The downfall of Croesus and Oedipus: Tracing affinities between Herodotus’ Histories and Sophocles’ Oedipus Tyrannus

A number of critics have noted striking parallels between the stories of Croesus in Herodotus’ Histories and Oedipus in Sophocles’ Oedipus Tyrannus. Charles Segal (1971) and Jasper Griffin (2006), for instance, have drawn attention to general parallels, such as the use of time to build up dramatic tension and the recurrence of certain motifs, like the exposure of babies after doom-laden prophecies, the fragility of human life, and the interplay of personal responsibility and divine compulsion. Bernd Manuwald (1992) meanwhile has focused on oracles and dreams and analysed their role specifically in the downfall of both kings.1 Finally, Charles Chiasson (2003) has shown how particular episodes in Herodotus’ account of the Lydian king Croesus resemble small-scale dramas.2 The life-and-death dilemmas represented there and the episodic nature of Herodotus’ story-telling are typical of tragedy and suggest a familiarity on his part with this popular fifth-century BCE genre.3

Given the sheer number of potential intertextual connections between the two authors’ works, it is unsurprising that several scholars have sought to chart the likely direction of influence between Herodotus and Sophocles by tracing the date of Herodotus’ activity in Athens.4 This line of investigation is somewhat marred, however, by the unknown performance date of many of Sophocles’ plays, the disputed date of the Histories’ publication, and the fact that, as Elizabeth Irwin notes, ‘the intertextuality between his [Sophocles’] plays and Herodotean sentiment and

1 Manuwald 1992: 5 argues that both the OT and Herodotus’ Adrastus story follow a typical oracle pattern: 1. prophecy (oracle or dream); 2. reaction of the receiver of this prophecy who does everything to try to frustrate it; 3. inevitable fulfilment of the event despite, or precisely because of, the receiver’s reaction.
2 E.g., king Candaules, his wife, and the king’s bodyguard Gyges (1.7-12); the Phrygian Adrastus, king Croesus and his son Atys (1.34-45); the pyre scene between Croesus and the Persian king Cyrus (1.86-7). Other narratives resembling tragedy feature elsewhere in the Histories, see further Sad 2002, Chiasson 2003, Griffin 2006, Darbo-Peschanski 2017. For more specific affinities between Sophoclean tragedy and Herodotus, see West 1999: 109-136 (Antigone and Book 3 of the Histories, especially parallels between the Cambyses and Croesus), Dewald and Kitzinger 2006: 122-9 (Antigone 904-12 and the wife of Intaphrenes, Hdt. 3.119), Finkelberg 1995 (Trachiniae 634-9 and the description of Malis in Book 7 of the Histories), Finglass 2018b: 59-75 (Oedipus and Periander).
3 For further discussion on Herodotus’ relationship with tragedy, see those works listed in the previous note; for a more cautious line concerning the influence of tragedy on Herodotus (and early historiography), however, see Rutherford 2007, 2012: 15 n. 4.
4 For the (relatively scant) ancient evidence associating Herodotus with Athens, see Priestley 2014: 44-50; for the complexities surrounding the direction of influence between the two authors, see Finglass 2018b: 73-5, cf. Erbse 1992: 71 n. 22, who suggests that the language of Hdt. 3.118-19 is indebted to Sophocles.
idiom span his entire career’. In this paper, therefore, we do not set out to show that one author was directly alluding to the other. Instead, we examine two stories, that of Herodotus’ Croesus in Book One of the *Histories* and of Sophocles’ Oedipus in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, comparing them against four central themes: ignorance and learning too late, misplaced hope, mutability of fortune, and fate and responsibility. In doing so we, first, aim to provide a more nuanced view of the thematic *affinities* between the two texts – most particularly the way they treat the conception of happiness and the relative importance given to divine and human causation in shaping an individual’s fortune. Secondly, in offering a close assessment of the language connected with our chosen themes we hope to illustrate how, despite working in different genres, Herodotus and Sophocles employ similar techniques, notably through the use of different focalisations, in order to engage their audiences. Lastly, some scholars have used the term ‘tragic’ to describe the complete reversal of Croesus’ fortune without defining the term. This paper seeks to refine our perception of Croesus’ fall by showing that many of the features highlighted in Aristotle’s *Poetics* for the finest tragedy not only apply to Sophocles’ *OT* but also the Croesus *logos*.

The first theme to consider in both narratives is the concept of being ignorant and learning too late. From the outset of the Croesus story, Herodotus makes it known that, as the king of Lydia, Croesus *will* be punished for the crimes of his ancestors. For while the oracle at Delphi sanctioned the kingship of his progenitor Gyges, it was added that ‘the sons of Heracles will have vengeance (τίσις) on Gyges’ posterity in the fifth generation’ (Ἡρακλείδῃσι τίσις ἥξει ἐς τὸν πέμπτον ἀπόγονον Γύγεω, 1.13.2), that is, in Croesus’ lifetime. Even before he has been

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5 Irwin 2020. Many scholars date the publication of Herodotus’ *Histories* to the mid 420s; there are interesting arguments, however, for a date later in the fifth century BCE, for which see Irwin 2020. The first performance of the *OT* is also generally thought to have taken place in the 420s but a date in the 430s or even the 440s is not inconceivable; see Finglass 2018a: 1-6.

6 For a measured approach towards the role of the alluding author, see Hinds 1998: 48-9, who rightly cautions against the total occlusion of the subjective author when reading allusions between texts.

7 See, for instance, Stahl 1975: 6-7, Gould 1989: 121, Griffin 2006: 51. Saïd 2002: 132-7 argues that some aspects of Herodotus’ Croesus *logos* can be described as tragic, notably the stories of Gyges and Atys and Adrastus. She also makes some general observations about the many ‘echoes between Oedipus Rex and the tragedy of Croesus’ (p. 135).

8 The theme of learning too late has been well studied in the case of the Croesus *logos*; see, e.g., Christ 1994: 192; Kindt 2006; Pelling 2006; Haywood 2019: 117-23.

9 Greek passages from Herodotus are taken from Nigel Wilson’s recently published OCT edition; Greek passages from the *OT* are taken from Patrick Finglass’ commentary on the play. All translations are our own and err on the side of the literal in order to emphasise certain verbal correspondences between the two texts.

properly introduced into the narrative, then, readers are already alerted to the Delphic prediction that a great τίσις will be exacted for the crimes of Gyges.\textsuperscript{11} Moreover, the narratorial comment that ‘of this utterance the Lydians and their kings took no account until it was fulfilled’ (τοῦτο τοῦ ἔπεος Λυδοῖ τε καὶ οἱ βασιλέες αὐτῶν λόγον οὐδένα ἐποιεῦντο, πρὶν δὴ ἐπετελέσθη, 1.13.2), which implicitly includes Croesus himself, underlines from an early stage the significance of being ignorant and learning too late as explanatory motifs for his undoing.

The idea of the Lydian monarch’s ignorance also appears in his dialogue with the Athenian Solon, one of several Hellenic σοφισταί (‘wise men’), according to Herodotus, who visited Croesus at Sardis (1.29.1).\textsuperscript{12} At this meeting, Croesus hopes to be designated ‘most prosperous of men’ (ἀνθρώπων ὀλβιώτατος, 1.30.3). Unfortunately for him, Solon conceives the term ὄλβιος to denote ‘a lasting, blissful prosperity’,\textsuperscript{13} rather than, as he does, in terms of material wealth. For having listened to the ‘wise adviser’ Solon’s extended reflections, Croesus nonetheless seems to consider his prosperity invulnerable. Therefore, he brusquely ‘dismissed him [Solon], considering the speech to be of no account. He thought him to be very ignorant, he who disregarded present successes and called upon people to look to the end of all affairs’ (τοὔτε λόγου μιν ποιησάμενος οὐδένος ἀποπέμπεται, κάρτα δόξας ἀμαθέα εἶναι, ὃς τὰ παρεόντα ἀγαθὰ μετείς τὴν τελευτὴν παντὸς χρήματος ὁρᾶν ἐκέλευε, 1.33.1).\textsuperscript{14} Just as Croesus and other Lydians had taken no account of the Pythia’s prior warning to his ancestor Gyges, here the king sends Solon away without paying heed to his advice, regarding him even as ‘ignorant’ (ἀμαθής). The irony of calling this famous σοφιστής ignorant may already be noted amongst some of Herodotus’ audience, but will be felt fully by all when the formerly materially successful Lydian sits atop the burning pyre at 1.86, now a prisoner of Cyrus.\textsuperscript{15} And, strikingly, just as with the Lydians and their kings’ collective amnesia about the prophecy concerning Gyges’ progeny, this wilful dismissal of Solon’s sage advice is introduced via a narratorial summary which directly informs the Histories’ external audience that the adviser fell short in gratifying the king, who

\textsuperscript{11} Harrison 2000: 224.
\textsuperscript{13} Hollmann 2015: 89.
\textsuperscript{14} For Croesus’ materialist worldview, see 1.41.1-2, 90.4; cf. Kurke 1999: 148.
\textsuperscript{15} For the different uses of irony in Herodotus, see Rutherford 2018 (pages 6-9 deal with the Lydian logos).
thus sent him away. In both instances, the narrator equips readers to assess characters’ assumptions against a wider set of perspectives.

Herodotus returns to Croesus’ ignorance and late-learning near the close of the narrative. While Croesus had adopted a positive reading of those oracles from Delphi and Amphiaras at Oropus which stated that ‘if he should march against the Persians he should destroy a great empire’ (ἵν στρατεύθηται ἐπὶ Πέρσας, μεγάλην ἀρχήν μιν καταλύσειν, 1.53.3), after his rescue from the pyre, the Pythia belabours the point on behalf of Apollo that he failed to consult the oracle sufficiently about which empire he would destroy. In addition, it transpires that he should not have been so pleased to receive a separate oracle at Delphi referring to a mule as ruler of the Medes (1.55.2), since, as is pointed out, the Persian Cyrus was born of mixed origins, and hence could be considered a ‘mule’. On account of both oracular messages, Apollo charges Croesus as uncomprehending. Upon learning the god’s response, Herodotus relates that ‘when [Croesus] heard it, he realised that the mistake (ἁμαρτάδα) was his own and not the god’s’ (ὁ δὲ ἀκούσας συνέγνω ἑωυτοῦ εἶναι τὴν ἁμαρτάδα καὶ οὐ τοῦ θεοῦ, 1.91.5). Thus, Herodotus reports that, at last, Croesus appreciates matters that he had previously ignored or misconstrued; but crucially, his move from ignorance to understanding occurs after the complete disaster that has befallen his kingdom. His knowledge of what has happened at this late point does not in any way obviate or lessen his significant demise.

