Chapter Four: **Polycrates and the Ring**

We ended our examination of the story of Rhampsinitus and the thief with the potent image of the unbroken seals on the doors of the king's treasury. The crafty reader, we concluded, instead of accepting the authoritative closure implied by the signs on its surface, must find an alternative, hidden entrance to a text like the *Histories* if he is to engage the challenge laid down by it and its author. The seal in this case, the σήμαντρα, is the wax or clay impression left by the king's sealing action; but there is an implied second component to sealing—the hard, permanently inscribed seal-stone that leaves the impression in the malleable material. If the seal left on the door represents a kind of text, and its subversion a kind of stolen reading of the space it seals, the image of the seal-stone itself directs our attention more closely to the act of writing, and to the author's relation to his text.[1] It raises new issues—some of them similar to those we have just been dealing with, such as the individual's interpretive "interface" with the physical objects and spaces that surround him; and others, concerning identity and authority in the writing process, which provide the interpretive terms that will, I think, enable us to draw our examination of the individual in Herodotus to its own close.

Herodotus prompts us to examine such issues when he presents the tale of Polycrates' loss and miraculous recovery of his precious seal (σφρηγίς). The story is yet another of those memorable anecdotes that sticks firmly in the mind of the reader as she moves through the *Histories*, but whose wider significance is considerably more complex than it at first lets on to be. It is, on other words, a worthy companion to our studies of Hippocleides and of Rhampsinitus and the thief. Indeed Shimron connects it explicitly with the latter as "a tall but imaginable tale", though he sees it as being of significance only as a "weak repeat of Solon's sermon to Croesus."[2] The story gives us another opportunity, moreover, to return to our friend king Amasis, that tricky figure who seems to demand attention no matter which character we turn our gaze upon.[3] Most importantly for this last section of our study, however, the tale seems to provide an

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[1]Walter Kranz (1961) takes the naming of the author within his work and the use of the first person singular as the fundamental sealing mechanisms for a literary text—"den durch die Anwendung der Ichform, auch die Nennung des Verfassernamens charakterisierten Eingang und Schluss eines dichtersichen Werkes." His article, appropriately named σφρηγίς, has as its ultimate aim the question "wie sich der Schöpfer zu seinem eigenen Werk verhält." (p.3). Cf. Also Woodbury 1952 p.21, on the connection between prose authors' self-naming introductions and Theognis' seal poem.

[2]Shimron 1989 p.94.

[3]Diesner refers to this part of Polycrates' story as the "Amasisnovelle" (e.g. Diesner 1959 p.213.)

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excellent example of what we referred to in the previous chapter, with Van Baak, as iconic semanticising. It is not just that the image of the ring has a symbolic potency that reaches beyond its function in the story—that, as Rosenberg puts it, "Durch seine geschlossene Form kann ein Ring eindeuting als Band verstanden werden";[4] but more than this, for a study which seeks to elaborate the reflections of images within the text by the very rhetoric of the text, and which chooses for its text an author who is decidedly prone to ring composition, Polycrates' story seems even at first glance to represent something of a fish in a barrel.

Things are not, of course, so simple. There is good reason to doubt that the seal is in fact a part of a ring at all, since Herodotus at no point describes the σφρηγίς as a δακτύλιος, though he does use this latter word elsewhere of seal rings;[5] and he uses no words which would inevitably suggest that the king wore the seal on his finger.[6] We'll have occasion to examine this doubt later, for the doubt itself is, I think, a symptom of a significant ambiguity; but before we dive into a full analysis of the episode, I want to emphasise simply that Polycrates is above all the kind of authoritative, powerful individual who normally draws our attention as we read. As Diesner notes, he is not only a kind of "tragic hero" in a class with Croesus and Xerxes, but "he is one of those men ... whose great and amazing acts Herodotus had taken as a major theme (*Haupt-thema*) of his ἱστορίης ἀπόδεξις from the beginning of his proem onwards."[7] Our concern, as ever, is the way Herodotus manipulates this focus, and the way we in turn react and respond to that manipulation as we read and reread the text he has left us.

As before, I propose to elucidate the episode first in terms of its analogical connections within the network of the text, though in this case I have only one such analogue to put forward, albeit a very powerful one; and then to narrow down the focus onto the narrative development of the tale itself. It will be helpful, however, if we can first get an idea of the issues that have suggested themselves to other readers, since this story, when compared to some others in our study, has attracted a good deal more comment. The significance of my methods and conclusions, moreover (how I read Herodotus), may be somewhat clearer when set in relief against this background. We can divide the responses to Polycrates'

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[4]Rosenberger 1995 p.71—though his point is intended to explain the magico-religious use of the ring itself, rather than the literary use of the image.

[5]2.38.3—when an Egyptian priest has passed an animal as fit for sacrifice, he σημαίνεται βύβλῳ περὶ τὰ κέρεα εἰλίσσων καὶ ἔπειτα γῆν σημαντρίδα ἐπιπλάσας ἐπιβάλλει τὸν δακτύλιον.

[6]See Labarbe 1984 p.23; note also Boardman's reservation ("if set in a ring"—Boardman 1970 p.429). In Plato's *Hippias Minor*, Hippias is the proud owner of a σφραγίς *and* a δακτύλιος (368c).

[7]Diesner 1959 p.217.

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story into four groups: those that deal with the chronology and source criticism of the piece on a strictly historical level; those concerned with the structural significance of the story—it's place in the narrative development of the *Histories*; those that find the episode's significance in various analogical connections to other figures and stories within the text; and those who make this connection more narrowly in terms of the story's treatment of fate and free will.

The structural criticism goes back to Jacoby, who found the whole account of Samian history to be disconnected, and suggested that Herodotus had begun with one lecture and then, when confronted with the problem of integrating it into his larger project, had broken it up into three parts for reasons of economy.[8] Fornara accepts the idea that the stories are only loosely connected to their surroundings, but only because they represent more of a "finishing touch" than an early lecture. Like the Solon-Croesus story in book I, this is an instance of "Herodotus' method in its final perfection."[9] Immerwahr, meanwhile, takes up the problem and suggests first that each of the three episodes was introduced to explore a different theme, and secondly that the logical connections are much stronger than Jacoby found them to be—in particular "the famous ring-story becomes a direct motivating factor of the Spartan campaign."[10] Still, the sense that the connection is at least understated remains with the reader, and Herodotus' belated justification for the Samian *logoi*—a hurried account of three Samian wonders—does not help much; it seems to be more of a guilty rationalisation than an original motivation.[11] Indeed Immerwahr himself warns against the seductive power of the *logoi*: "The fascination of the reader with Polycrates and Periander must not stand in the way of an appreciation of Herodotus' interest in the Spartan war." The warning (surely doomed to go unheeded) suggests that Herodotus' text is at cross purposes with itself here; if it really can "fascinate" us with such figures, then that spellbound response must be our starting point for an interpretation. Such an interpretation is in fact just what Immerwahr proceeds to give for the ring story, with an insight we shall develop later: there is no *logos* about Polycrates as a character, he notes, just "narratives about two pairs of characters: Polycrates and Amasis, and Oroites and

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[8]Jacoby 1913 col. 381.

[9]Fornara 1973 p.36 n.14. he continues: "The sharp contrast they present to their surroundings is enough to indicate that they were created or polished when Herodotus, at the peak of his powers, was absorbed in giving final shape to his work as a whole. These episodes are a vehicle for a philosophy which nothing else in these books suggests he attained to." Wood, meanwhile, takes the episodes as a "synoptic" description of Polycrates' monarchy "in its full cycle" (Wood 1972 p.84).

[10]Immerwahr 1956 p.314-15.

[11]See Mitchell 1975 p.79-80.

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Polycrates." He concludes that "It is, then, a story of Amasis as much as of Polycrates, and Amasis, not Polycrates, determines the structure."[12]

We shall have to come to terms with the way the Samian *logoi*, and the ring story in particular, stand out from their context. Similarly, the confusion over the chronology of the story and the sources of Herodotus' account is suggestive when viewed in terms of a reader's response to the story. First, a confrontation with other historical accounts and with the coinage of sixth century Samos makes it clear that Herodotus' account of Polycrates as the first tyrant of Samos (ἐπαναστάς 3.39.1) passes over the rule of his father (Polycrates? I) and grandfather (Syloson I).[13] This in itself, of course, need not have any impact on the reader, since it is not detectable in the text, and may simply reflect the limited nature of Herodotus' sources.[14] But insofar as it brings up the question of the gap between Herodotus' account and what is historically verifiable, or even plausible, it does have a certain significance, if only because it gives us a glimpse of Herodotus' manipulation of perspective in his choice and expression of material. This gap has been found to be particularly evident in the reasoning that gives the ring story it's place in the narrative—the explanation for the break between Egypt and Samos. The story forms a bridge, in effect, between the story of Cambyses' invasion of Egypt and the Spartan expedition to Samos, and it is Polycrates' relations with Amasis that form the one side of that bridge.[15] The version we find in Herodotus is intended, according to Mitchell, "to cloak the fact that Polycrates medized" by making Amasis initiate the break between them;[16] and Labarbe warns that the motive given to Amasis by Polycrates' retrieval of the ring is "bien personnel et bien mince pour pouvoir être admis sans discussion"[17]—and yet it is the climactic ending to the tale, the

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[12]Immerwahr 1956 p.317-8.

[13]For the chronology see White 1954, Cadoux 1956, Labarbe 1962, Barron 1964, Mitchell 1975, Woodbury 1985, and Vilatte 1990 pp. 5-6.

[14]See especially Mitchell 1975 p.76, Vilatte *ibid*.

[15]"La mention de la rupture apporte au récit sa conclusion et... elle en détermine tout l'éclairage" (Labarbe 1984 p.29 n. 57.)

