranny: The Tyrants of Corinth," *AJP* 117 (1996) 361–389; Hart (*supra* n.9) 50–65.

³⁸Lateiner (*supra* n.34); John G. Gammie, "Herodotus on Kings and Tyrants: Objective Historiography or Conventional Portraiture?" *JNES* 45 (1986) 171–195. I use "colored by" rather than a stronger expression; Gammie notes that tyrants in Herodotos' narrative often deviate from the stereotype, and Gray (*supra* n.37) stresses the variety of uses to which the stock motifs are put. Flory (*supra* n.29) 131–132 finds Otanes' speech falsified by the narrative, but the argument needs to consider a wider range of material.

³⁹Herodotos' use of the word in the negative sense is stressed by Arther Ferrill, "Herodotus on Tyranny," *Historia* 27 (1978) 385–398. But Herodotos is not consistent here: see Càssola (*supra* n.34) 25–27 and Victor Parker, "Τύραννος. The Semantics of a Political Concept from Archilochus to Aristotle," *Hermes* 126 (1998) 145–172 at 161–164. For a different view, see Edmond Lévy, "Basileus et tyrannos chez Hérodote," *Ktema* 18 (1993) 7–18.

stock views of tyrants and by self-serving efforts by the Athenians to cover up their complicity with the Peisistratids.⁴⁰ Still, we can see what Herodotos' larger picture of tyranny is and how the tale of Hippias' dream fits into it. The dream story shows Hippias acting like his father and acting like a tyrant, and it reflects badly on him in both capacities.

To conclude, Hippias' dream is a would-be tyrant's dream—what Plato's tyrannical man dreams about, an extreme case of what tyrants (at least in legend and anecdote) do. The equation of sleeping with one's mother and regaining possession of one's motherland is not simply a neutral piece of natural symbolism. It is a comment, a suggestion in Herodotos' narrative that in Hippias' case one is just as bad as the other. Herodotos' Hippias is trying to seize his country by force and return to a position of power where he can do as he pleases without restraint, just as he could before. There is an obscene name for people like that. Herodotos does not utter it, but the tale of Hippias' dream makes the point.⁴¹

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⁴⁰The views of, respectively, Lionel Pearson, "Real and Conventional Personalities in Greek History," *JHI* 15 (1954) 136–145 = *Selected Papers* (Chico 1983) 110–119; and Lavelle (*supra* n.12).

⁴¹Part of the work on this paper was done on a sabbatical granted by the University of Wyoming and spent at the University of Leeds. I am deeply grateful to both institutions. Earlier versions were read before the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association and the Leeds International Latin Seminar, with helpful discussion. Without wishing to implicate them in my judgments or errors, I thank Roger Brock and Frank Romer for reading and commenting on earlier drafts; R. Drew Griffith and Brian Lavelle for helpful e-mail discussions on particular points; and the senior editor and anonymous referee for *GRBS*.