Just as Croesus’ disaster is foretold in the Gyges oracle, so Oedipus’ destiny is predicted by prophecies: he will kill his father Laius and marry his mother Jocasta even though at the time he is unaware of their identity. There is no narratorial voice in tragedy, but many, maybe most, 16 Croesus’ original question to the oracles was: ‘shall Croesus march against the Persians, and if so, should he make an alliance with any army of men’ (εἰ στρατεύθηται ἐπὶ Πέρσας καὶ εἰ τινα στρατὸν ἀνδρῶν προσθέοιτο σύμμαχον, 1.53.2).
17 At 1.91, Herodotus refers three times to the god Apollo by way of the poetic form Loxias; Asheri 2007 ad loc. proposes that a ‘poetic (Delphic?) source’ lies behind Herodotus’ account of Apollo’s response. One further occurrence of the name Loxias appears at 4.163, also an oracular context.
18 ‘But as he did not understand that which was uttered [concerning the destruction of an empire] and did not inquire further, let him declare himself the cause of what happened. And when he consulted the oracle for the last time, Loxias spoke about a mule; and this also he failed to understand’ (οὐ συλλαβὼν δὲ τὸ ῥηθὲν οὐδ᾽ ἐπανειρόμενος ἑοιτῶν αἵτιν ἀποφαίνετο· τῷ καὶ τὸ τελευταῖον χρηστηριαζομένον εἶπε Λοξίης περὶ ημίονου, οὐδὲ τοῦτο συνέλαβε, 1.91.4-5).
19 Outside the Croesus logos, there is a parallel between Oedipus and another king in the Histories, the Persian Cyrus. In both stories, divine communication, fate and pity play a role: in the OT, Laius has three-day old Oedipus
spectators would have been familiar with the myth of the Labdacid house. They would quickly have noticed Oedipus’ ignorance, especially since Sophocles heightens it with dramatic irony. At the beginning of the play, the king finds out from Apollo’s oracle to Creon that Thebes is suffering from the plague because its citizens failed to search for the murderer of Laius (95-107). Oedipus begins his investigation believing that he has no personal connection with the crime. ‘I know since I have heard about it, for I never saw him’ (ἔξοιδ᾽ ἀκούων: οὐ γὰρ εἰσεῖδόν γέ πω, 105), he tells Creon. The spectator familiar with the myth knows that he is wrong since he obviously did see his father when he killed him. The irony functions in a similar way to the narrator’s comment in Herodotus: it suggests that the drama is about Oedipus’ learning process, his path from ignorance to knowledge.

Sophocles further emphasises the theme of ignorance by combining irony with repeated metaphors of blindness and vision, darkness and light. They are particularly prominent in the scene with Tiresias. Oedipus begs him to help in his search for Laius’ murderers but the seer refuses, knowing that what he has gained from his mantic art can only bring pain. Oedipus reacts angrily, saying that if the blind prophet happened to have ‘sight’ (βλέπων, 348) he could be cast out on Mount Cithaeron after hearing from a Delphic oracle that it will be his ‘fate’ (μοῖρα, 713) to die at the hand of any child of his and Jocasta’s. The infant, however, is found by a shepherd who, out of pity (κατοικτίσας, 1178), hands him over to others. In the Histories, Cyrus’ grandfather Astyages has two dreams (1.107.1, 1.108.1) which suggest that any child of his daughter’s will usurp his throne. He orders Harpagus to kill the newborn baby but the steward and his whole household weep and wail at the idea (κλαύων, 1.109.1, cf. κλαυθμῷ, 1.111.2). Instead, he hands the infant to a mountain shepherd to expose. ‘As ordained by fate’ (κατὰ δαίμονα, 1.111.1), however, the herdsman’s wife has just given birth to their still-born child and seeing baby Cyrus bursts into tears (δακρύσασα, 1.112.1) and persuades her husband to swap the two infants. Both Oedipus and Cyrus, then, are preserved in similar circumstances for the divine predictions to be fulfilled. As pointed out by Griffin 2006: 49, the two kings also see themselves as children of chance (παῖδα τῆς Τύχης, OT 1080, see below). For the tragic resonances in Herodotus’ account of Cyrus, see further Pelling 1996: 76.

20 Finglass 2018a: 13-40 analyses both the tradition of the Oedipus myth from epic to tragedy and Sophocles’ innovations. Given the popularity of the myth it seems fair to assume that in the fifth century most spectators would have been broadly familiar with the story. The oracles, however, may have been Sophocles’ invention, cf. Sommerstein 2015: 478 and Finglass 2018a: 34. Spectators would, therefore, have had to wait almost to the end of the play (1182) before finding out the precise relationship between the Delphic pronouncements to Creon (95-103), Laius (711-14, 852-4) and Oedipus (787-93, 994-6).

21 There are further prominent clusters of dramatic irony in Oedipus’ proclamation to the Thebans (216-75), e.g., at 219-20, 222, 244-5, 246-51, 253-4, 260-2, 264-6. For irony, specifically at the beginning of the OT, see Andrade 2001.

22 Cf. Whitman 1951: 138 ‘In the figure of Oedipus, the man of supreme insight, or gnome, the quest for knowledge is itself the tragic action.’ The view of Reinhardt (1979) is not dissimilar. He sees Oedipus’ path from illusion to truth centred on the question ‘what am I, and what is my own true existence?’ (100).
suspected of having committed the murder himself. Although this accusation is understandable on the level of the dramatic action, the ‘knowing’ spectator realises that Oedipus is wrong and that in reality it is he who lacks ‘sight’. Later in the scene, Tiresias discloses to Oedipus that he is Laius’ murderer but the king rejects the revelations of the, by his own admission, authoritative Tiresias (300-3) and mistakenly describes himself as ‘the man who sees the light’ (ὤστις φῶς ὁρᾶ, 375) while the seer, he says, is ‘nourished by a single night’ (μιᾶς τρέφει πρὸς νυκτός, 374). Finally, in his prophecy of the king’s future, Tiresias tells Oedipus that he will be ‘blind from seeing clearly’ (τυφλὸς … ἐκ δεδορκότος, 454). Unlike the audience, Oedipus cannot comprehend this riddling language and, not unlike Croesus who judged the wise Solon to be ‘ignorant’ (ἀμαθής, 1.33.1), dismisses the seer’s words as ‘foolish’ (μῶρα, 433).

There is a final cluster of words to do with ‘seeing’ when Oedipus explains why he has blinded himself (1270-6, 1329-35, 1371-90) and here they highlight the theme of learning too late. While Jocasta is able to escape her new reality by committing suicide, this is not possible for her parricidal son-husband ‘for I do not know with what eyes (ὁμασίων) I could have looked on (βλέπον) my father when I went to Hades nor again on my unhappy mother’ (ἐγὼ γὰρ οὐκ οἶδ᾽ ὡμασίων ποίοις βλέπον / πατέρα ποτ᾽ ἂν προσεῖδον εἰς Ἅιδου μολὼν / οὐδ᾽ αὐτῇ τάλαιναν μητέρ’, 1371-3). Oedipus’ true vision prevents him from finding relief even in death. In life too, the ‘sight’ (ὁψίς, 1375) of his children-siblings can only bring pain to his ‘eyes’ (ὀφθαλμοῖς, 1377). He has finally learnt Tiresias’ lesson. As with Croesus, his ignorance has turned into self-knowledge, but his new insight has led to the annihilation of his very existence.

Both Herodotus and Sophocles, then, emphasise their protagonists’ prolonged transition from a state of ignorance to one of full awareness. This calls to mind Aristotle’s fourth-century BCE analysis of tragedy. In the Poetics, he concludes that the protagonists of the best tragedies experience both ‘reversal’ (περιπέτεια, 11.1452a22) and ‘recognition’ (ἀναγνώρισις, 1.23-25).

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24 The self-blinding may well have been Sophocles’ innovation. In a fragment believed to be from Euripides’ Oedipus (fr. 541 TrGF), it is the palace servants who put out the king’s eyes, still believing him to be the son of the Corinthian king Polybus. See Finglass 2018a: 25.
11.1452a28) and mentions the OT as exemplary (11.1453a33). In the Histories, Croesus undergoes the reversal of his fortune in a similar manner; indeed, in Herodotus and Sophocles, recognition, the ‘change from ignorance to knowledge’ (ἐξ ἀγνοίας εἰς γνῶσιν μεταβολή, 11.1452a30-31) and reversal, the ‘change to the opposite direction of events’ (ἡ εἰς τὸ ἐναντίον τῶν πραττομένων μεταβολή, 11.1452a22-3) occur simultaneously, a practice considered ‘finest’ (καλλίστη, 11.1452b31) by Aristotle. Moreover, the third element of a tragic plot considered indispensable by Aristotle, namely ‘suffering’ (πάθος, 11.1452b9), is also present in both stories. The two kings’ inexorable progression towards disaster undoubtedly represents ‘a destructive or painful action’ (πρᾶξις φθαρτικὴ ἢ ὀδυνηρά, 11.1452b11). Both stories, then, as presented by Herodotus and Sophocles, are ‘tragic’ in broad Aristotelian terms.

Striking too is the fact that Herodotus and Sophocles use similar narrative techniques: both play on the disjuncture between their characters’ limited knowledge and the audience’s much wider understanding. Herodotus deploys narratorial comments that his characters are not privy to but which speak directly to his readers; Sophocles uses irony and metaphors to communicate with the spectator ‘over the heads’, so to speak, of the stage figures. By doing so, both authors encourage their audience to interpret the narratives at a deeper level.

Because of the contradictions between different chapters in Aristotle’s Poetics, references are quoted by chapter, page and line.

Subsequently in the Poetics, anagnorisis is more closely associated with the recognition of identity (11.1452b2-5, 16.1454b18-1455a20) but Aristotle’s first definition is more general. Moreover, he specifically allows for ‘other kinds of recognition’ (ἄλλαι ἀναγνωρίσεις, 11.1452a33), including ‘whether someone has or has not committed a deed’ (εἰ πέπραγέ τις ἢ μὴ πέπραγεν, 11.1452a35-6). Cf. Rutherford (1982: 147): ‘For all the power and terror which the story of Oedipus’ incest and parricide possesses, … the anagnorisis of Oedipus [also] entails the acquisition of fresh knowledge which changes his whole perspective.’

In chapter 7, Aristotle says that περιπέτεια can be a change either ‘from adversity to prosperity or from prosperity to adversity’ (ἐἰς εὐτυχίαν ἐκ δυστυχίας ἢ ἐξ εὐτυχίας εἰς δυστυχίαν, 7.1451a14-15). Chapters 13 and 14, however, come to contradictory conclusions: in chapter 13, the finest tragedies end in disaster, while in chapter 14 a recognition scene intervenes to prevent the calamity. For discussions of this contradiction, see, e.g., Moles 1979 and Murnaghan 1995.