[16]Cf. Labarbe 1984 p.34: "pour blanchir politiquement la mémoire de Polycrate". Mitchell notes sternly that "the account of Polycrates invites more serious criticism, since the alternative reason for Polycrates' desertion of Amasis was known to Herodotus, but is not mentioned, as we might have expected, even as an alternative to which he does not commit himself." (Mitchell 1975 p.79). Vilatte has Amasis initiate the break, but calls it the "initiative fâcheuse" of a trivial king who does not comprehend Polycrates' heroic designs (Vilatte 1990 p.11). Note the contrast between the ring story, with its load of doom for Polycrates and Amasis lofty self-distancing, and 3.44, where Polycrates helps Cambyses humiliate Egypt; cf. Diesner 1959 p.214. Diodorus Siculus' account has Polycrates behave so badly towards Egyptians that Amasis has to break off the friendship (Diod. Sic. 1.95.3).

[17]Labarbe 1984 p.29; he concludes ultimately that Amasis was already dead when Polycrates went over to Cambyses, and that the vulnerability of Psammetichus III forced the Samian tyrant to abandon him.

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phrase that lingers with the reader as he moves on.

As Labarbe's observation suggests, it seems as if the reader is expected to question the plausibility of Herodotus' account, whether that reader knows of any contradictory evidence or not. For some readers this questioning leads to the conclusion that Herodotus was too uncritical in his acceptance of what his sources told him, or that he was himself partial towards the tyrant; for others there is more interest to be found in the positive reasons that lie behind Herodotus' choices. If we accept that there is a gap—and a somewhat evident one—between Herodotus' story and the facts, then we should look to see what he chooses to emphasise in the story and how that contrasts with what we as readers would expect to find.

When we approach the text in this way, it is tempting to conclude that Herodotus is using the story to convey a fairly straightforward religious message—one that, as Shimron notes, he expressed much better elsewhere.[18] This is the fatalist notion expressed by Amasis, first in giving his advice (τὸ θεῖον ἐπισταμένος ὡς ἐστι φθονερόν 3.40.1) and later in breaking off the friendship (ἔμαθε ὅτι ἐκκομίσαι τε ἀδύνατον εἴη ἀνθρώπῳ ἄνθρωπον ἐκ τοῦ μέλλοντος γένεσθαι πρήγματος καὶ ὅτι οὐκ εὖ τελευτήσειν μέλλοι Πολυκράτης εὐτυχέων τὰ πάντα, ὃς καὶ τὰ ἀποβάλλοι εὑρίσκοι 3.43.1). There may be a certain appropriateness to the association of Polycrates with this tragic theme, since he was known as a patron of poets—though not, it must be said, of tragic ones.[19] But when we consider what it is about the story that most impresses the reader, the rather trite moral seems if anything subordinate to the spectacular mechanism by which Polycrates' fate is confirmed; if this is a tragic story, it is rather Euripidean than Sophoclean.

Still, it is certainly true that most critics see this episode as an example of "the complementary nature of human and divine motivation that is fundamental elsewhere in Herodotus",[20] and this gives us a good reason to further examine Polycrates' own responsibility for his fate, and the way Herodotus signals it. Indeed, while Focke goes so far as to suggest that Herodotus' religious beliefs have been formed according to his view

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[18]Shimron 1989 p.94; cf. Wood 1972 p.81-2, Schadewalt 1982 p.192-5.

[19]"It may have been suggested by the emphasis of the lyric poets Anakreon and Ibykos on the wealth, fame and fortune of Polycrates" (Mitchell 1975 p.80). We might, however, expect something more optimistic (erotic or sympotic) from this pair. Certainly the Ibycus fragment that contains Polycrates' name seems more personal than tragic—see Fr. 282, and for discussion see Woodbury 1985, with extensive bibliography in his n.1 (p.193). For Anacreon on Samos, see Page PMG Fr. 138, 146; also Strabo 638. Himerius says that Anacreon sang the τύχη of Polycrates (Or.28.2 / p.128 Colonna). Cf. also Detienne's comment that Polycrates was a "tyran lettré" (Détienne 1992 p.76).

[20]Immerwahr 1956 p.319. He notes that the idea of good fortune turned upside down or "rooted out" (πρόρριζος) connects Polycrates explicitly with Croesus and with Solon's advice in 1.32. For this "complementarity," see Forrest 1979 p.311 ff.; Kirchberg 1965 pp. 118-9; Von Leyden [in Marg] p.180.

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of human motivation,[21] Van der Veen sees the narrative of the ring as a story of Polycrates' failure to understand or to heed Amasis' advice—just as occurs in other warner stories in the *Histories*.[22] He chooses discomfort when Amasis has urged pain, he has failed to choose what is "worth most" to him,[23] and is all too ready to seek after new pleasures. Yet, given Amasis' emphatic interpretation of events, it does seem that we must ultimately accept what Mitchell calls a "bifocal determinism"[24] —and in this formulation we can perhaps see why this debate is so relevant to our study. The question of fate and free will in Herodotus is, on one level at least, a question of perspective and focus—of the reader's choice of perspective. We can choose to see things from a divine point of view, in which case Polycrates' fate is decided, or from a human one—in which case he does plenty to bring about his own death. It will be our business to see how Herodotus' presents and manipulates this choice, and how he highlights its relation to questions of interpretation, authority and identity.

Those critics, meanwhile, who cannot rest content with seeing the story as a parable about fate and free will seek further significance in its relation to other similar stories in Herodotus' text (besides the Solon-Croesus *logos*, that is). For Wood, Polycrates has an analogue in Peisistratus, the Athenian tyrant—a link which brings up questions of "liberty and constitution" wherein Samian history becomes "an ironic antithesis to Athenian history."[25] Immerwahr meanwhile sees Polycrates as providing an analogue for Miltiades and Cleomenes in the category of powerful Greeks,[26] and for both Immerwahr and Wood there is an evident

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[21]Focke [in Marg] p.38—"eben sein Götterglaube hat Herodot recht eigentlich erst zum Historiker gemacht, indem er ihn in der Fülle der Geschehnisse bestimmte Sinnzusammehänge sehen liess. Aus schicksalhafter Grösse erwuchs ihm die Einsicht in den Kreislauf der menschlichen Dinge." Cf. Nicolai, who makes a connection between the "gottliche Doppelstrategie" and Herodotus' own historical method ("eine rein immanente Erklärungsweise" Nicolai 1986 pp. 30-31).

[22]Since Herodotean kings never obey the wise advisor, "we expect him *a priori* not to obey" (Van der Veen 1993 p.456). And so we have the story of his failure to heed the warning. Cf. Shimron p.110: the story is not presented as supernatural, and "the miraculous discovery of the ring is only by himself [Polycrates] attributed to the ye›on and his end, foretold by his daughter's dream, is explained by his own obstinacy, or plain stupidity, as an entirely human event.' Shimron concludes, however, that Herodotus leaves "the final decision to the reader"—and I hope to suggest how a reader can make such a decision. For the theme of the (usually unheeded) wise advisor, see Bischoff 1932, Lattimore 1939.

[23]Cf. Marinatos 1982 p.260 on the "Wechselwirkung von Charakter und Schicksal", with the conclusion that the episode constitutes a divine test of Polycrates—which he fails. "Als er den Ring ins Meer wirft, versucht er sich auf einfache Weise aus seiner möglicherweise gefährlichen Situation zu befreien, ohne das aufgeben zu wollen, was ihm am liebsten ist, die Macht." Also Mitchell 1975 p.85.

[24]For an argument supporting the (symbolic) appropriateness of the choice of the ring (i.e. it's not altogether Polycrates' fault), see Benardete 1969 p.82, Labarbe 1984 p.26.

[25]Wood 1972 pp. 84-5.

[26]Immerwahr 1966 p.191.

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link to Cambyses—another target for both human and divine τίσις.[27] These links, however, all focus on what we might call the large scale motifs of the tale—the themes of rise and fall, power and powerlessness.[28] I propose to do what I have done in previous chapters—to look for an analogue which shares with this story smaller-scale elements such as word-patterns and images, or motifs that compose the mechanism of the plot rather than its moral significance. Above all, of course, I want to find a figure or figures who, by their thematic relation to Polycrates, tell us something about him which might not be obvious on a first reading, but which emerges through the retrospective comparison of the figures.

I

As I warned above, I have only one comparison to suggest for careful development in this instance, but it is one that is very carefully articulated at the most basic level of the text, one which sets up a rich field of associations, and which has on its own merits drawn a good deal of attention. I want to read the story of Polycrates against the tale of Arion,[29] as we meet it early on in the first book of the *Histories* (1.23ff). To resume the story briefly: Arion, the inventor of the dithyramb and resident at the court of Periander of Corinth, travels to Sicily to make some money. He then embarks with his wealth on a Corinthian ship (for he will trust only Corinthian sailors); but the sailors plot to rob and kill him, and when he learns of this he tries to bargain for his life. At last he persuades them to let him sing one last time, and then leaps into the sea, only to be rescued by a dolphin and returned to the mainland. Periander cannot believe his story, and holds him under guard until the sailors arrive and betray themselves by their amazement at his reappearance.

There are a number of striking resemblances to the story of Polycrates. The frame—a sudden and rather disconnected digression on an

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[27]"If Polycrates is an analogue to Cambyses, then Oroetes is an analogue to the Magi" (Wood 1972 p.81). Immerwahr likens the vain gesture of throwing away the ring to Cambyses' pointless fratricide (3.65.3 <> 3.43.1)—Immerwahr *ibid.*

[28]On this theme generally, see McGlew 1993, esp. p.26.

[29]Hooker makes a brief reference to the Polycrates story in his analysis of 1.23-4, but only to note the shared moral theme, "the impossibility of averting τὸ μέλλον πρῆγμα" (Hooker 1989 p.143). Gould connects the two in terms of their weak and purely "temporal" connection to their frame (Gould 1989 p.51). He notes too (p.50) that the Arion story is told entirely in indirect speech (something that has "no precedent in epic"), which is true of the ring story also, if we exclude Amasis' letter.

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amazing thing that happened to a Greek tyrant[30]—is in itself very similar, though one might put this down to consistency of narrative practice rather than a significant repetition. The same might be said of the fact that both stories end up with monuments (the ring itself, as Benardete sees it, or the wonders of Samos;[31] and the statue of "a man on a dolphin" at Taenarum). Still, if we look at the basic plot of the two stories, I think we'll find some compelling correspondences. In both there is a voyage on the open sea, a "throwing" of something into the sea (1.24.5 ῥῖψαι, 3.41 ῥίπτει),[32] a "sailing back" (1.24 ἀποπλέειν, 3.41 ἀπόπλεε), and then the miraculous return of the thing thrown into the sea, by means of a sea creature,[33] to a tyrant. Not only do both tales, as Hooker notes, illustrate the κύκλος of human affairs, but they do so with virtually the same stock of images and elements.

When we look closer, moreover, we find a number of secondary resemblances which may give us some clues as to the shared significance of the stories. In Van der Veen's analysis of the Polycrates story, for instance, Polycrates' chief fault seems to be the need for pleasure (ἡδονή). When he later acts against all advice (πάσης συμβουλίης ἀλογήσας 3.125.1), says Van der Veen, "pleasure here explicitly overrides Polycrates' rational awareness of danger."[34] In the Arion story, meanwhile, the sailors' mistake (allowing Arion to control his own fate to at least some extent, and to sing the song that summons his rescuer) is explicitly connected to the ἡδονή they feel in hearing him sing (1.24.5). In

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[30]The apparent independence of this story from its context has caused even more debate than that of the Polycrates story. Munson calls it "the only purely episodic insertion in the *Histories*" (Munson 1986 p.95); and in support notes Pagel's assessment of it as "the 'Musterbeispiel' of episodic digression" (Pagel 1927). Aly and Von Fritz agree that it is a pure digression (Aly 1921 p.36, Von Fritz 1967 p.306), and Flory characterises its connection to its context as "gossamer thin" (Flory 1978 p.411; cf. Legrand v.I p.23). Flory's note 1 summarises three attempts to explain the relevance of the story: Schwabl 1969 pp. 259-61 (it highlights the power of Delphi and Apollo), Cobet 1971 p.149 (the pirates are analogues for Alyattes) and Wood 1972 pp. 23-4 (Arion's rescue prefigures Croesus' rescue). To these we can add Flory's own conclusion (the story begins a theme of desperate, brave gestures); Munson's (we are meant to focus on "the threatened opponent's interpretation ... of his own almost miraculous recovery", p.98; "the *thoma* (marvel) of Arion is pertinent and functional to the surrounding context and to the main focus of the *Histories*, not factually, but at the level of ideas" p.100); Hooker's (the προσθήκη as a "bringing together" or analogy, allowing Herodotus to explore the nature of human credulity—Hooker 1989 p.145-6); Long's (the irony of the tale undercuts the surrounding picture of Periander's magnificence—Long 1987 ch..3 (pp. 51-60) and Packman's (Arion and Periander together provide shifting analogues for Herodotus, his sources and his audience—Packman 1991 p.400).

[31]See Benardete 1969 p.82; and on the monuments as ἔργα πολυκρατεῖα, see Mitchell 1975 p.83, Shipley 1987 p.75; Aristotle *Politics* 1313b.

[32]For "throwing" (with a form of ῥίπτω) as a way of trusting to luck or the gods (like casting lots), cf. 4.61.2 (Scythian sacrifices), 4.94.2 ("sending a messenger to Salmoxis").

[33]Note that Aristotle includes a section on the cetaceans (whales, dolphins, etc.) in his description of fishes in the *Hist. Anim*. (VI. 10-12)).

[34]Van der Veen 1993 p.442.

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both stories, moreover, attention is drawn to the peril of the main character's soul or life, his ψυχή. Arion "begged for his life" (ψυχὴν δὲ παραιτεόμενου 1.24.2), and Polycrates is told by Amasis to find the thing that, being lost, would most pain his soul (ψυχὴν ἀλγήσεις 3.40.2).[35] Then there is an implied piracy in both stories: Arion's captors have, in effect, turned pirates;[36] and the story of the Samian thalassocracy is inextricably tied up with piracy. As Mitchell notes, the very wealth and success that Polycrates was seeking to protect was "the fruit of indiscriminate piracy" (p.84).

There are three further similarities which look especially significant. Each story centers around a figure whose exceptionality is emphasised: Polycrates' deeds were "famed throughout Ionia and the rest of Greece," and we later find out that "he was the first of those we know about to have a thalassocracy in mind" (3.122.1). Arion, meanwhile, was a lyre-player "second to none of his time" and "the first of those we know about to compose, name and teach the dithyramb" (1.23).[37] Secondly, in each case the climactic action takes place before a carefully noted audience: in 1.24 it is literally an audience to Arion's song, and Herodotus has it clearly separated from the performer; while in 3.41 Herodotus emphasises that Polycrates threw away his seal πάντων ὁρώντων τῶν συμπλόων. Finally, each "throwing into the sea" focuses our attention on the importance of a physical object. In one case it is the seal, which in a sense stands for the man; and in the other case it is a set of ritual robes, and a lyre in particular—the objects that represent the man's one source of power. Clement of Alexandria makes an interesting slip when he confuses these two stories and has Polycrates throw into the sea a seal which depicted a "musical lyre".[38]

This last correspondence is most intriguing. We should note first that in each case we have an image not simply of a physical object, but of a signifying *objet d'art*. Each is itself a work of art, and each can be used to produce another work of art. In the case of the seal, its status as a work of art is explicitly noted: it is the creation of the artisan Theodorus. This

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[35]Van der Veen (*ibid* p.440) notes that what Polycrates in fact looks for is what will "distress" his soul (ἀσηθείη 3.41.1).

[36]See Flory 1978 p.413, Benardete 1969 p.15. For Long this is one of the chief ironies of the tale—"a joke on the Corinthians themselves, for they become the villains of the piece even if their tyrant does catch the criminals." (Long 1987 p.55).

[37]διθυράμβον πρώτον ἀνθρώπων, τῶν ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν, ποιήσαντά τε καὶ ὀνομάσαντα καὶ διδάξαντα ἐν Κορίνθῳ. On the formula πρώτος τῶν ἡμεὶς ἴδμεν see Shimron 1973, Kleingünther 1933 pp.43-65 (esp p. 50 on Arion). "He was a εὑρετής, on a level with sages, lawgivers and founders of cities." (Hooker 1989 p. 144).

[38]Clement Alex. *Paidag.* III. 11.59.2 (p. 270 Stählin-Treu). For the Arion story's conspicuous emphasis on the singer's σκεύη, see Flory 1978 pp. 413-4, Long 1987 p.58.

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reference reminds us that Polycrates is a patron of the arts, a funder of all kinds of artistic production,[39] and that the seal is one such product. The parallel with the Arion story, where the emphasis is on the art which is produced by the object (the νόμος ὄρθιος, a song in Apollo's honour) and which summons divine help (the dolphin, beast of Apollo and folk-etymology for Delphi)[40], lends support to Benardete's interpretation of the Polycrates story: "The ring is meant to be preserved; it is a memorial intended to endure for many generations. Polycrates tried to transfer that power into himself ... the ring's χάρις, by propitiating divine jealousy, would magically turn Polycrates into a work of art" (p.82). In other words, the tyrant tries to exchange places with the seal and to take on its enduring qualities—much as Arion, at the critical moment of his life, identifies himself with his art and all its accoutrements (though with more success than Polycrates).

If we look more closely at the physical or spatial nature of these images, moreover, we can learn more about what this exchange of identity means. First, if we take it that Polycrates' seal *is* set in a ring, it becomes clear that both images, lyre and ring, involve circularity and closure.[41] Even if the sfrhg€w is not part of a finger ring, in fact, Herodotus emphasises that it is worn (ἐφόρεε) and must be "taken off" (like clothing—περιελόμενος[42]) before being thrown away. As Labarbe concludes, then, it must at least be held on a chain or cord of some sort—perhaps a gold one (hence χρυσόδετος).[43] In this sense the image of the worn seal (for which cf. Soph. *Electra* 1222 and Kenna's interpretation of the nature of the seal[44]) becomes parallel not only to the lyre of Arion but also to his clothes (σκεύη).

Given these similarities, we are in a position to make some initial

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[39]For Polycrates and poets see n.19 above. For Theodorus cf. 1.51 (a silver mixing bowl at Delphi which is an οὐ γὰρ τὸ συντυχὸν... ἔργον—"a special piece"), Pausanias 8.14.8 and Tzetzes Chil. VI. 212-3; also Shipley 1987 pp. 87-90 ("also a man of literary accomplishment" p.88). Note also Rhoïkos, architect of the Heraeum (3.60), and Mandrokles, builder of Darius' bridge over the Bosporus (4.87; and artist of a picture of the same, 4.88). Détienne likens the status of the scribe Maiandrius to that of the talented stone cutter at Hipparchus' court in Athens (Détienne 1992 p.76).

[40]For the link with Apollo, see Schwabl 1969 pp. 259-61; On the νόμος ὄρθιος see Benardete 1969 p.82, Stein *ad loc.*

[41]For the shape of the Cithara, see the Hymn to Hermes 47-51. Note that it involves a double enclosure: the ring formed by the πήχεις and ζυγόν, and also the tortoise-shell sounding box.

[42]It is hard to resist the admittedly anachronistic resonance with Plato's story of Gyges and the magic ring: when Gyges sees the ring on the finger of the massive corpse, he "removes it" and leaves (περιελόμενον 359e). Perhaps the tale already existed in much the form that Plato knew it in Herodotus' time, or perhaps Plato understood Polycrates' σφρηγίς as a δακτύλιος.

[43]See Labarbe 1984 pp. 23-4.

[44]Kenna 1961. Also Boardman 1970 p.237; and p.149 no. 5 for a clear photograph of a seal set on a "swivel ring".