Aristotle’s definition of πάθος in chapter 11 is fairly general although he does give specific examples, namely ‘public deaths, excessive pain, wounding, and so on’ (οἵ τε ἐν τῷ φανερῷ θάνατοι καὶ αἱ περιωδυνίαι καὶ τρώσεις καὶ δόσῃ τοιοῦτα, 11.1452b11-13). Only in chapter 14 is he more specific, saying that sufferings should occur ‘between familial relationships’ (ἐν ταῖς φιλίαις, 14.1453b19).

Cf. Vernant 1988: 114 (on the different understanding of νόμος (law) by Creon and Antigone in Sophocles’ Antigone): ‘It is only over the heads of the protagonists that, between the author and the spectator, another dialogue is set up in which language regains its ability to establish communication and, as it were, its transparency’.
Another point of comparison between the two texts is the special emphasis given to Croesus and Oedipus’ misplaced *elpis* (‘hope’ or ‘expectation’).\(^{30}\) In the case of Croesus, hopes and expectations first feature in his dialogue with the Athenian θεωρός Solon, who arrives in the Lydian capital Sardis ‘at the acme of its wealth’ (ʿَاκμαζούσας πλούτῳ, 1.29.1). The Lydian monarch treats his guest-friend with great munificence, asking his ‘attendants to lead Solon around his treasury … [showing everything] both great and splendid (בחירות)’ (τὸν Σόλωνα θεράποντες περιήγον κατὰ τοὺς θησαυρούς … μεγάλα τε καὶ ἀλβιά, 1.30.1).\(^{31}\) He is then struck by a desire for Solon to name the person that he considers to be the happiest of mankind. Herodotus reports in his own voice that ‘he asked about this hoping (ἐλπίζων) himself to be the most happy (ἁλβιώτατος) of men; yet Solon, not flattering him but using the truth, replied “ο βασιλεὺς Τέλλος Ἀθηναῖος” (ὁ μὲν ἐλπίζων εἶναι ἀνθρώπων ἁλβιώτατος ταῦτα ἐπειρώτα· Σόλων δὲ οὐδὲν ὑποθωμέευσας ἄλλα τῷ ἑώντι χρησάμενος λέγει ‘ὁ βασιλεύς, Τέλλον Ἀθηναίον’, 1.30.3). Croesus reacts in wonderment (ἀποθωμάσας), but still listens to his explanation for Tellus’ victory (his reasons touch on virtues that cover civic, familial and religious spheres, 1.30.4).\(^{32}\)

Croesus then inquires into the identity of Solon’s second most-happy individual, ‘fully expecting (δοκέων) at least to take second place’ (δοκέων πάγχυ δευτερεῖα γῶν οἴσεσθαι, 1.31.1). But his hopes are squandered, as Solon awards the silver medal to the Argive brothers Cleobis and Biton, who although not satisfying all the reasons given for Tellus’ happiness, do, like Tellus, receive public honours for their memorable deeds (1.32.4-5). Once again, Herodotus intervenes using his own voice to reinforce the disjuncture between Croesus’ expectations and Solon’s surprising expositions on Tellus and on Cleobis and Biton; both times he signposts the Lydian king’s hopes (ἐλπίζων, δοκέων), a tactic which signals to the reader that things will come to pass in an unexpected way. Not only this, but in the case of Tellus Herodotus even comments on Solon ‘using the truth’ (τῷ ἑώντι χρησάμενος), a manoeuvre that, ultimately, fails to endear him to the Lydian king.\(^{33}\)

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\(^{30}\) Hoping is typically a foolish enterprise in the *Histories*; see further Lateiner 2018: 134-6, who comments on Croesus’ being ‘Herodotos’ “poster boy” for *elpis*, a paradigm of hoping gone bad, and repeatedly shot down for it’ (134); cf. Harrison 2000: 61-2.

\(^{31}\) Croesus apparently expects this outlandish display of his magnificent treasury to convince Solon of his being the most blessed man that the itinerant Solon knows; cf. Purves 2010: 143-4, 205. As Gagné 2016: 83 points out, Croesus derives his wealth from the riches that his ancestors stole from the Heraclidae.


\(^{33}\) Branscome 2013: 29-30.
Later in the Croesus *logos*, Herodotus reports that the monarch made a substantial sacrificial offering to the god at Delphi,34 ‘hoping (ἐλπὶζων) that he would win over the god to their [the Lydians’] side’ (ἐλπὶζων τὸν θεὸν μᾶλλον τὶ τούτοις ἀνακτήσεσθαι, 1.50.1), and that he then consulted the oracles at Delphi and Oropus as to whether he should launch a military campaign against the Persians. Having received the same message from both oracles, namely that he will destroy a great empire if he attacks the Persians, Croesus is found ‘hoping that he will completely destroy Cyrus’ kingdom’ (πάγχυ ... ἐλπίσας καταλύσειν τὴν Κύρου βασιληίην, 1.54.1; cf. 1.71.1). And later in the narrative, Herodotus reaffirms that Croesus marches his troops into Persia, ‘expecting (ἐλπίσας) the oracle to be favourable to himself’ (ἐλπίσας πρὸς ἑωυτοῦ τὸν χρησμὸν εἶναι, 1.75.2). As these cases demonstrate, Croesus repeatedly builds up his hopes of military success against Cyrus’ Persians on the basis of a somewhat limited interpretation of ambiguous oracles that does not account for other, less optimistic readings.35 But as Herodotus’ audience will soon discover, his hopes of conquering Cyrus prove forlorn when the Persian king brings an end to the Lydian empire.

Following an initial, inconclusive battle against Cyrus, Croesus leads his troops back home with designs to launch a renewed campaign against the Persians together with allied contingents, ‘never expecting (ἐλπίσας) that ... Cyrus would march against Sardis’ (οὐδαμὰ ἐλπίσας ... Κῦρος ἐλάσῃ ἐπὶ Σάρδις, 1.77.4). But this is in fact exactly what comes to pass.36 Herodotus later comments that the king led his Lydian troops into battle against his Persian aggressor at Sardis, ‘since matters had turned out contrary to expectation from what he himself was expecting’ (ὁς οἱ παρὰ δόξαν ἐσχε τὰ πρῆγματα ἢ ὡς αὐτὸς κατεδόκεε, 1.79.2; cf. the similar phrasing at 8.4.1). He even refers to an incident in the battle, by which Cyrus dashes Croesus’ hopes by leading camels into the fray against the Lydian cavalry, causing their horses to run away in fear; the narrator thus concludes that ‘the hope (ἐλπὶς) of Croesus had been destroyed’ (διέφθαρτο τε τῷ Κροίσῳ ἡ ἐλπίς, 1.80.5). Throughout the narrative, then, Herodotus underlines the king’s tendency to rely on hope, his expecting that things will turn out a certain way. That Croesus’ *elpis* is confounded by the events which unfold serves as a firm marker of his tendency towards

34 On the wider narrative significance of these spectacular offerings, see Mills 2014.
36 Mills 2014: 151.
uncritical decision-making and his propensity not to consider less positive outcomes for himself.\textsuperscript{37}

Oedipus’ enquiry in the play is also based on hope, namely the hope of finding the murderers of Laius and, as in Herodotus, the use of the word \textit{elpis} charts the trajectory of the hero’s downfall. The first usage shows Oedipus at the height of his power and illusion:\textsuperscript{38} like Croesus, he believes that prophecies can be analysed and interpreted in the same way as human speech. After receiving Creon’s Delphic oracle, he begins by enquiring what is known about the circumstances of the late king’s death. His brother-in-law informs him that the sole survivor was able to disclose only one piece of information: that Laius and his entourage were murdered by robbers. Oedipus believes that even such minimal evidence is a good starting point since ‘one thing might lead to our finding out and learning many more things, / if we could seize some humble beginning of hope’ (ἐν γὰρ πόλλῃ ἀν ἔξερεν μαθεῖν, / ἄρρητη βραχέαν εἰ λάβοιμεν ἑλπίδος, 120-1). Although by the end of the play he does indeed find Laius’ murderer, spectators familiar with the outline of the myth will realise early on in the play that the word ‘hope’ has ironic undertones.

In the course of the action, Oedipus continues to display misguided hope. When Jocasta reveals that Laius and his men were killed where three roads meet near Delphi, Oedipus is initially startled. His only salvation now resides in interviewing the sole survivor. Jocasta then discloses that she knows the identity of the man and, for a brief moment, he is elated: he has ‘reached such a pitch of hope (ἐλπίδων)’ (ἐς τοσοῦτον ἑλπίδων / ἐμοὶ βεβῶτος, 771-2) because it may now be possible to disprove his terrible sense of foreboding that Tiresias may be right after all. However, within less than 100 lines, after recounting to his wife how he killed an old man and his entourage at just such a place near Delphi, he almost convinces himself that he is guilty of the crime. Although the chorus tell him to continue to ‘have hope’ (ἔχ᾽ ἐλπίδα, 835) and Oedipus replies that he has ‘just so much hope’ (τοσοῦτόν ... τῆς ἐλπίδος, 836), the cluster of \textit{elpis} words

\textsuperscript{37} It is noteworthy too, that Herodotus repeatedly refers to Croesus’ hopes directly following (what prove to be his unsuccessful) interpretations of oracular messages (1.54.1, 71.1, 75.2), an important motif in the overall narrative shaping of the Lydian king’s great fall in the \textit{Histories}. On oracles in the \textit{Croesus logos}, see Crahay 1956: 182–8; Kirchberg 1965: 12–32; Barker 2006; Kindt 2006, 2016: 20–8; cf. further discussion below.
\textsuperscript{38} Reinhardt 1979: 98 describes the \textit{OT} as ‘the tragedy of illusion’.
has a more sinister undertone: driven by false hope, the king is brought ever closer to his destruction.

Even after Jocasta has hanged herself and Oedipus has struck out his eyes, he continues to express hope – a hope that, if we have the ending as Sophocles wrote it, is again misplaced. After showing himself to the Thebans and rejecting the chorus’ view that his self-mutilation is a sign of madness, Oedipus comes face to face with Creon, the man whom he falsely suspected of plotting with Tiresias. Finding that ‘against my hope (ἐλπίδος) you, the best man, have come to me, the worst’ (ἐλπίδος μ’ ἀπέσπασας, / ἄριστος ἐλθὼν πρὸς κάκιστον ἄνδρ’ ἐμέ, 1432-3), he begs the new king to send him into exile. Creon, however, dashes Oedipus’ hope because he wants to send to Delphi first (1438-9). Oedipus’ false elpis is no longer a sign of his self-delusion; it has become symbolic of the total ‘reversal of his life’ (ἀλλαγῇ βίου, 1206).