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judgments about the joint significance of these tales. They represent, first of all, the successful and failed use of a special sort of art object to protect one's life (ψυχή): in a crisis, Arion identifies himself with his art by donning his robes and taking up his lyre, then throwing himself into the sea—leaving his χρήματα on the ship. Polycrates, on the other hand, attempts to change places with the art-work and, as Benardete puts it, to transfer its power onto himself, while he retains all of his χρήματα. Arion puts on (ἐνδύντα) his σκεύη, but Polycrates "takes off" (περιελόμενος) his seal. Secondly, however, both figures attempt to escape from an enclosing space by using an object which is itself of a closed kind, but which has a special communicative function. Polycrates is caught in the κύκλος of human affairs, and this is symbolised by the space of the ship—which is "filled (πληρώσας) with men, and which he "stepped into" (ἐσέβη). Arion is literally caught in a ship with no way out (ὑπειληθέντα ... ἐς ἀπορίην). It is the use to which each man puts these objects which determines his success in making this escape. Arion paradoxically encloses himself further within his σκεύη, but uses their signifying power (music) to communicate. Polycrates rejects the physical enclosure symbolised by the σφρηγίς and uses it as a brute object rather than as a sign. He throws it overboard as a kind of inanimate scapegoat,[45] ignoring its communicative power. It is significant that, though we are told that it is a seal, and informed carefully of its material and workmanship, we are not told what is engraved upon it, nor if the quality of the engraving formed part of its value to Polycrates.[46] He attempts to reify his identity in the object, but not in the sign.

These tales, then, are not so much about reading objects as about communicating with them (or not). Both narratives draw our attention to the communicative nature of their climactic actions when they make it clear that their central figures are significant because of their relation to other crucial figures—figures who communicate with them, judge them, and then either hold onto or abandon them much as they had done with their respective objects. Hence, as we have seen, Immerwahr rightly concludes that the ring story is a *logos* about pairs of people; and the story of Arion, while it seems at first to trivialise his relationship with Periander, ultimately puts the tyrant in the position of interpreter and judge of the

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[45]For this ring as a kind of scapegoat, see Versnel 1977 pp.36-37 (and for other literal scapegoat narratives in Herodotus, see Stern 1991); as a symbol of Polycrates' power and identity, see Benardete 1969 p.82, Steiner 1994 p.161 "Seals can serve as a double of their owners and supply a symbolic representation of the living person of the king ... he offers the gods a surrogate or scapegoat"; also Labarbe 1984 p.26; and Vilatte 1990 p.9 (comparing it as a "talisman de pouvoir" to the bow of Odysseus on Ithaca).

[46]This may explain why the Romans thought they had the ring of Polycrates in the temple of Concord, even though its stone was unengraved (*intacta inlibataque*) and therefore useless as a σφρηγίς (Pliny Nat. Hist. 37.8). For the (assumed) quality of the engraving, see Strabo 14.1.16.

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story, moving from ἀπιστία through inquiry (ἱστορέεσθαι) to belief, in a way that reflects the reader's own progression through the story.[47] To make the significance of this clearer, I want to look at two ways in which movement is described in these stories, and which further link the stories together—words or groups of words, that is, whose use throws some light on the power of communication that holds between the two main pairs of characters. The first word group, where movement is referred to with the verb χωρέω, suggests that in the one story Arion is free and separate from the negative enclosing forces (the sailors, the ship), but in successful communication with the positive authority of the king; but in Polycrates' story same the verb ironically describes his excessive success, and the inescapability of his fate. Hence, in the Arion story, the musician's escape is already underway when his musical performance separates his captors from him, effectively putting them into the more enclosed position (ἀναχωρῆσαι ἐκ τῆς πρύμνης ἐς μέσην νέα). Then, after reaching shore on the Dolphin's back, Arion "proceeded" to Corinth and resumed communication with Periander (χωρέειν... ἀπηγέεσθαι). Polycrates, meanwhile, though "everything came *to* him with good fortune" (πάντα οἱ ἐχώρεε εὐτυχέως) wherever his "straight expeditions" took him (ὅκου γὰρ ἰθύσειε στρατεύεσθαι...), yields only to the determination of the fisherman to "come into his presence" (ἐλθεῖν ἐς ὄψιν) and actually "proceeds to meet him (χωρήσαντος)—thereby moving towards his own destruction. For Polycrates, therefore, the movement denoted by xvr°v ends in a kind of futile or blocked communication (note that the fisherman then goes home, and the promised dinner is not mentioned again)—a connection only with death—which leads up perfectly to Amasis' breaking off of relations with this man who does not understand how to communicate.

The second way of talking about movement involves two closely related words for "removing" or "carrying out"—ἐκκομίζω and ἐκφέρω. These words denote the attempted removal of the focal individual from danger, but they do so from a different perspective, that of an observer or intermediary rather than of the central figure himself. At the end of the ring story Amasis concludes that "it is impossible for a man to convey a man out of the way (ἐκκομίσαι) of what is going to happen." This moral retrospectively reevaluates the whole of the preceding action from Amasis' point of view; what had been the tale of Polycrates' attempt to free himself from a sort of enclosing fate, we now reread as Amasis' failed attempt to *remove* him by his own controlling influence. The contrast with the Arion

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[47]"Periander doesn't believe the story of the rescue dolphin. This makes sense to me: I don't believe it either." (Packman 1990 p.400). Cf. Long's points about the story's ironic jibe at Corinthians generally and at Periander in particular—since this θῶμα μέγιστον of his reign results in a vague statue which is οὐ μέγα.

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story is clear: while that removal is impossible "for a man" to achieve,[48] not so for a dolphin (ὑπολαβόντα... ἐξενεῖκαι)—and by implication a god. The role of the royal observer in the Arion story, meanwhile, remains just that—observing, interpreting, commenting. Indeed, far from "taking Arion out", Periander's actions constitute a new kind of interpretive enclosure (ἐν φυλακῇ ἔχειν οὐδαμὰ μετιέντα, ἀνακώς δὲ ἔχειν τῶν πορθμέων).[49]

II

Both tales, then, focus our attention on the communicative strategies of the central figure, and at the same time direct us outwards towards the interpretive perspective of a more or less involved observer. I want to leave the Arion story now and concentrate on how the rich texture of the Polycrates story, and the Samian *logoi* generally, develop and refine these themes through the interplay of spatial images in the text, and through the playful arrangement of the space *of* the text. It seems to me that the text places strong emphasis on two aspects or elements of communication in the story of Polycrates and the ring, and that it re-emphasises these elements in the other Samian stories of book three. Firstly, it draws attention to the literal process of exchange, above all in the motifs of gift-giving and guest-friendship. Then, somewhat more subtly, the narrative explores the significance of written communication and graphic signification in that very process of exchange. Amongst other things, the stories of book three suggest that Polycrates did not know how to conduct a relationship of *xenia*, nor how to read or write successfully, and that this entailed his destruction.

First the processes of exchange. Before the introductory passage summarising Polycrates' successes, the very first thing we learn about his reign (after he has disposed of his brothers) is that "he established a ξεινίη with Amasis the king of Egypt, sending gifts and receiving others from him." The story is ultimately closed by Amasis' decision to dissolve the alliance (διαλύεσθαι) so that he won't be "pained in his soul" by the demise of a man who is a guest-friend (ξείνου ἀνδρός). Amasis conducts the alliance reasonably—he exchanges gifts, gives advice, and breaks it off when it becomes clear that the mutual exchange of χάρις is fated to be

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[48]Polycrates would have done well to draw the same conclusion, for Oroites entices him to his death by suggesting that Polycrates "rescue" him and his money—συ νῦν ἐμε ἐκκομίσας αὐτὸν καὶ τὰ χρήματα 3.122. This leads. paradoxically, to Polycrates being removed from his home to meet his death in Sardis.

[49]Long interprets the repetition of προιέντα / μετιέντα in the Arion story as establishing its bipartite division, wherein Arion progresses from being at the mercy of the sailors to being "under house arrest" in Corinth (Long 1987 p.56).

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one-sided.[50] On Polycrates' side, however, the understanding of friendship, and therefore of correct exchange, seems to be somewhat perverted. “Soon after” the alliance with Amasis, for instance, Polycrates’ power and fame grew to such an extent that “he plundered everyone with no distinctions (ἔφερε δὲ καὶ ἦγε πάντας διακρίνων οὐδένα) for he said he could do his friend a greater favour (τῷ γὰρ φίλῳ ἔφη χαριεῖσθαι μάλλον) by giving back what he had taken rather than by not taking it in the first place.”[51] When Amasis breaks off the friendship, he interprets Polycrates’ failure to dispose of the ring in terms that make it seem like the obverse of this initial plundering and giving back: “He realised that Polycrates was bound to come to a bad end... since he retrieved even what he had thrown away.” The trick with the ring, in other words, is a futile attempt at one correct, symbolic giving away; but the gods play the same role that he had taken earlier, giving back to him what they had received from him. This makes it quite clear to the reader that Polycrates’ perversion of ξεινίη (taking and giving back, rather than giving and receiving), at least in part, lies behind his imminent demise.

There is a further example of improper or inappropriate jein€h at the centre of the tale. When the fisherman catches the “large and beautiful fish” with the ring inside it, he decides that it should be given as a gift (δῶρον δοθῆναι) to Polycrates; so he goes to the palace, insists on an audience with Polycrates, and as he gives the fish he emphasises that this is an exceptional action for him. He is a man who lives by his hands (ἀποχειροβίοτος) and who would normally take such a find to the market (ἀγορή). It is as if he is trying to place himself now on a level with Polycrates by an aristocratic gift-exchange: he meets him face-to-face, and rejects the mercantile exchanges of the market-place in favour of a χάρις-driven gift exchange.[52] Polycrates is charmed by the words, and actually reciprocates the exchange; he notes the “double *charis*” of the man’s words and gift, and proceeds to invite him to dinner. We do not hear about this dinner, however—though as readers of Petronius we might expect the climactic discovery of the ring to take place there in the fisherman’s presence. Instead Herodotus disposes of the fisherman (μέγα ποιεύμενος ταῦτα ἤιε ἐς τὰ οἰκία) and doubles the motif of inappropriate jein€h, for Polycrates now receives another gift from his subordinates. His servants

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[50]On the role of χάρις as the fundamental medium of exchange in ξεινίη, see MacLachlan 1993—e.g. p.8: "Only balanced reciprocity interests us in a study of *Charis*, for it is the only one that is strictly reciprocal." Cf. also Herman 1987 p.41 (on Syloson and the cloak), Kurke 1991 p.104-7. Gould interprets the τίσις motif of the *Histories* as a form of reciprocity: "The obligations of *xenia*, along with those of kinship, form one of the most powerful strands of connection which structure Herodotus' narrative, but it remains barely visible since it is something which he and his readers take for granted" (Gould 1989 p.43).

[51]On Polycrates' "treachery", see Immerwahr 1966 p.191.

[52]Van der Veen describes the gift as "a substantial sacrifice" (1993 p.449).

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(θεράποντες) cut open the fish and, finding the ring inside, carry it “full of χάρις” (κεχαρηκότες) to give (διδόντες) to Polycrates. Only at this point does Polycrates begin to suspect the reason for all this χάρις and all these gifts.

As Leslie Kurke observes, the theme of "intercepted exchange" is paramount in the Samian stories[53]—the stolen gifts of 3.47,[54] for instance, or the Corcyrean boys of 3.48. As a "middle ground" between east and west, Samos is a point of both interchange and blockage; we discover here, however, that blockage affects the Samian tyrant himself in a paradigmatic fashion—Samos is not just a point of interception for others' exchanges, it is itself isolated from successful exchange, and Polycrates is the human image of that isolation. Everything comes to him, but he cannot get rid of it, and the reason seems to have to do with a fundamental misunderstanding of the principles of gift-exchange. We can illustrate this with two further episodes, one of which exemplifies the failure of all Samian *xeniai* and the other of which suggests the impossibility of exchange between classes. They are both especially pertinent to Polycrates: one is the story of his brother Syloson, and the other is a third narrative of a throwing into the sea followed by a recovery, that we might set beside the ring story and Arion's adventure. Syloson, like Polycrates, is the recipient of good luck (εὐτυχίη 3.139.2) that turns out to be not so good as expected. His luck consists in meeting Darius in the market place in Memphis when the latter is a soldier with Cambyses, and giving him his cloak for free. Darius offers him money for it, but he makes a gift of it "on an inspired impulse" (θείῃ τύχῃ χρεώμενος 3.139.3)—a gift which he will later recall to the now king Darius, which leads Darius to offer him his fill of gold and silver. Syloson instead wants Samos—but without bloodshed—and this Darius promises him. Van der Veen has thoroughly documented how this good luck takes a grim turn for the worse, with Syloson eventually receiving a Samos that has been emptied of its inhabitants, and how "a small gift in the end has major, destructive consequences; ...the result of the second gift [Darius' reciprocation] is pictured as the opposite of the intended one."[55] We are in a position to add some further obervations: first, we note that the gift which initiates the obligation is a piece of clothing of a very enclosing sort,[56] the donning of which Herodotus takes a moment to note: λαβὼν χλανίδα καὶ

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[53]"Under the sign of this Polykratean theory of friendship, the Samian narratives play themselves out as a series of violated or interrupted gift exchanges." (L.V. Kurke, unpublished MS.)

[54]And of 1.70.

[55]Van der Veen 1995 p.144. Cf. Benardete p.96: "In accordance with his disinterested observing he gave to Darius ... the red cloak ... This free gift, however, this pure example of χάρις, destroys Samos."

[56]A cloak is a "shield from the wind"- χλαινάων τ' ἀνεμοσκεπέων *Il.* 16.224.

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περιβαλόμενος 3.139.2. When Darius takes this over from him, it is as if he receives an object which by its very nature symbolises the bond that now exists; and we have seen in the stories of Arion and Polycrates how this motif can be played out in several ways with various shades of significance. Secondly, the narrative puts Syloson himself forward as a figure of ambiguous status. The motif of the gift of a cloak itself recalls, in a rather indirect way, *Odyssey* 14. 467ff.,[57] where Odysseus, posing as a Cretan guest-friend of Odysseus in Eumaeus' hut, tells a story about how, on an ambush below the walls of Troy, his fellow leader Odysseus had contrived to get a cloak for him on a cold night by sending off a messenger to Agamemnon. The cloak (χλαῖνα) left by the volunteer serves as an indirect gift from Odysseus to this pseudo-Cretan—which provides the fake-Cretan with an exemplum in his attempt to persuade Eumaeus to give him a cloak. Not only does the Herodotean allusion suggest that we identify Syloson with the wily Odysseus, then, but it reminds us of Odysseus at his trickiest, spinning a false story of exchange and trickery about himself to his own vassal.[58] It shows us a gift that is not really a gift, an exchange accomplished by cunning rather than openly, and with someone else's property; and it recalls another isolated exchange where the gift never really circulates as it should—for in Odysseus' story we see Odysseus the Greek procure a cloak for Odysseus the Cretan, and we know full well that they are one and the same.

Syloson's status, especially his status as a man who can participate in gift exchange, is made even more dubious by Herodotus' description of his activity just before he sees Darius. With Cambyses' invasion of Egypt, Herodotus tells us, there came many Greeks: some merchants (κατ' ἐμπορίην), some soldiers, some just coming to see the land (οἱ δὲ τίνες καὶ αὐτῆς τῆς χώρης θεηταί)—and Syloson is one of these. It is natural to read this as meaning that he was one of the sightseers, but the way Herodotus goes on makes us wonder if he might not instead fall into the first category:[59] when he saw Darius, he was "hanging about in the market place"—ἠγόραζε ἐν τῇ Μέμφι (3.139.2). This verb can certainly mean

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[57]Throughout book 14 of the *Odyssey* we return again and again to the image of a cloak as a gift of hospitality: the image provides, in effect, a focus for the audience's anxiety about Ithaca's hospitality for Odysseus; E.g. 14. 132, 154, 320, 341, 396, 460, 520 (Odysseus finally gets his cloak).

[58]Herodotus' report itself retains much of the fabulous feel—How and Wells find that "The whole story is more than suspicious."

59Stein notes this ambiguity. Though his text gives him only two groups of visitors (οἳ μέν, ὡς οἰκός, κατ᾽ ἐμπορίην στρατευόμενοι—a remarkable combination), he remarks on "Syloson was one of these" that "sollte wegen ἄλλοι τε συχνοί (4), eigentlich καὶ Δ καὶ Σ folgen; die relativische Fügung empfahl sich aber, da S., als zu einer der beiden Klassen gehörig, nicht füglich abgesondert und in Gegensatz zu ihnen genannt werden kannte."

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something like this—being idle in the open;[60] but it most naturally means *taking part* in the buying and selling of the market place, as at 2.35.2. And as soon as Darius sees him in the cloak, he assumes that it is for sale—"he came up and tried to buy it." Syloson's offer of it as a gift, in other words, is all the more startling because he has been set up as a figure who has more in common with the fisherman than with Polycrates or Darius.

Our second example of a perverted gift exchange picks up this idea of exchange with a merchant. In book four Herodotus gives the Cyrenean version of the birth of the colony's founder, Battus: his mother's stepmother convinced her father that she had been fornicating, and so he (king Etearchus of Oaxus on Crete) "contrived a most unholy deed against his daughter": he set up a guest-friendship (ξένια) with a merchant called Themison, and made him swear to do whatever he asked. Thereupon he told him to take the daughter and abandon her in the ocean (καταποντώσαι 4.154.4). The merchant was horrified and dissolved the friendship; but, true to his name, he performed the obligation by tying a rope to the girl, dropping her in the sea, and then pulling her back in by means of the rope. They then arrived in Thera, and she became the concubine of a man called Polymnestus—and later gave birth to the stammering, lisping child Battus. The tale seems to combine the motifs of the Arion and ring stories: a person is thrown overboard, but is returned by means of a literally binding physical object. The throwing is the result, moreover, of the request of a guest-friend, and this makes the connection with Polycrates' story especially clear; but the contrast is perhaps most significant. In Polycrates' case, the *xenia* is a valid one between equals, and it fails because he does not understand how to carry out Amasis' request, and indeed mixes it up with other, less valid *xeniai*; Themison, on the other hand, understands better than Etearchus how to carry out the request properly; but the evil purpose behind the *xenia,* which is the king's only reason for allying himself to a merchant, plays itself out eventually in the birth of a boy who cannot speak properly. One form of perverted communication leads to another.[61]

When we look at relevant narratives of failed or inappropriate *xenia*, then, we find in one case that Herodotus draws attention to the dubious status of the initiator of the alliance; and in the other, that

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[60]As at 4.78.4, 4.164.4, and 3.137.1—where the Persians find the escaped Democedes ἀγοράζοντα. In this case too, though the primary meaning of the verb probably has little to do with buying and selling, the connotation of the market place is most apposite for Democedes in his role of intermediary between east and west; it perhaps also recalls thereby the *Histories'* opening *logos* of the rape of Io.

[61]We might usefully compare this to the vicissitudes of communication in Croesus' story, where his mute son seems to stand as silent witness to his father's doom—and ultimately to symbolise his reprieve when he finally speaks; see Sebeok 1979.

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initiator's evident "unholiness" and the inappropriateness of his choice of friend[62] are combated in part by another cunning exchange—the casting off and retrieval of the girl—but nonetheless have lasting effects in terms of a blockage of communication at its most basic, verbal level. Now, as I have suggested, these exchanges are inappropriate at least in part because the partners are not on the same level—they are not worthy of each other.[63] Therein, in fact, lies Polycrates' problem: he is unable to judge (διακρίνειν) worth. The narrative returns us time and again to the question of worth—of what is a worthy counterpart to Polycrates, and who is worthy of having power.[64] The motif is set up in the ring story, but is brought off with a heavy dose of irony in the account of Polycrates' death at the hands of Oroites. Amasis sets Polycrates the task of choosing "what is worth most" to him (πλείστου ἄξιον); Polycrates then does this, but Herodotus avoids repeating the idea of the object's worth, mentioning only that it would "distress" Polycrates' soul to lose it—suggesting that Polycrates has failed to grasp a key component of Amasis' advice.[65] The result of this failure is that Polycrates is henceforth marked as "worthy" of the destruction which is symbolised by the returned ring: the fisherman, immediately upon catching the fateful fish, "considered it worthy" (ἀξίου) of Polycrates; and later told the tyrant that he considered the gift "worthy of you and your power" (σέο τε εἶναι ἄξιος καὶ τῆς σῆς ἀρχῆς). The symbol of his demise, in other words, has been evaluated as Polycrates' worthy counterpart, and as such he cannot remove it from circulation, and cannot stop it from coming back to him.