In the case of both Oedipus and Croesus, then, elpis proves to be misplaced. And once again, there is a parallel between the two figures in terms of the tragedy of their downfall: not only do they experience the reversal of their fortune and the recognition of their ignorance in line with Aristotle’s Poetics; their ruin also comes about in a similar manner, ‘through some error’ (δι᾽ ἁμαρτίαν τινά, 13.1453a10). The term ἁμαρτία (error) has provoked much controversy since it only occurs twice in the Poetics, here and a few lines later (‘through a great hamartia’, δι’ ἁμαρτίαν μεγάλην, 13.1453a16). Aristotle does not offer an explanation of the word but the senses of ἁμαρτία can be grouped under three main headings: ‘to miss the mark (literally); to fail in some object or make a mistake; and to offend morally or do wrong’ (Stinton 1975: 222).
Many critics nowadays understand *hamartia* in purely intellectual terms, but the vagueness of its use in the *Poetics* seems to make a wide range of readings possible, including an error like entertaining false hopes.

The affinity between Herodotus and Sophocles even extends to the way that they undercut their characters’ hopes and expectations through carefully placed narrative devices which signal to their external audiences an altogether different reading. In the case of Croesus, Herodotus describes the oracle that he regards as being favourable to himself as ‘mixed’ (κιβδήλου), thereby hinting to readers that Croesus was unaware of the deceptive content embedded in the god’s message. Similarly, in the *OT*, the word *elpis* is used to signal that the play is conceived on two levels: for Oedipus, ‘hope’ has to do with the successful search for the criminal who killed Laius; for the ‘knowing’ spectator, however, who shares Tiresias’ perspective and is aware of the fact that Oedipus and the killer are the same person, *elpis* is a marker of the hero’s lack of self-knowledge and his eventual ruin.

A further idea that pervades both the *OT* and the *Histories* is the notion that human affairs are inherently mutable; the fates of Oedipus and Croesus serve as paradigms for humankind, which is in a state of constant flux. Having set out the general principle that nothing remains fixed regarding human ‘prosperity’ (ἐὐδαιμονίην, 1.5.4), Herodotus begins his programmatic excursus on ‘Croesus, the first barbarian we know of to subjugate the Greeks by taking tribute from them’ (ὁ Κροῖσος βαρβάρων πρῶτος τῶν ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν τοὺς μὲν κατεστρέψατο Ἑλλήνων ἐς...). He concludes that *hamartia* has ‘a range of applications, from ‘ignorance of fact' at one end to ‘moral defect’, ‘moral error’ at the other’ (221); contra Dodds 1966, see below.

There is considerable scholarly disagreement about how best to translate the term κιβδήλος. Kurke 2009 highlights the metaphorical nature of this adjective, which is associated with the Greek coinage system, and translates it as ‘counterfeit’; Pelling 2006: 154, n. 49 argues that it should instead be taken to mean ‘mixed’, as in the archaic period practice of mixing gold or silver with less valuable metals. Others have opted, instead, for ‘ambiguous’, e.g., Christ 1994: 191; Said 2002: 136. Despite the uncertainty of how best to translate the word, Harrison 2000: 152, n. 109 is right to stress that there is no reason to assume Herodotus is using the term in a pejorative way at 1.75.

‘For those that were great in times past are now in many cases small; and those that were great in my time were formerly small. So, knowing that human prosperity (εὐδαιμονίην) never remains fixed, I shall mention both alike’ (τὰ γὰρ τὸ πάλαι μεγάλα ἦν, τὰ πολλὰ σμικρὰ αὐτῶν γέγονε· τὰ δὲ ἐπ’ ἐμὲ ἦν μεγάλα, πρῶτον ἦν σμικρά. τὴν ἀνθρωπίην ὄν ἐπιστάμενος εὐδαιμονίην οὐδαμὰ ἐν τώτῳ μένουσαι, ἐπιμνήσομαι ἀμφοτέρων ἐμὸς εὐδαιμονίην ὄν εὐδαιμονίην ἐν τώτῳ μένουσαι, ἐπιμνήσομαι ἀμφοτέρων ἐμὸς, ἐμὸς ἐμὸς, 1.5.4). On the wider significance of this within the *Histories*, see variously Stahl 1975: 1-2; Shapiro 1996: 356; Harrison 2000: 51-63; Munson 2001: 182; Pelling 2006: 143; Purves 2010: 126; Dewald 2011: 54; Gagné 2013: 326, 341; Bassi 2016: 143; Chiasson 2016: 31; Clarke 2018: 313-18.
φόρου ἀπαγωγῆν, 1.6.2). Over the course of the narrative, Herodotus will make several interventions – both in his own voice and that of others – to demonstrate how Croesus’ career reflects the ephemeral nature of human prosperity.

As we saw above, Solon’s reflections on the pinnacles of human happiness are met with incredulity and consternation on Croesus’ part. The monarch therefore asks the Athenian to outline what he makes of his own prosperity; the adviser’s elusive, multi-pronged response shows how he continues to avoid the use of flattery as he promulgates his views on human (mis-)fortune.\(^4^4\) Solon begins by remarking that the divine is ‘entirely jealous’ (πᾶν φθονερόν) and prone to disturb humanity’s lot (1.32.1; cf. similarly 3.40.2, 7.46.4).\(^4^5\) Next, he emphasises the ‘long time’ (μακρῷ χρόνῳ, 1.32.2) that people live – enough for them to see and endure many hardships; for this reason, he cautions, ‘the whole of mankind is chance’ (πᾶν ἐστὶ ἄνθρωπος συμφορή, 1.32.4).\(^4^6\) The term συμφορή (which can be translated variously as ‘chance’, ‘misfortune’) proves especially arresting in the wider context of the Croesus logos, namely when the Lydian meets a terrible συμφορή after his son Atys is killed accidentally by his ξεῖνος Adrastus (1.34-45).\(^4^7\) This reference to man as ‘chance’ hints to Herodotus’ audience of the misfortune to strike Croesus in the near future, something that the narrator himself sanctions at 1.44.2 when he refers to the mourning king calling upon the god due to his ‘misfortune’ (συμφορή).

There are yet more lessons for Croesus to learn from this disquisition on happiness. Solon continues by comparing the lot of rich and unblessed people (ζάπλουτοι, ἀνόλβιος) and those with much more moderate means but who are ‘fortunate’ (εὐτυχέος, 1.32.5). He argues that those with more modest means are better off than the wealthy in a multitude of ways, protected by their ‘good fortune’ (εὐτυχίη), ‘good looks’ (εὐειδής), \textit{inter alia}, and ends by emphasising the need to look to the τέλος or end of an individual’s life (picking up on the name of the most-

\(^{4^4}\) Crane 1996: 75. For the moral dimension of Solon’s reply at 1.32, Munson 2001: 183-5 is instructive.
\(^{4^5}\) For a broader discussion on divine φθόνος in the \textit{Histories}, with further bibliography, see Chiasson 2016: 43-54.
\(^{4^6}\) Pelling 2006: 147 n. 23 refers to a similar phrase by the tragedian Chaeremon (τύχη τὰ θνητῶν πράγματα, ‘humanity’s affairs are chance’), which would later become proverbial. For the connections here with the poet Solon’s ideas on the impermanence of good fortune, see Chiasson 2016: 38-9.
\(^{4^7}\) de Jong, 2014: 179 notes that the word is repeated six times in the Atys-Adrastus story, surfacing as a ‘leitmotif’ in the Croesus \textit{logos}; cf. too Pelling 2006: 153.
happy Tellus). He concludes: ‘wait until a person ends their life, and call them not blessed (ὀλβιών) but fortunate (εὐτυχέα)’ (πρὶν δ’ ἂν τελευτήσῃ, ἐπισχεῖν, μηδὲ καλέειν κω ὄλβιον ἀλλ’ εὐτυχέα, 1.32.6). It is these observations on one being unable to discern true happiness until the end of any individual's life which lies at the heart of Solon’s opaque warning to the king. Indeed, he concludes his vision of human life: ‘it is necessary to look to the end of every matter (παντὸς χρήματος), and how it will turn out; for to many the god shows just a glimpse of happiness (ὀλβιον), but then overturns them root and branch’ (σκοπέειν δὲ χρὴ παντὸς χρήματος τὴν τελευτήν, κῇ ἀποβήσεται: πολλοὶς γὰρ ὑποδέξας ὄλβον ὁ θεὸς προρρίζους ἀνέτρεψε, 1.32.9; cf. Artabanus’ quasi-Solian reflections at 7.51.3).

It is clear, however, that Solon’s happiness lecture makes little impact, for Herodotus immediately offers a revealing conjecture about Croesus’ unchanged approach to human ὀλβία. After Solon departs Sardis, Herodotus writes that ‘a great vengeance (νέμεσις) seized Croesus, as seems likely, because he considered himself to be the most happy (ὀλβιώτατον) of men’ (ἔλαβέ ἐκ θεοῦ νέμεσις μεγάλη Κροῖσον, ὡς εἰκάσαι, ὅτι ἐνόμισε ἑωυτὸν εἶναι ἀνθρώπων ἀπάντων ὀλβιώτατον, 1.34.1). The narrator therefore makes the connection explicit to readers concerning the death of Atys in the succeeding chapters and Croesus’ (continued) disproportionate sense of his own prosperity. This appraisal of the misfortune that strikes the king demonstrates not only Herodotus’ aligning himself with Solon (or even supplementing ‘the Athenian’s focus on divine agency’), but also underlines that the sage had made an insufficient impact in his dealings with Croesus. The historian makes no signal that he was mindful of Solon’s admonitions on the mutability of human fortune until much later, near the end of the whole excursus.50

48 On this sole use of νέμεσις in the Histories, Dillery 2019 is now essential. Dillery’s reading splendidly emphasises how the Atys-Adrastus episode, to which the narrator’s comment on a ‘great vengeance’ serves as a prelude, functions ‘as a guide to help us see ‘why things happen’ elsewhere in the History’ (quote at page 55).