As I say, this idea is brought off with heavy irony later on. When Oroites has Polycrates at his mercy, he kills him in a way that is "unworthy of him and of his great ambitions (Πολυκράτης διεφθάρη κακώς, οὔτε ἑωυτοῦ ἀξίως οὔτε τῶν ἑωυτοῦ φρονημάτων)—for none of the other Greek tyrants, save the Syracusans, was worthy (ἄξιος) to be compared to Polycrates for magnificence; and having killed him in a manner unworthy of recounting (οὐκ ἀξίως ἀπηγήσιος) Oroites impaled

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[62]On the rarity of *xeniai* extending outside of aristocratic circles (with this as the main example), see Herman 1987 p.34 n.74

[63]Indeed it may be that Polycrates is allying himself with a typical agent of the overthrow of power—see Anacreon fr. 8 / 353 PMG on fishermen as στασιασταί.

[64]Leslie Kurke, in a forthcoming book, makes this same point about the story's concentration on "worth". I am also indebted to her for her analysis of the "complementary" roles of gift exchange and coining, and of the seal's "talismanic" relation to royal coinage (below p.23f.). Indeed most of the episodes treated here (the fisherman, Maiandrius, Oroites, Bagaeus, Syloson...) are also dealt with in her MS, and her ideas about the clash of aristocratic and polis-based value systems in such narratives, whether set forth in her writings or communicated in her teachings, have formed one of the chief bases for my own understanding of Herodotus.

[65]For both Van der Veen (1993 p.442) and Marinatos 1982 (p.260) Polycrates' πλείστου ἄξιον can only be "his power" (i.e. his ἀρχή).

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him." (3.125). The irony is clear, for it is Polycrates' failure to judge a worthy object of exchange (exchange for his own life, that is) which attaches this "unworthy" death to him. Despite the narrator's indignant protestations now, the text has carefully led us to expect exactly what happens—that Polycrates' ultimate "worth" will be judged very differently from his own expectations (φρονημάτων);[66] and it leaves us with a final irony—that the death we have been expecting since chapter forty-three is now not even "worth recounting."[67]

The problem of judging worth is of course one we have met before when dealing with Amasis. He himself provides us with a paradoxical image of worthiness: he seems to have a privileged sense of worth, the ability to judge oracles and to win over his subjects; but that ability is tied up with the changeability of his own worth, as symbolised by the career of his chamberpot. In fact, changeability is just what he emphasises here too: he advises that "one should succeed in some matters, but fail in others, and so continue one's life by doing things in alternation (ἐναλλάξ πρήσσων) rather than being fortunate in all matters." This corresponds very closely with his justification in 2.173 for his own way of life (καταστάσις πρηγμάτων); he understands that a man cannot be serious all the time, just as a bow cannot be strung all the time, and so he "allots a part [of himself, or of his time] to both seriousness and play." As we see here, Amasis himself uses an object (the bow) to illustrate this ἐναλλάξ motif in book two, so it should come as no great surprise that we find an object doing much the same in book three in another narrative that involves his advice. We concluded earlier that the ring, or the seal worn on a cord, suggests the κύκλος of fate that Polycrates tries to escape from, and that Arion with his lyre succeeds in evading. Amasis' bow adds another dimension; the bow (and indeed the lyre) can be unstrung (its *palintonos harmonie* loosened, in Heracleitus' terms[68]), but the ring (or gold chain) is too powerful an enclosure. Polycrates identifies himself with an object that in fact symbolises the fateful necessity of his complete success, his inability to ἐναλλάξ πρήσσειν. Amasis' philosophy of personal change, moreover,

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[66]Oroites entices him by taking advantage of precisely those greedy φρονήματα· πυνθάνομαι ... χρήματα τοι οὐκ εἶναι κατὰ τὰ φρονήματα. Note also that the "worthy" motif has a coda in Maiandrius' futile effort at introducing democracy—his ungrateful subjects accuse him of being "unworthy to rule" in even a limited capacity (3.142.5).

[67]Herodotus frequently describes events or things as "worth telling"—e.g. 2.155.1; 2.70.1; and he often combines these two words in one (ἀξιαπηγητός: 1.16.2; 1.177.1; 2.99.4; 2.137.5; 5.57.2). This declaration that something is *not* worth telling, however, is much rarer. We might take it to be idiomatic—meaning "So miserably that I don't deign to recount it"—since the positive version with the adverb has the sense "excellently" (fighting ἀξίως λόγου, 6.112.3; 7.211.3); but the sense of Herodotus choosing what is worth *commemorating* still persists. Compare instead his choice not to mention a name he knows (1.51.4), or his choice not to follow one or more "lines" (versions) of a report (οὐδ' ἀξιὰ μνησθῆναι 2.20.1).

[68]παλίντονος ἁρμονίη ὥσπερ τόξου καὶ λύρης DK 51.

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seems to coincide in the Polycrates story with a notion of healthy *ex*change—while Polycrates' continued success and his inability to change, as we have seen, only perverts his jein€ai.

The seal, however, is not the only significant object in the story: more literally significant are the two letters that Amasis and Polycrates send each other. Here we turn to the second element of communication in the story: writing, and inscribing signs. This exchange of letters fairly stands out from the narrative. Though Detienne assumes that the two kings maintained a regular correspondence,[69] this does not follow automatically from their guest-friendship and mutual gift-exchange, and it is not suggested in Herodotus' text. Everyday communication by letter amongst friends is unheard of in Herodotus, and there is little other historical evidence for it up to his time. A letter is used by Darius to instruct his *subordinate* Megabazus to attack Paeonia (5.14), but in all other cases (and perhaps this one too) communication by letter in Herodotus is for secrecy or other deceptive purposes.[70] Rather, Amasis' letter looks a lot like a form of gift exchange—one final exchange that, with its reciprocation by Polycrates, ends the relationship.[71] Indeed it is notable that when Amasis wishes to inform Polycrates that their friendship is over, he sends not a letter but a herald (κῆρυξ). To end the relationship by continuing the correspondence would be self-contradictory, an annulment of the alliance by means of a token that affirms it.

The importance of letter-writing for this story, besides its relevance to the theme of jein€h, is double: first, it draws attention to and helps us understand the significance of the object at the centre of the story—the seal.[72] Both letter and seal are enclosing objects, both are objects whose function is performed by inscription, and of course they often exercise this function jointly, the one accomplishing the enclosing of the other and authorising its significance. Secondly, the letter highlights the play of mediation, presence and distance in the crucial motif of the *interpretation*

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[69]Détienne 1992 p.73.

[70]Secrecy: 1.123; 6.4; 8.128. Deception: 1.125; 3.128 (= Bagaeus' trick to have Oroites executed on the authority of Darius' seal). On Herodotus' suspicion of written communication generally, see Steiner 1994.

[71]On the connection between gift exchange and early alphabetic writing in Greece (the Dipylon Vase) see Robb 1994 pp. 23-35. There is paltry evidence even for letters of commerce in the fifth century—see Lombardo 1992 p.175—and regular letters between *xenoi* do not (as far as we can see) become the norm until Isocrates' time. Note also Steiner 1994 p.6: "Writing does not displace the traditional object by introducing a more explicit and exact written record in its place. Instead the Greeks join writing to the material symbol, and fashion a new vessel for the forces released in the rite." The letter carried by Bellerophon has just this status—a token of hospitality *and* a (deceptive) inscribed writing tablet (Steiner p. 30-31). On the letter as a *sumbolon* of exchange, see Herman 1987 pp. 63-5.

[72]Note that Herodotus reports the full introductory formula of the letter—what would, in Kranz's poetic terminology, be its σφρηγίς: Ἄμασις Πολυκράτει ὧδε λέγει.

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of Polycrates' actions—and this in turn brings us back to the question of the episode's importance for our own reading of Herodotus, for our conception of what it means to read this text.

Herodotus gives us two stories which confirm that Polycrates has for him a strong association with the physical implications of seals and sealing—one of which he recounts only reluctantly. He tells us that the Spartans tired of their siege of Samos after forty days and left; but then he notes that there is a "more foolish" story (ματαιότερος) that Polycrates bribed them by counterfeiting local currency—gilding lead coins and stamping them (κόψαντα). The royal seal and the coin stamp are intimately related objects, both materially[73] and conceptually. They both imbue an object with authority by inscribing its outer surface—they assure the receiver of the authenticity of what is contained within. Though Herodotus notes his doubt about the report, then, we nonetheless see Polycrates abusing the power of the very same sort of object as the one he has placed so much value upon. It is ironic that Polycrates is then lured to his death by a similar trick: Oroites fools Polycrates' ambassador, the scribe Maiandrius, into thinking that he has vast wealth available, by filling eight chests with stones and then gilding them by laying gold on top (ἐπιπολής). To be sure, there is no inscription involved here—but there is a reader (the scribe),[74] and the narrative reminds us specifically of Polycrates' seal: the layer of gold on stones recalls the "emerald stone" (σμαράγδου... λίθου) set in gold (χρυσόδετος)[75] of the seal; and like the letters the kings send, the chests are enclosing objects which have to be kept closed (katadÆsaw) until they can be shown to their destinatee.[76]

A third point links Polycrates' seal to his correspondence with Amasis—a rather crafty verbal repetition that ties together the chain of vengeance which proceeds from Polycrates through Oroites to Bagaeus. Bagaeus achieves the demise of Oroites by appropriating the royal seal (σφρηγίδα... Δαρείου) and writing a series of letters containing spurious commands from the king to Oroites' bodyguards. First they are to stop

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[73]They are both χαρακτῆρες: see Plato *Politicus* 289b1-5. See also MacDonald 1905 p.46 on their historical connection (the king's seal used as coin stamp); and Steiner 1994 p.160. Note, however, Boardman's reservations: the two items were undoubtedly made by the same artisans, but despite similarities of style they each had their own repertoire of graphic devices (Boardman 1970 p.238).

[74]"Like so many Herodotean characters who spend their lives occupied with writing, the scribe's autopsy is a superficial one." Steiner 1994 p.173. For the connection of the counterfeit coins and the chests, cf. p.160 *ibid*., and Kurke's forthcoming work.

[75]χρυσόδετος may connote a solid chain, as at Soph. El.837; but it is perhaps more likely that this is a metaphorical usage, and that the meaning "overlaid with gold" or "set in gold" is the basic one—e.g. Soph fr. 232, Eur. Phoen. 805, Alcaeus 350.2 Lobel-Page.

[76]Note further that a seal (i.e. the seal on a letter) might itself be covered with a protective shell (κόγχη)—Ar. Vesp. 585, 589. Cf also Soph. Trach. 614, where the bezel is described as the ἕρκος of the seal.

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serving the satrap, and then—when he sees that they "greatly revered the letters" (τὰ βυβλία σεβομένους μεγάλως 3.128)—to kill Oroites. This they do at once, and "in this way vengeance for Polycrates of Samos came round upon Oroites the Persian." A highly appropriate vengeance-by-letter to be sure; and there is a nice resonance between the soldiers' "great reverence" for the outward form of the letters (i.e. the king's seal)[77] and Amasis' subjects' own reverence for the reshaped chamberpot at 2.172, which they σέβοντο μεγάλως. But there are also connections to Polycrates' earlier history: first the use of a scribe as an intermediary—Bagaeus lends authority to the letters by having the royal scribe (τῷ γραμματιστῇ τῷ βασιληίῳ) read them out aloud, as if the scribe can act as a sort of human double for the royal seal[78]. Secondly, Bagaeus' only action at the moment that he achieves his end is to present each letter to the scribe, "removing its covering" or "unsealing it" (περιαιρεόμενος). If we reread the ring story, we find this word at another crucial point—it is what Polycrates does with his seal immediately before throwing it away. We noted that this "taking off" (the verb usually refers to the removal of clothing[79]) parallels Arion's "putting on" of his robes; but given this later, very relevant occurrence of the word, it is hard not to connect this significant action of Polycrates more closely with the signifying function of the seal. When he takes off the seal, it is as if he is removing the sealed covering from a letter—removing with it the guarantee of his own identity and authority.

But these connections also help us see where Polycrates has gone wrong, or how he misunderstands the signifying practices and objects he is trying to use. After all, though Detienne calls him a "tyran lettré", he places a fatal trust in a scribe, and his own letter to Amasis results in the immediate dissolution of the friendship.[80] I suggested earlier that a comparison with the Arion story shows him to be using the seal as a brute object rather than a signifying one. We can now refine that observation,

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[77]In fact he says that "they greatly respected the letters, and even more so what was being read from them"—perhaps suggesting (ironically) that the greater reverence proceeds from the lesser, which has no basis.

[78]Maiandrius is absent from the ring story itself, perhaps so that the symbolic function of the signifying object will not be diluted by his presence at the climactic moment; or perhaps because, for the theme to be elaborated thoroughly, Polycrates would have to have him thrown overboard too (like Arion)...

[79]But in Herodotus that can be a significant action: Psammetichus "removes" his helmet (περιελόμενος τὴν κυνέην) to use it in place of a φιάλη for libation, and his fellow basile›w see the gesture as a symbolic power-grab (2.151.2-3). At 3.69.2 the verb is used actively to describe the removal of a clay jar from around the gold which has been poured into it to set; this is how Darius stores his tribute, and when he needs money, he "melts down and mints (κατακόπτει) as much as he needs each time." At 3.159.1 and 6.46.1 the active verb refers to the razing of a conquered city's walls.

[80]One might even see him as using the seal to close up the letter to Amasis: Herodotus uses the verb ἐπιτίθημι to describe the sending of the letter—a sense the verb has only when used of a letter, perhaps because it refers to the application of the seal before sending.

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for when we read the seal against the letter-writing in the story, we find that Polycrates misunderstands the seal as a medium. He emphasises the material which holds signification to the detriment of the sign itself. As we noted earlier, it is suspicious that Herodotus does not describe the engraving on the seal at all, only the material and setting; but more than this, the narrative suggests a fundamental confusion between the seal itself, which provides a powerful, concrete symbol for the man and his authority, and the material that is sealed—the letter, the written sign. When Polycrates "unwraps" his seal from himself, we see *him* as a kind of letter, from which he removes the covering and the seal; but he has lost sight of the talismanic power of the seal itself (its status as an object which can simply stand in for himself), something which might be successfully sacrificed. Instead he sets up a kind of unwanted reciprocal communication between himself and the gods; since he throws away something which is, as he treats it, part of a letter, it is only appropriate that it should come back by return post.

This confusion of medium (signifying, or the power of writing, sealing, inscribing) with material is inherent also in his excessive trust in the scribe's power to see the truth at Oroites' court; and this brings us to the second aspect of Polycrates' error. He is always separated from those who interact with him—separated by faulty or unreliable intermediaries. Those intermediaries, on the other hand, are irremediably present to him—he cannot get rid of them, and hence cannot communicate through them. More than just a failure of communication, moreover, this separation represents a failure of interpretation—which is what Amasis' presence in the narrative brings home to us. This is why everything "comes to him with good fortune" (ἐχώρεε εὐτυχέως[81]), why the miracle of the fish "happened to him" (οἱ συνήνεικε), why the fisherman, bearing Polycrates' evil fate in his hands, demands to come into his presence (ὄψιν), and why he finds that events have "taken hold of him" (καταλελάβηκε). On the other hand, he only communicates with Amasis by letters (βυβλία), and with Oroites by his scribe. The irrational hatred of Oroites for Polycrates is a case in point: he conceived the desire to take and kill the Samian tyrant "without ever suffering anything at his hands, nor hearing a rude word from him, nor even having seen him before." In one of the versions reported by Herodotus, Oroites tries to establish communications with Polycrates by sending a messenger (about what, we don't hear); but Polycrates rebuffs him. In fact, he happened to be in the "mens'

[81]On the separate senses of the two words, see Van der Veen 1993 p.434 n.2. χωρέω can of course also describe the capacity of a vessel—e.g. the bowl at Exampaeus (4.81.4), Alcmeon's gold-filled buskins (6.125.4), 200 jars full of silver (1.51.2), the comparative capacities of the Persian *artabe* and the Greek *medimnon* (1.192-3), and the bronze Spartan bowl stolen by the Samians (1.70.1). For a man identified with an enclosing object, then, it is an appropriate word.

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house" (ἀνδρέων) with the poet Anacreon and, for some reason, when the messenger came in he neither replied nor even turned away from the wall he was facing.[82] Though the messenger is in the room with him, in other words, Polycrates refuses to allow him into his "visual presence" (ὄψιν)—a stark contrast to his treatment of the fisherman. The image of the room and the man facing the wall reinforce the reader's sense of Polycrates' dangerous isolation and inability, or refusal, to participate in normal communication. The narrative places a heavy emphasis on the climax (οὔτε τι μεταστραφῆναι οὔτε [τι] ὑποκρίνασθαι), moreover, by delaying it with parentheses ("for he happened to be facing the wall"), paratactic asides ("and Anacreon of Ceos was with him"), and waffling conditionals ("whether because ... or because ..."). The presence of the figure of Anacreon only adds irony: Polycrates sits silently next to a master of discourse and stares at a wall—an enduring image if ever there was one.

Polycrates' failure to communicate, his failure even to acknowledge the presence of a messenger, is pointed up by contrast with the perceptive abilities of Amasis and of his own daughter. Though Polycrates shares his "visual presence" (ὄψιν) only with the fisherman, his daughter has an ὄψις of her own, a dream which he will quickly "carry out" (3.125);[83] and right at the start of the story, with a litotes which seems to characterise his opinion of Amasis' wisdom, Herodotus notes that Polycrates "did not escape Amasis' notice with his great success, but rather this was an important matter to him" (οὐκ ἐλάνθανε, ἀλλά οἱ τοῦτ' ἦν ἐπιμελής 3.40.1).[84]

It seems, then, that while from Polycrates' point of view the channels of communication are blocked by faulty intermediaries, this does not prevent others from perceiving him, interpreting his situation, and trying to communicate with him—in some cases in his interest, in others for the sake of bringing home to him the consequences of his errors. Amasis perceives his danger at a great distance (indeed over the separating ocean) with no mention of intermediaries; it is rather as if he has himself heard the "shout" of Polycrates' notoriety (τοῦ Πολυκράτεος τὰ πράγματα ηὔξετο καὶ ἦν βεβωμένα ἀνά τε τὴν Ἰωνίην καὶ τὴν ἄλλην Ἑλλάδα). But he chooses to communicate with Polycrates in a way that the latter cannot understand—perhaps precisely in order to test Polycrates' interpretive abilities; and this choice of a letter for communication further clouds the tyrant's judgment, suggesting to him the choice of a seal as a propitiatory

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[82]Perhaps admiring the κόσμον ἀξιοθέητον that Maiandrius later dedicated in the Heraeum (3.123).

[83]Oroites too meets an all too present death: Bagaeus has the faked letters read aloud "in Oroites' presence" (Οροίτεω ἐς ὄψιν ἐλθών 3.128).

[84]For the litotes combined with a positive statement, cf. 2.172.2 μετὰ δὲ σοφίῃ αὐτοὺς ὁ Ἄμασις, οὐκ ἀγνωμοσύνῃ, προσηγάγετο.

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sacrifice. This sacrifice turns out, unintentionally, to be another form of reciprocal communication—a form that entails a reply where none is wanted, a return message enclosed in an animal like Harpagus' letter hidden in a hare (1.123.4).

Both the enclosing and the mediating connotations of the seal, then, are important to Polycrates' demise. With this in mind, we can start to pull together the divergent strands of this analysis, and to try to specify what this episode teaches us about reading Herodotus. Let's consider first the relation between the spaces in the text and the space of the text—the degree to which the use of images colludes with the verbal structure to direct our reading towards certain emphases. We saw that in the story of Rhampsinitus and the thief there is a high level of such collusion; the thief's deceptiveness, and his ability to penetrate a sealed space and leave behind a paradoxical scene for an observer, is mirrored by the text's own tricky narrative tactics. Here things are more complex: we have no clear picture, for one thing, of the exact nature of the focal object. Images of enclosure abound in the text, culminating in the seal's double enclosure—within the stomach (νηδύι) within the fish. But the seal itself remains ambiguous—there are words that have led readers for some time to take it to be set in a ring (χρυσόδετος, περιελόμενος), but these can easily be taken otherwise. Instead, we are forced to focus on the relation between the abundant images of enclosure and the *function* of the seal—closing up a letter, a chest or a door—and this relationship does not lend itself to easy "iconization" in the text.