49 Chiasson 2016: 49.

50 For the closing chapters of the Croesus logos, see especially Versnel 2011: 184-7, who looks to classify the different motifs regarding ‘the Herodotean options on causation of the fall of an extremely lucky, rich or powerful person’ (quote at page 186). Cf. too Pelling 2006: 155-64 and Segal 1971, who focuses more narrowly on the pyre scene and its intertextual relationship with Bacchylides’ third Epinician.
Indeed, it is at the dramatic moment when he is put on a burning pyre that Croesus utters three times the name Solon; after his conqueror Cyrus bids his interpreters to inquire into the name being invoked, Croesus declares the Athenian to be ‘he who I would have preferred, over great wealth, to come to words with all rulers’ (τὸν ἂν ἐγὼ πᾶσι τυράννοισι προετίμησα μεγάλων χρημάτων ἐς λόγους ἐλθεῖν, 1.86.4). At last, Croesus begins to recognise the wisdom espoused by Solon, and he ironically dismisses as being of inferior value the very ‘great wealth’ (μεγάλων χρημάτων) that he had previously held in such high esteem. The subsequent explanation of his meeting with Solon to Cyrus at 1.86.5 recapitulates the broad sweep of Herodotus’ own narrative at 1.29-33, centring as it does on Solon’s gazing at his ‘wealth’ (ὀλβὸν) and on how things turned out just as Solon had said. He concludes, then, that ‘he [Solon] was speaking not anymore to himself but to all humanity, and most of all to those supposing (δοκέοντας) themselves to be prosperous (ὀλβίους)’ (οὐδέν τι μᾶλλον ἐς ἑωυτὸν λέγων ἢ οὐκ ἐς ἅπαν τὸ ἀνθρώπινον καὶ μάλιστα τοὺς παρὰ σφίσι αὐτοῖσι ὀλβίους δοκέοντας εἶναι, 1.86.5). So, at the moment of near death, Croesus’ recognition that human prosperity is at best a transitory thing converges with Solon’s; he realises that it is any individual who, as he had done, considers themself to be ὀλβίος that is most in need of the ‘wise adviser’s’ caveats on looking to the end of all things. Although he saves himself from death by eliciting the pity of his conqueror Cyrus, who reflected that ‘he, being also a man, was burning alive another man who had been as fortunate (εὐδαιμονίῃ) as himself’ (καὶ αὐτὸς ἄνθρωπος ἢ ἄλλον ἄνθρωπον, γενόμενον ἑωυτοῦ εὐδαιμονίῃ οὐκ ἑλάσσω, 1.86.6), each of these ideas speaks to Croesus’ situation: he is the one who the Delphic priestess announces will face a τίσις (1.13.2), and when interviewing Solon, he had failed to conceive that his εὐδαιμονίῃ would be ephemeral. Finally, Cyrus’ thinking on unsound human fortunes chimes closely with both Solon’s didacticisms at 1.32, as well as Herodotus’ own narratorial comments on the fluctuations in human prosperity at 1.5.3. As such, Cyrus’ observation serves to close the logos just as it began; Herodotus’ entire Croesus logos becomes one great ring composition on the frailties of human prosperousness.

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54 Segal 1971: 45-6 comments well on the dramatic function of time in this scene; the burning pyre adds tension and a sense of urgency for both Cyrus and Croesus, who must learn Solon’s bitter lessons quickly; cf. Chiasson 2003: 26-7.
55 Branscome 2013: 53 points out, however, that Solon’s logoi on Tellus and on Cleobis and Biton appear to have made no effect on Croesus, who indeed makes no reference to these accounts at 1.86. Cyrus’ reaction to Croesus’ speech also bears repeating here: he considered himself just a man delivering to the fire another man whose εὐδαιμονίῃ had been no less than his own. Herodotus continues that he also feared a τίσις and that he recognised ‘nothing is stable in human affairs’ (οὐδέν εἶ ὁ τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώπωι σφαλέως ἔχον, 1.86.6). Each of these ideas speaks to Croesus’ situation: he is the one who the Delphic priestess announces will face a τίσις (1.13.2), and when interviewing Solon, he had failed to conceive that his εὐδαιμονίῃ would be ephemeral. Finally, Cyrus’ thinking on unsound human fortunes chimes closely with both Solon’s didacticisms at 1.32, as well as Herodotus’ own narratorial comments on the fluctuations in human prosperity at 1.5.3. As such, Cyrus’ observation serves to close the logos just as it began; Herodotus’ entire Croesus logos becomes one great ring composition on the frailties of human prosperousness.
ζῶντα πυρὶ διδοίη, 1.86.6), the fallen king undoubtedly suffers a great reversal of fortune in the loss of his kingdom and wealth.56

Like Croesus, Oedipus is at the height of success when the play begins. Unlike Croesus, however, who equates happiness with wealth, the focus is on his public and private life. The priest of Zeus who appeals for help on behalf of the plague-ridden city calls him ‘first of men’ (ἀνδρῶν … πρῶτον, 33) and ‘best of mortals’ (βροτῶν ἄριστ’), 46) because he rescued Thebes from the sphinx and has always kept the city ‘straight’ (ὁρθῶσαι, 39; ὀρθόν 50). Oedipus is popular with the citizens and, in turn, cares deeply for them (65-7, 94). He reigns in harmony with Jocasta and Creon, each of whom has an ‘equal’ share in power (ἴσον, 579; ἰσοῦμαι, 582). He also has the support of the wider community, represented on stage by the chorus of elders. They speak freely and he accepts their advice to let Creon go (669-72) although, after the scene with Tiresias, he believes him to be his would-be-murderer (534; cf. 140-1). Indeed, even when faced with the furious sovereign, both the seer and Creon still feel they enjoy freedom of speech: while admitting that Oedipus is king, Tiresias can ‘lay claim to the equal right to answer back on equal terms’ (ἐξισωτέον ... / ἴσ᾽ ἀντιλέξαι, 408-9), and Creon similarly stands up to Oedipus, telling him ‘in reply to the things you said, listen on equal terms to me’ (ἀντὶ τῶν εἰρημένων / ἴσ᾽ ἀντάκουσον, 543-4). Only a king who believes that his position is secure can rule in this manner.57

In his personal life too, Oedipus is at the height of happiness. At the beginning of the play, Jocasta and Creon are not only his co-rulers, they are also his friends. Creon is ‘the trusted one, my friend from the start’ (ὁ πιστός, οὑξ ἀρχῆς φίλος, 385), and Oedipus’ relationship with Jocasta is even closer:58 he does not hide anything from her, not even the awful oracles

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56 Croesus will of course continue to participate in the Histories as a kind of adviser figure to Cyrus and Cambyses. Strikingly, he advises Cyrus that ‘there is a wheel in human affairs, which turns so that the same men do not always have good fortune’ (ὦς κύκλος τῶν ἀνθρωπηίων ἐστὶ πρηγμάτων, περιφερόμενος δὲ οὐκ ἔδε αἰεί τοὺς αὐτοὺς; ἐντυχὲν, 1.207.2), a kind of pastiche of Solon’s wisdom. Cyrus does not seem to have heeded this advice, however: Herodotus writes that he was ‘believing himself to be something more than a man’ (τὸ δοκέειν πλέον τι εἶναι ἀνθρώπου, 1.204.2) and that he took the rather pompous view that ‘the gods care for me’ (ἐμεῦ θεοὶ κήδονται, 1.209.4).

57 Contra Edmunds 2002: 75 ‘The tyranny of Oedipus comes into conflict with the norm of equality established in Athenian ideology.’

58 Bowra, 1944: 191 compares Oedipus’ marriage to that of Odysseus and Penelope: it is ‘full of that ‘union of hearts’, ὁμοφροσύνη, which Odysseus praised to Nausicaa as the best thing in marriage [Od. 6.180-5].’ See also
foretelling parricide and incest or his killing of the old man with his entourage near Delphi.

Altogether, then, it is unsurprising that both the chorus and the palace messenger judge Oedipus’ life before his downfall as exemplary in ‘happiness’ (εὐδαιμονία, 1190, 1197) and ‘bliss’ (ὀλβος, 1197, 1282, 1283). Spectators, however, know that his bliss will not last.

For Croesus, the vast ‘wealth’ (πλοῦτος) he amassed in his treasury and the amazement his visitors usually express, are proof of his happiness. In the OT, wealth is not emphasised in the same way, but it is a background motif nonetheless which, because of its connection with Oedipus’ false suspicions, indirectly contributes to his eventual ruin. When Oedipus is told by Creon that Laius was killed by robbers, he immediately assumes that a wider conspiracy must have been behind such a daring act and that the murder was carried out ‘with the help of money’ (ξὺν ἀργύρῳ, 124). Later, when he makes his accusation of treachery against Creon, he mocks him saying he would not have succeeded ‘without wealth’ (ἀνεύ … πλοῦτου, 541) since kingship can only be won with a large group of supporters and ‘money’ (χρήμασίν, 542). Oedipus also accuses Tiresias of plotting against him for the sake of money (κέρδεσιν, ‘profit’, 388), and the seer eventually prophesies that Oedipus will end up ‘a beggar rather than wealthy’ (πτωχὸς ἀντὶ πλουσίου, 455). Wealth, though not the main goal for Oedipus, still plays an important role. Like Croesus, he will eventually understand that wealth and kingship are ephemeral.

Both in the Histories and the OT, it is the passage of time (χρόνος, 613-15, 1213) and the vagaries of chance that ultimately prove to be the reason for the instability of human life. The terms used by both Herodotus and Sophocles are συμφορά and τύχη. In the OT, their meaning varies according to the context: they can have neutral, positive or negative associations and are, therefore, variously translated as ‘event’, ‘chance’, ‘luck’, ‘good fortune’ or ‘misfortune’.

Whitman 1951: 132-3 ‘[Jocasta] has a suave and compliant way, but at the same time she is highly influential with Oedipus and commands deference from all.’

59 In their translations Finglass, Lloyd-Jones and Jebb do not distinguish clearly between εὐδαιμονία and ὀλβος. Finglass translates both as ‘prosperity’, Lloyd-Jones and Jebb as ‘happiness’. When the two terms are combined in the fourth stasimon, the translations differ: εὐδαίμονος ὀλβος (1197) is rendered as ‘prosperity blessed by the gods’ by Finglass, ‘success sanctioned by the gods’ by Lloyd-Jones, and ‘the prize of an all-prosperous fortune’ by Jebb. Reading Herodotus and Sophocles in the light of each other can help differentiate more sharply between the two terms.