If there is any such mirroring, it occurs mostly on a large scale—in our reading, that is, of the three Samian stories as they take us all the way from Cambyses in Egypt (3.38) to the rebellion of Babylon (3.150). These *logoi* form a transition which could well be said to seal up the events they span (earlier we called the ring story a bridge), and indeed to reflect the reciprocal communication that we noted as a major motif of the ring story. The first story in its entirety (3.39-60) is, as Immerwahr emphasises, the story of the Spartans' failed expedition eastwards to conquer Samos; the apparently irrelevant digression on Amasis and Polycrates is framed by reminders of this fact (ἐποιήσαντο καὶ Λακεδαιμόνιοι στρατηίην ἐπὶ Σάμον τε καὶ Πολυκράτεα 3.39.1, Ἐπὶ τοῦτον δὴ ὦν τὸν Πολυκράτεα εὐτυχέοντα τὰ πάντα ἐστρατεύοντο Λακεδαιμόνιοι 3.44.1). The *logos* ends with the departure of the Spartans and their Samian allies, and a brief mention of the three Samian wonders. In the chapters between 3.60 and 3.120 (the death of Polycrates) we see the rise of Darius to power over Persia; and then we jump back to Cambyses' time—rather unexpectedly—and hear the stories of Polycrates, Oroites and Bagaeus. Only at chapter 129 does the reason for this retrospective digression become clear; it

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explains how Democedes came to be at Darius' court, having come over to Oroites with Polycrates and then ended up in Bagaeus' hands. Now we hear of his exploits at Darius' court, and finally, from 139-49, we hear about Darius' capture of Samos, now under Maiandrius' rule.

It is the second *logos* that provides the key to the iconic significance of the seal story; for Democedes is the human intermediary who links Darius to Greece (much as Samos itself does in a geographic sense). The twists and turns of the narrative represent a crucial shift in the direction of communication and perception between east and west: at first we see the Spartans turn their attention eastwards—but they go no further than Samos. They are blocked by their failure to crack open the besieged island city. Then, in the second *logos*, we see Greeks from Samos (Democedes and Polycrates) moving east—but this communication induces an ominous reciprocation. At Democedes' urging, queen Atossa draws the attention of her husband to Greece as a potential military target, and persuades him to use Democedes as an intermediary—a man who can "show and explain" everything about Greece (134.5). The third *logos* then shows Darius' first move towards Greece—the successful capture of Samos.

On a large scale, then, the narrative of 3.39-150 replicates the motifs important to the ring story (an undesiredly reciprocated communication, and an intermediary which can be treated as both a brute object[85] and as one capable of signifying—δέξαι καὶ κατηγήσασθαι 3.134.5), and it does so in a form that makes very clear their significance for the great themes of the *Histories*. But it also replicates the crucial motifs on a more formal level: the ring story, coming first, acts as a kind of seal or key[86] for the extended *logos*. It provides a significant point of entry into the meaning of the larger narrative, something which we see and must read before we proceed. If we can appreciate the significance of the seal, we may find it easier to read some of the more challenging aspects of the text. For one thing, it unifies the whole narrative of 3.39-150, so that the motif of reciprocal communication remains in our mind, from Amasis' letters in 3.40 to the failed ξεινίη of the scribe Maiandrius in Sparta in chapter 148, despite the lengthy narrative of Persian history that comes between (3.61-119). For another, it provides the key to unscrambling the retrospective narrative logic of passages such as 120-128: if we keep in mind the important image of the intermediary, we see that these stories' chief function is to introduce Democedes—even as they themselves direct

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[85]Democedes is at first a "neglected slave"—ἐν ἀνδροπόδοισι ὅκου δὴ ἀπημελημένον 3.129.3.

[86]For the connection between seals and keys, see Labarbe 1984 p.22 (though his assertion of the equivalence is unsupported).

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our attention back to the ring story and its motifs.

This much, however, would still only account for the importance of the image of a seal *impression*—the reader's point of entry into a text; but as we noted early on, the story is above all about a concrete seal, the object that seals rather than the one that its sealed. To understand how this is reflected in the text, we need to come to grips with the way Herodotus plays with the related notions of perspective, perception and interpretation. To do so, I want start by drawing attention to a resonance between Amasis' role in the story and some lines from Theognis' famous seal poem (fr.40 West). "Let a seal be put upon these lines of my poetry," he says, "and they will never be stolen without notice (λήσει κλεπτόμενα) nor will anyone substitute (ἀλλάξει) the worse when the better is available."[87] With the aid of the seal, then, the reader or hearer will be able to *notice* the "theft" of lines, and nobody will be tempted to *exchange* good lines for bad. Amasis, however, seems to suggest a very different kind of reading: on the one hand, his ability to notice, as we have seen, is heavily emphasised; but what he notices is the very need continually to exchange good for bad, and vice versa—to ἐναλλάξ πρήσσειν. If we read through Amasis' eyes, then, we begin to suspect the very notion of a seal—a hard, unchanging sign of a person's power and authority.

I can suggest one way we might be expected to articulate this suspicion as we read the stories we've been dealing with here. If the story of Polycrates' ring is really about a pair of characters, and the various forms of exchange, communication, and perception that pass between them, it should not surprise us that Herodotus picks the image of a seal to "iconise" that relationship; for the seal only has significance when paired with its impression. The stone is a work of art, but that art is only significant when seen in relief. The very origin of the word, if we take Chantraine's best guess, is recalled onomatopoeically in its every pronunciation, and reminds us of the seal *in use*, making an impression.[88] We hear, that is, the hot metal of a coin "sizzling" (σφαραγίζω) as the stamp is applied, and to speak the word is to remind oneself that it describes an object which signifies. This paired status, where the object's importance cannot be understood without its mirror double, is our best tool for understanding how crucial the idea of paired figures, and the way they are joined in significance, is to Herodotus' text; and the Polycrates story

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[87]Κύρνε, σοφιζομένῳ μὲν ἐμοὶ σφρηγὶς ἐπικείσθω / τοῖσδ' ἔπεσιν — λήσει δ' οὔποτε κλεπτόμενα, / οὐδέ τις ἀλλάξει κάκιον τοὐσθλοῦ παρέοντος (Fr. 40 West / 19-21).

[88]Chantraine notes the possible connection with σφαραγέομαι, which he finds "sémantiquement énigmatique", but suggests we hear in σφρηγίς "le sceau faisant éclater l'argile ou la cire lorsqu'on l'appose." He then warns that "on n'ose chercher un rapport avec φράσσω"—though such a connection would be most suggestive for my analysis.

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directs us to read this pairing in two ways. It suggests we consider the pairing as a kind of perpetual, reciprocal exchange, where each side must be "worthy" of the other not by taking on the enduring, unchanging status of a piece of stone, but precisely by changing and enacting within himself the same kind of continual cycling (ἐναλλάξ πρήσσειν) that characterises his conduct with others. Secondly, the text uses this pairing to draw a kind of equivalence between communication and perception, and thereby makes us conscious of our own role as potential partners to the text, to the author, or to the figure in the text. It achieves this above all by playing with our sense of perspective as we read—most obviously by giving us Amasis as an observer within the text, an authoritative perspective on Polycrates' situation. We "learn" that it is impossible to save a man from his fate at the same time as Amasis does; and it does not hurt the identification that Amasis is reading when he comes to this conclusion. But Herodotus goes further than this: he draws attention to the multiple forms of interpretive relationship in the text by cycling perspective among them. Hence we share with Polycrates the task of reading and responding to Amasis' letter—which Herodotus helpfully reports verbatim—and of deciding what is his (or our?) πλείστου ἄξιον. And in case we feel too inclined to identify with Amasis' perspective, Herodotus ultimately puts him on another level: when Polycrates finally dies, Herodotus says that "the many good fortunes of Polycrates came to this—just as Amasis king of Egypt had prophesied (προεμαντεύσατο 3.125.4) in advance." Now it is clear that Amasis had done nothing so explicit as foretelling Polycrates' death, and given the absence of this last phrase from one of the manuscript groups (*d*) it is tempting to see it as a scribal addition (as, for instance, Stein does); but as Erbse notes, it is quite possible that it was rather removed by a redactor who did not understand its meaning. It in fact provides a valid *re*interpretation of what has come before, presenting Amasis' letter in the terms not of friendly advice, but of an enigmatic oracle[89]—the words of one who has a privileged perspective, that is, of a god (or one inspired by the god) or of an author. Amasis, after all, is a writer too, one whose choice of a letter as a communicative medium stands out from the text. Even as Herodotus reinterprets Amasis' role as that of a man with a privileged perspective, then, he also reinterprets his own position as an author, equating writing with the privileged knowledge of prophecy.[90]

What is important here is not that we can assign any of these

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[89]Erbse 1992 p.98 n.9—"Der Brief des Amasis erfüllt ja tatsächlich die Aufgabe eines Orakels."

[90]Nagy (1990) points out that Herodotus' own historical discourse in itself (i.e. without necessarily being conceived of as written) shares much with oracular discourse: a juridical aspect (p.320-22), and the use of *ainigmata* , either in quotation (p.332) or woven into the text (p.335-8).

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perspectives individually; for all that the equation of writing and prophesy, for instance, is a suggestive and significant tool for reading Herodotus, it is only one of several voices we hear Herodotus and his characters take on. It is rather the very switching among voices that we must learn to appreciate as the unique and special quality of Herodotus' narrative. This is what the spatial images illustrate with their continual oscillation between closure and openness; and this is what the text's treatment of the seal suggests—a signifying symbol of authority and identity that is at once an unchanging, engraved stone *and* a fragile, removable impression that lends its authority to other discourse. Above all, the ability to read these multiple perspectives is what we learn from Amasis' advice and from his example of perpetual (ex)change—to ἕναλλάξ πρήσσειν.

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