60 Harrison 2000: 114 calls the Solonian type of explanation for human misfortune ‘amoral’.

61 For τύχη in the OT, see Eidinow, 2011: 59. Tuchē is transformed ‘from the simple indication of good fortune … at the beginning of the play … to signify mankind's dangerous misunderstanding of the power of the divine as the end draws near.’ In the OT, unlike the Histories, the idea of a δαίμον, a power influencing the destiny of individuals, is
Initially, in the *OT* συμφορά and τύχη imply something positive: the priest praises Oedipus for ‘the events of his life’ (συμφοραῖς βίου, 33), that is, Oedipus’ rescue of Thebes and his subsequent marriage to the widowed queen. The king must now replicate this ‘good fortune’ (τύχην, 52) and find the polluter of Thebes and thus end the plague in the city.62

Quickly, however, the context gives the words ironic undertones. In his proclamation to the Thebans, Oedipus claims that it was ‘fate’ (τύχη, 264) that caused Laius’ demise. Unlike the ‘knowing’ spectator, he does not realise that he is talking about his own fate here, a fate that has made him into a parricide. Tiresias employs συμφορά in a deliberately enigmatic manner when he asserts that Oedipus will find no pleasure in the ‘event’ (ξυμφορᾷ, 454). Since Oedipus does not appreciate that the ‘event’ is the revelation that he is the murderer of Laius, this only makes sense to the audience. At the height of his illusion, when Jocasta has already worked out the terrible truth, Oedipus calls himself the ‘son of Chance’ (παῖδα τῆς Τύχης, 1080): he will be proud of his origin, even if he turns out to be the child of a servant in Laius’ household, since Chance marked him out both as ‘small and great’ (μικρὸν καὶ μέγαν, 1083). Unlike Herodotus and Sophocles’ audiences, Oedipus and Croesus only see the upward movement of fortune.63

Once Oedipus’ deeds have been revealed, συμφορά and τύχη are only used in the negative sense: the chorus call Oedipus ‘wretched in his bad fortune’ (δείλαιε … τῆς … συμφορᾶς, 1347) and the man ‘who not looking upon the envy of citizens and chances (τύχαις) has come to a great billow of terrible misfortune (συμφορᾶς)’ (ὅστις οὐ ζήλῳ πολιτῶν καὶ τύχαις ἐπιβλέπων, / εἰς ὅσον κλύδωνα δεινῆς συμφορᾶς ἐλήλυθεν, 1526-7).64 They now see the king as a paradigm

also important. In the course of the play, the word undergoes a similar shift as τύχη. As Eidinow says, ‘initially, it is used as a synonym for god(s) … but gradually the term takes on a more personalised sense’ (p. 59).’ There is a cluster of *daimōn* words after Oedipus’ self-blinding, with the palace messenger, the chorus and Oedipus himself sensing the presence of some supra-human being (1258, 1301, 1302, 1311, 1328). For the similarities and differences in the conception of μοῖρα in our two stories, see n. 90.

62 Croesus thinks that there should be χάρις (reciprocity) between himself, the wealthy king, and his visitors: he turns Solon away when the sage fails to adhere to this principle by recognising him as ὀλβιώτατος. The supposed relationship of χάρις is reversed in the *OT*: in the prologue the priest of Zeus expects his king’s aid in return for the Thebans’ support (47-50). For χάρις in Herodotus’ Croesus account, see further Kurke 1999: 151.

63 As we saw (n. 56), in the *Histories*, Croesus figures further as a kind of adviser figure to subsequent Persian kings. Oedipus, too, makes another appearance in Sophocles’ work: in the *Oedipus Coloneus*, though an old and blind beggar, he at least finds respect and redemption. His fate shows that the wheel of fortune can indeed turn either way.

64 The inclusion of envy, though in the *OT* not of the gods but of mortals, represents another possible Solonian echo.
(παράδειγμ’, 1193) for the whole of humanity.65 ‘Happiness’ (εὐδαιμονίας, 1197), they conclude, is only temporal. People may appear (δοκεῖν, 1191; δόξαντ’, 1192) to be happy (εὐδαιμονός, 1197) but in actual fact nothing can be deemed ‘blessed’ (μακαρίζω, 1195). This is of course the very essence of Solon’s advice to Croesus.

The OT concludes with a choral observation that almost exactly mirrors one of the Herodotean Solon’s major dictums: ‘one should wait to see the final day (τελευταίαν ἣμέραν) and should call none among mortals blessed (ὀλβίζειν) until he has crossed the limit of life without suffering (παθὼν) grief’ (θνητὸν ὄντα κείνην τὴν τελευταίαν ἰδέαν / ἡμέραν ἔπισκοποῦντα μηδὲν’ ὀλβίζειν, πρὶν ἄν / τέρμα τοῦ βίου περάσῃ μηδὲν ἀλγεινόν παθὼν, 1528-30). Many critics dismiss the final seven lines of the play as an interpolation,66 but the poet who composed them must have wanted to reinforce the idea of the instability of human life which, as we have seen, is one explanation for the misfortune that befalls both Croesus and Oedipus. This ending which contains something akin to a quotation from the Histories is the most emphatic affirmation of the close thematic and verbal affinities between the two texts.

Both Herodotus and Sophocles’ narratives thus demonstrate the fundamental significance of chance overturning an individual’s good fortune. As we saw earlier, in the Poetics Aristotle concludes that tragic heroes fall into adversity ‘through some hamartia’ (ὁ’ ἁμαρτίαν τινά, 1453a15), which, we suggested, could include an error such as entertaining false hopes. E. R. Dodds (1966) rejects any such moralising reading; he argues that hamartia is simply ‘an offence committed in ignorance of some material fact and therefore free from πονηρία [wickedness] or κακία [moral badness]’ (39).67 Even on this interpretation, Croesus and Oedipus are alike.

Neither is morally base; their error is factual: it lies in thinking that their situation is stable and secure – in failing to recognise, to echo Solon’s words, that there is a difference between luck and true blessedness. Both Herodotus and Sophocles, moreover, teach their audiences the lesson

65 In Sophocles’ Ajax, Odysseus takes no pleasure in having the maddened Ajax displayed to him by Athena because he sees him as a paradigm of humanity: ‘I pity him, the wretched man, although he is my enemy … because I see that all of us who live are nothing but phantoms or a fleeting shadow’ (ἐποικτίρω δέ νιν / δύστηνον ἔμπας, καίπερ ὄντα δοςμενή, / … ὅρω γὰρ ἡμᾶς οὐδέν ὄντας ἄλλο πλὴν εἴδολ. ὀσοπερ ζῶμεν ἢ κούφην σκιάν, 121-6).
66 The reasons adduced are both linguistic and literary. Dawe, 1982: 192-3 and Finglass, 2018a: 615-19 provide useful summaries. On interpolation at the close of the OT more generally, see n. 39.
67 For Dodds (1966: 40), ‘the hamartia of Oedipus … lay quite simply in parricide and incest - a μεγάλη ἁμαρτία [great error] indeed, the greatest a man can commit.’
of the mutability of human fate in a similar manner, by having their protagonists experience a particularly cruel and powerful ‘great calamity’ (ἄτην μεγάλην, *Hist.*, 1.32.6; *OT* ἄτας ἀγρίας, 1205, ἄτη, 1284).

Finally, in charting the tragic reversals in fortune of Croesus and Oedipus, it is important to examine not only the role played by fate in these two individuals’ demise, but also the personal responsibility that they must both bring to bear. In the case of Croesus, as noted earlier, Herodotus records an oracle predicting that a τίσις (‘vengeance’) would be exacted upon the Lydian dynasty in the fifth generation (1.13.2), and at the close of the logos, the Delphic priestess relates that Loxias wished to visit a disaster upon the sons of Croesus, but ‘fate’ (μοῖραν, 1.91.1) had it that he must pay for the ‘mistake’ (ἁμαρτάδα) of Gyges. In addition, Herodotus precedes the entire account by remarking on the impermanent nature of any city’s fortunes and on his ‘understanding’ (ἐπιστάμενος) that humanity necessarily experiences only a finite amount of ‘good fortune’ (εὐδαιμονίη) (1.5.4); a corollary of these observations is that human beings are unable to prevent the inevitable rise and fall of nations that will take place over a lengthy time period. In these ways, Croesus is profoundly inhibited in Herodotus’ narrative, unable to withstand the larger forces at work that are set on the collapse of his kingdom.

And yet, a moral explanation – that Croesus is personally responsible for the tragedy that has befallen him – is evinced at several points too in Herodotus’ account. First of all, in his communications with different oracle centres, notably Delphi, the Lydian displays a striking inability to interpret oracular messages. In his first appeal to the divine, Croesus looks to discover if any oracle has knowledge of an improbable set of actions that he carries out (i.e. the boiling up of a lamb and a tortoise in a brazen cauldron). This appeal, then, is one pivoted towards his ‘testing of oracle sites’ to ascertain (at least from his perspective) whether they ‘convey the truth’ (πειρώμενος τῶν μαντηίων ... φρονέοντα τὴν ἀληθείην, 1.46.3). A studiously

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68 The transmitted text is corrupt but the words ἄτας and ἀγρίας are accepted in all the emendations. Cf. Finglass 2018a: 532-3.
69 See further Harrison 113-4 with n. 36.
70 He does this with a view to sending again in order to inquire about an expedition against Persia – one of several points at which Herodotus notes his expansionist agenda (cf. 1.26-29.1, 71.1, 73.1). The repeated emphasis on Croesus’ expansionism is itself a marker of his own agency in the events that unfold in Herodotus’ narrative. For multiple oracular consultations in the ancient world, see Eidinow 2019.
cautious approach to oracular consultation for sure, but also one that stands in contrast to Oedipus’ reverent consultation at Delphi at the start of the OT and indeed one that inverts the traditional Greek model of seeking advice from oracles.\textsuperscript{71}

Although the king is encouraged by the response he receives at Delphi, which demonstrates a clear awareness of his cooking a lamb and tortoise in a cauldron, Croesus himself falls short in appreciating what proves to be an oracle laden with both a ‘surface’ and ‘hidden’ meaning. For there is no sign that he reflects on the first two lines, in which the god announces his supra-human ability to count all the grains of sand, measure the sea and hear those without speech.\textsuperscript{72}

These lines will resonate more deeply amongst Herodotus’ audience later, however, when the narrator reports that Croesus is told in a separate exchange with the oracle that, concerning his mute son, he shall first hear him speak on a ‘wretched’ day (ἀνόλβω, 1.85.2). The reference to ἀνολβής encourages readers to think back to Solon’s discourses on human happiness, and to reflect on the Lydian’s move away from a state of bliss (δόλβος). In addition, the oracle’s prediction that he ‘shall hear’ (αὐδήσει) his son’s first words recalls the first ‘test’ oracle, in which the god had already indicated his ability to hear the ‘voiceless’ (φωνεύντος) – an ironic gesture to the king’s future unhappy fate, when his son speaks for the first time during the capture of Sardis (1.85.2). Herodotus reports this ‘testing’ episode with some irony, then, in so far that while Croesus determines Delphi to be a source of ‘truth’ (ἀλήθεια), the overall logos implies that he does not fully appreciate what proves to be a riddling oracle that encompasses different temporal dimensions: both his present situation and a future unhappy time.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{71} Klees 1965: 16–49, 63–68 collects the relevant evidence. Christ 1994: 190-193 does not convince in his argument that Herodotus is not ‘condemning Croesus for his test of the oracles’ (quote at page 192); the overall presentation of his interaction with oracles indicates his shortcomings as an interpreter of oracular texts. Furthermore, Xen. Cyr. 7.2.15-18 demonstrates that it was inappropriate to test Apollo in the first place.

\textsuperscript{72} ‘I know the number of sand and the measure of the sea, and I comprehend the mute, and I hear the voiceless. The smell has come to my senses of tough-shelled tortoise, boiled in bronze together with lambs’ meat; beneath it lies bronze, just as bronze covers it’ (οἶδα δ᾽ ἐγὼ ψάμμου τὸν ἀριθμὸν καὶ μέτρα θαλάσσης, / καὶ κωφοῦ συνίημι, καὶ οὐ φωνεύντος ἀκούω. / ὀδήμη μ᾽ ἐς φρένας ἠλθεὶ κραταρίνου χελώνης / ἐγραφευνθής ἐν χαλκῷ ἀρμεί ἀργείοις κρέσσιν, / ἢ χαλκὸς μὲν ὑπέστρωται, χαλκὸν δ᾽ ἐπείσται, 1.47.3). Purves 2010: 152-4 stresses the incommensurable nature of mortal and immortal perspectives as exemplified in this oracle; cf. Kindt 2006: 38: Croesus ‘implicitly denies the difference in perspective and knowledge represented in the obscure oracular language’.

\textsuperscript{73} So, Kindt 2006: 38: ‘Herodotus’ audience, however, acknowledges such hints and thus reads the story of Croesus’ fall in a larger framework of significance’; cf. Harrison 2000: 41, n. 30.
As shown above, Croesus also famously misinterprets another oracle from Delphi, which foretells that he will destroy a great empire if he marches against the Persians (1.53.3). He never contemplates that this elliptical message (referred to by Herodotus later as a χρησμοῦ κιβδήλου, 1.75.2) could imply the curtailment of his own dominion, since he fails to seek further clarification from the oracle as to whose empire would be destroyed – something pointed out by the god Apollo (1.91.4), who also refers there to Croesus being αἴτιος (‘responsible’) for the loss of his power. Herodotus takes care to conclude there that after the king heard the god’s message, he accepted ‘the error’ (τὴν ἁμαρτάδα, 1.91.6) was his and not that of the god – language which chimes with the historian’s own assessment earlier in the narrative that in his ‘mistaking (ἁμαρτὼν) the import of the oracle’ (ἁμαρτῶν τοῦ χρησμοῦ, 1.71.1), Croesus marched his army against Persia. Croesus’ consistent misreading of ambiguous oracular messages surfaces, then, as one of the chief ways in which Herodotus shows that Croesus was responsible for precipitating his own downfall.

Beyond his interpretation of oracles, Croesus’ dealings with the divine elicits a level of readerly alarm in other ways too. After he is spared death by the Persian king, he remains muddled about the reasons for his comeuppance. Herodotus writes that Cyrus considers him a ‘theophile and good man’ (θεοφιλὴς καὶ ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός, 1.87.2), and asks what drove him to march his army as an enemy of Persia. Yet Croesus’ answer is less than pious: ‘I did these things to your good fortune (εὐδαιμονίῃ), and to my own bad fortune (κακοδαιμονίῃ); the god of the Greeks was responsible (αἴτιος) for these things, stirring (ἐπαείρας) me up to wage war’ (ἐγὼ ταῦτα ἔπρηξα τῇ σῇ μὲν εὐδαιμονίῃ, τῇ ἐμεωυτοῦ δὲ κακοδαιμονίῃ, αἴτιος δὲ τούτων ἐγένετο ὁ Ἑλλήνων θεὸς.

74 It is true that Croesus does go to Delphi again, ‘for since he ascertained the truth from the oracle, he made much use of it for himself’ (ἐπείτε γὰρ δὴ παρέλαβε τοῦ μαντείου ἀληθείην, ἐνεφορέετο αὐτοῦ, 1.55.1). Note, however, that he does not ask whose empire will be destroyed, as the god says he should have; instead, he seeks to know ‘whether his monarchy will endure for a long time’ (ἐὰν οἱ πολυχρόνιοι δέστα ἢ μοναρχίην).

75 Similarly, in the context of the Atys-Adrastus story, Dillery 2019: 41 writes perceptively: ‘The words, thoughts and feelings of characters in the story merge with the evaluations of the narrator, and the other way around.’

76 Herodotus gives three possibilities to explain Cyrus’ placing Croesus on the burning pyre, the third one being his ‘understanding Croesus to be a god-fearing man’ (πυθόμενος τὸν Κροῖσον εἶναι θεοσεβέα, 1.86.2) and his wanting to know if any of the ‘gods’ (δαιμόνων) would save him on the pyre. The embedded focalisation in these chapters is striking: it is Cyrus, not Herodotus, who regards Croesus as a theophile, and it is Cyrus, Herodotus conjectures, who was testing whether the gods would rescue the king. Croesus’ subsequent reproaching of the Greek gods (1.90) and the god’s firm rebuttal (1.91) raises the question, then, as to the soundness of Cyrus’ judgements concerning his ostensibly theophilia.

ἐπαείρας ἐμὲ στρατεύεσθαι, 1.87.3). Even at this late stage, he continues to assign the (Greek) gods as the cause of his ill fortune. Shortly after the pyre scene, he even sends some emissaries to Delphi, asking if the gods felt no ‘shame’ (ἐπαισχύνεται) in inciting him and convincing him he would capture an empire (1.90.4). Once more, Herodotus signals Croesus’ lack of humility in his dealings with the oracle; for the Lydian emissaries were also required to ask whether it was customary for the Greeks’ gods to practice ‘ingratitude’ (ἀχαρίστοισι, 1.90.4). Croesus’ extensive engagement with the divine, then, illustrates how he helped to bring about his fated destruction, since it was his naïve ‘trusting in the [empire] oracle’ (τῷ χρηστηρίῳ πίσυνος, 1.73.1) that gave him motivation to launch his military attack. The reproach he exhibits to the god suggests a lack of self-knowledge and introspection on his part, to the extent that many of Herodotus’ readers might well be surprised by Loxias’ rather benign reply, in which the god does not chastise the king for asserting that he lacked gratitude for the substantial donations made at Delphi.

In considering Croesus’ character, there are a number of positive aspects that Herodotus emphasises. He is clearly a mild ruler for much of Herodotus’ narrative, not least in his kind treatment of the tragic figure Adrastus – both before and after he accidentally slays the king’s son Atys. Indeed, following Atys’ death, he tells Adrastus that he does not hold him ‘responsible’ (αἴτιος) for the accidental killing of his son, ‘except in as much as you did it involuntarily’ (εἰ μὴ ὅσον ἀέκων ἐξεργάσαο, 1.45.2). Not only this, but Croesus exhibits an inquiring mind: while his initial ‘testing’ of oracle centres goes against the traditional Greek model of oracular consultation, it succeeds inasmuch that he successfully identifies, from his point of view, those oracles that conveyed a true report of his obscure actions. Moreover, he is

78 Cf. Gagné 2013: 335.
79 Adrastus himself displays striking affinities with Oedipus. He is first introduced as having ‘involuntarily’ (ἀέκων, 135.3) slain his brother, and later, despite his and Croesus’ best efforts, he also ‘involuntarily’ (ἀέκων, 1.45.2) kills Croesus’ son, fulfilling the terms of a dream sent to Croesus which predicted that his son would die because of an iron spear (1.38.1). This closely recalls Oedipus who, as prophesied at Delphi, commits parricide and incest ‘unwittingly’ (ἄκοντα, 1213, 1230) in spite of doing everything possible to prevent the oracle from coming true. Moreover, although not being blamed by those around them, both men accept the responsibility for their deeds and perform violent acts against themselves: Adrastus by committing suicide, Oedipus by blinding himself. There is also a slight verbal echo between the two narratives in the use of the superlative form of adjectives, Adrastus calling himself the man ‘most weighed down by misfortune’ (βαρυσυμφορώτατος, 1.45), Oedipus ‘the most hated of mortals’ (ἐχθρότατον βροτῶν, 1346).
careful to form an alliance with the Lacedaimonians (1.70.1) following his extensive set of inquiries at Delphi into the most pre-eminent of the Greek states.

There are other passages, however, that nevertheless point to less positive aspects of Croesus’ character profile. In his dealings with Solon, he proves to be dismissive and decidedly lacking in self-awareness. For having heard about Tellus and Cleobis and Biton, Herodotus writes that Croesus ‘became incensed’ (σπερχθείς, 1.32.1) and that he jibed him for considering ‘our prosperity’ (ἡμετέρη εὐδαιμονίη) as nothing compared to that of private individuals. Not only this but he sent Solon away, thinking him an ‘ignoramus’ (ἀμαθής, 1.33). It is then reported on the authority of Herodotus himself that the ‘great vengeance’ (νέμεσις μεγάλη, 1.34.1) which was visited upon the king seemed to be due to his thinking himself ὀλβιώτατος. In these chapters, Herodotus effectively demonstrates that the Athenian’s advice makes no impact on Croesus, who registers as rather haughty as he continues to believe in his superlative happiness. It is important to note too, that final enigmatic, rather ugly postscript to the Croesus logos concerning the king’s half-brother Pantaleon. The particularly brutal treatment directed against his rival claimant to the Lydian throne, death by carding (1.92.4), offers a shocking and fresh reading on his character that forces audiences to reassess the existing image that has been developed of a somewhat foolish but relatively moderate individual who exercises caution as he looks to expand his empire. It is also striking to note in this context the stark juxtaposition with Adrastus, who first introduced himself to the Lydian as the murderer of his brother ‘unwilling against myself’ (ἐμεωυτοῦ ἀέκων, 1.35.3). Herodotus permits no such lack of intention on Croesus’ part; he violently destroys any possible dynastic challenge to his power base.

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81 On Solon’s failure to convert Croesus to his way of thinking in these chapters, see Pelling 2006: 152. His view, however, that ‘Solon’s type of argument is expressively roundabout … [warning] Croesus of the dangers, but very tactfully’ is not altogether persuasive: this captures less than adequately the bold and uncompromising nature of Solon’s logos, which, as 1.33 spells out, so displeases Croesus; cf. Lloyd 1987.
82 Cf. Dillery 2019: 47-8, focusing on verbal connections between νομίζειν and νέμεσις in this passage.
84 While Croesus’ utterance that Adrastus killed Atys against his will (ἀέκων) at 1.45.2 might intimate a more forgiving disposition, his subsequent remark that ‘it was one of the gods, he who long ago indicated to me what was to be’ (θεῶν κού τις, ὅς μοι καὶ πάλαι προεσήμαινε τα μέλλοντα ἔσεσθαι) should raise eyebrows. He is presumably referring there to his dream reported at 1.34.1-2, which ‘signified’ (σημαίνει) the death of his son by an iron spear. Croesus only has reason to believe, then, that the divine foresaw Atys’ death; neither he nor Herodotus’ readers are permitted to hold the gods responsible.
Redounding from the whole *logos*, then, is a complex scheme in which ultimate responsibility for Croesus’ ruin is difficult to assign, since divine and human causes commingle, but also one in which Herodotus clearly reveals the fallen king’s weaknesses and failings.\(^85\)

Oedipus’ fate, like that of Croesus, is determined before his birth:\(^86\) as noted earlier, both the parricide and incest are foretold in oracles before they are committed.\(^87\) Once the truth has been revealed, not a single stage figure censures Oedipus for what he has done; everyone only expresses grief and pity for the blind king.\(^88\) The palace messenger who announces Oedipus’ entry after his self-blinding warns the Thebans that they will see such a sight ‘as would drive to pity even a man who hates him’ (οἷον καὶ στυγοῦντ᾽ ἐποικτίσαι, 1295-6) and both he and the *choreutai* stress that his crimes were committed ‘unwittingly’ (ἀκοντα, 1213, 1230).\(^89\) Even Creon, who has every reason to be angry with Oedipus, specifically mentions that he has not

\(^85\) See also Gagné 2013: 336-7: “Two general perspectives, then, are deployed in the narrative of Croesus’ downfall. One, the divine perspective … The other, the human perspective of apparent contingency taught by Solon to the king’ (p. 336).

\(^86\) As many critics have pointed out, ‘predetermination’ is a post-fifth-century philosophical concept. Greek poets and philosophers did not believe that divine foreknowledge implied an absence of human agency. In the *Odyssey*, Zeus’ rejection of blame for actions committed by evil men like Aegisthus shows how Homer saw fate and agency working together: ‘Alas, how mortals blame the gods! They say that evils come from us; but they themselves by their own recklessness experience suffering beyond their fate (ὅτα πόσοι, οἷον δὴ νοθεοῦς βροτοί αἰτιόωνται: / ἐς ἡμὲνον γὰρ φασι κάκ᾽ ἐμεμναυ, οἱ δὲ καὶ αὐτοί / σφῆσιν ἀτασθαλήσαν υπὲρ μόροι ἄλγε᾽, *Od*. 1.32-4); cf. R. Parker 1999: 20. See also Heraclitus who thought that ‘a man’s character determines his destiny’ (ἡθος ανθρώπων δαίμων, DK 22 B 119; cf. Allan, 2013: 176) and Aeschylus’ *Persians* where Darius’ ghost maintains that ‘when someone is in a hurry himself, the god will assist him’ (ἄταν σπειδῆ τις αὐτός, γὸ θεὸς συνάπτεται, 742). For detailed discussions of fate and determination in relation to the *OT*, see Dodds 1966: 42, Winnington-Ingram 1980: 150-78, especially 173-8, Schmitt 1988: 10-12, and Cairns 2013: 122-6 and 136-47 with bibliography.

\(^87\) Lloyd-Jones 1971 and Kovacs 2019 see the reason for Oedipus’ misfortunes in the transgressions in the previous generation and they refer to the oracle given to Laius (713-14, 852-4) foretelling that his son will kill him. They argue that the second *stasimon* of Aeschylus’ *Septem* (742-57) should inform the interpretation of Sophocles’ *OT*. In Aeschylus, the chorus sing about Apollo’s repeated warnings to Laius against having children. The punishment for ignoring this caveat falls on Oedipus. This would be similar to Croesus’ punishment for Gyges’ crimes generations earlier. In Sophocles, the oracle to Laius does not contain such threats and the question of divine justice is, therefore, more complex. On the possible unconditionality of the oracle, see Wilamowitz 1899: 55, Dodds 1966: 41, Finglass 2018a: 31-3.

\(^88\) Allan 2013: 189, n. 21 points out that ‘the audience’s sympathy and pity for the blinded Oedipus are cued by the Messenger’s introduction.’ Cairns 2013: 149 gives all the references for expressions of sympathy for Oedipus by stage figures. *Contra*, for the chorus at least, Kullmann 1994: 112.

\(^89\) See notes 79 and 84 above for the parallel use of ἀέκων (1.35.3, 1.45.2) in the Croesus-Adrastus-Atys story. In Sophocles’ *Trachiniae*, too, the chorus tell Deianeira that she has brought about Heracles’ calamity ‘involuntarily’ (μὴ ἡ ἐκσοσίθας, 727). In all three stories, prophecies predict the catastrophes, but the perpetrators nonetheless feel responsible for their deeds.
come to reproach him (1423). On the story plane, Oedipus cannot be blamed for a destiny (μοῖρα) known to Apollo even before his birth.\(^{90}\)

As we have seen throughout this analysis, however, the \(OT\) also operates on another plane,\(^{92}\) that of the ‘knowing’ spectator, and several stage figures refer to the need for retribution prior to the discovery of the truth. At the beginning of the play, Oedipus talks about Laius’ murder as the ancient ‘guilt’ (αἰτίας, 109) and Creon says that ‘vengeance has to be exacted’ on the killers (τιμωρεῖν, 107). Tiresias, whose voice has even greater authority, speaks of the crimes in moralistic terms:\(^{93}\) the king is the ‘unholy polluter of this land’ (γῆς τῆςδ᾽ ἀνοσίῳ μιάστορι, 353), he is in an ‘evil’ plight (κακοῦ, 367, 413; κακῶν, 424), his relationship with his dear ones is ‘most shameful’ (αἴσχισθ᾽, 367), and he is an ‘enemy to your own below’ (ἐχθρὸς … / τοῖς σοῖσιν αὐτοῦ νέρθε, 415-16). The spectators’ view of Oedipus’ deeds is shaped by the way they are perceived on the level of the story. Since they already know the identity of the perpetrator, their main interest is likely to be the manner in which the crimes were committed and where the responsibility for them lies.\(^{94}\)

\(^{90}\) The term μοῖρα (destiny, fate, a person’s portion in life) occurs six times in the \(OT\) (376, 713, 863, 887, 1302, 1458). In Tiresias’ utterance (376), the conception of μοῖρα seems closest to that of the Pythia in the \(Histories\). The seer tells Oedipus that ‘it is not your moira to fall at my hand, since Apollo, who has it in his mind, will be sufficient’ (οὐ γάρ σε μοῖρα πρός γ᾽ ἔμοι πεσεῖν, ἐπεὶ / ἱκανὸς Ἀπόλλων, ὃ τάδ᾽ ἐκπρᾶξαι μέλει, 376-7). In the \(Histories\), the Pythia explains to Croesus’ emissaries that ‘none may escape his allotted fate (μοῖραν), not even a god … Indeed, Loxias desired that the suffering of Sardis should fall in the lifetime of Croesus’ sons, not Croesus’ own, but he could not lead away the Fates (μοίρας) from their course’ (τὴν πεπρωμένην μοῖραν ἀδύνατα ἐστὶ ἀποφυγεῖν καὶ θεῷ … προθυμεομένου δὲ Λοξίεω ὅκως ἂν κατὰ τοὺς παῖδας τοῦ Κροίσου γένοιτο τὸ Σαρδίων πάθος καὶ μὴ κατ᾽ αὐτὸν Κροίσον, οὐκ οἷόν τε ἐγίνετο παραγαγεῖν μοίρας, 1.91.1-2). Both Tiresias and the Pythia, then, presuppose a previously fixed, unalterable destiny. Nonetheless, in the \(Histories\), Loxias manages to delay the taking of Sardis by three years and saves the Lydian king from the burning pyre. In the \(OT\), Apollo does not intervene to help Oedipus. Even here, however, an individual’s moira does not seem to be entirely pre-set. In the second stasimon, the choreutai imply that a person’s behaviour can affect their moira: ‘if someone moves arrogantly in deed or word … may an evil destiny (κακὰ … μοῖρα) take him, for his ill-starred (δυσπότμου) insolence’ (εἰ δέ τις ὑπέροπτα χερσὶν / ἢ λόγῳ πορεύεται, / … κακὰ νῦν ἔλοιπο μοῖρα, δυσπότμου χάριν χλιδᾶς, 883-4, 887-8). On moira in the \(OT\), see Eidinow 2011: 55-7.

\(^{91}\) Wilamowitz 1899: 56 ‘Der Gott weiß die Zukunft’ and Whitmann 1951: 140-1 ‘Apollo knows the future; he does not create it.’ \(^{92}\) Kitto 1995: 138 makes a similar point: ‘The action moves on two plains simultaneously.’ He is talking about the human and divine planes, however, not about the different perspectives of the internal and external audience.

\(^{93}\) Cf. Kullmann, 1994: 109 Tiresias ‘ist am ehesten als Sprachrohr des Apollon zu betrachten. Es ist auffällend, in welch persönlicher Weise er dem Odipus seine ‘Befleckung’ durch die Tötung des Vaters (353) und die Blutschande mit seiner Mutter (367) … als persönlich zu verantwortende Handlung zurechne.’ \(^{94}\) Oedipus’ innocence or culpability continue to be contentious points of discussion. The main positions are as follows: Oedipus is entirely blameless: Wilamowitz 1899, Dodds 1966, and, most recently, Finglass 2018a; Oedipus pays for the sins of his father: Lloyd-Jones 1971, Kovacs 2019; Oedipus cannot be blamed, but is answerable, for his actions: Kullmann 1994, Cairns 2013; Oedipus suffers the typical fall of the tyrant: Edmunds 2002; double
In many ways Oedipus is presented as an ideal ruler: he is compassionate, intelligent, and determined to find out the truth. It is precisely these qualities, however, that also make it possible for the destiny foretold by Apollo to be fulfilled. First, Oedipus could have ignored the fellow-banqueteer who disputes that the Corinthian king Polybus is his father; instead, he questions the royal couple. Although he is initially ‘cheered’ (ἐτερπόμην, 785) by their angry reaction, the mere possibility that the allegation may be correct is ‘constantly stealing up on me’ (ἔκνιζέ μ’ ἀεί, 786). He must know the truth. Confronted with Apollo’s terrible oracle, he makes the same error of judgement as Croesus. He only hears the surface meaning: he believes that ‘father’ and ‘mother’ refers to Polybus and Merope. Both Croesus and Oedipus should have questioned the Pythia further. The Lydian monarch should have enquired which empire will be destroyed if he attacks the Persians; Oedipus should have asked: ‘Who are my parents?’

Oedipus’ second mistake consists in believing that he can solve any problem purely by using his intelligence and so dismissing Tiresias’ ‘prophetic power’ (μαντείας, 394). He is troubled by the seer’s prophecies but after the Corinthian messenger has reported Polybus’ death he entirely questions the validity of ‘the prophetic hearth of the Pythia’ (τὴν Πυθόμαντιν ἑστίαν, 965) and concludes that the oracle that Laius would be killed by his son was ‘worth nothing’ (ἄξι᾽ οὐδενός, 972). Croesus and Oedipus thus display a similar attitude to prophecies: they are cautious in their dealing with them but feel they can, and need to be tested, against human knowledge.

motivation: Allan 2013; Apollo manipulates everything, Kovacs 2019; Apollo knows the future but does not create it: Wilamowitz 1899, Whitman 1951. Hester 1977 provides an extensive, but now outdated, bibliography.

Kitto 1995: 139 ‘an apparently malignant chain of circumstances combined now with the strong, now with the weak side of his character produces the catastrophe.’ Similarly, Bowra, 1944: 185 ‘The gods have chosen Oedipus for this fate. But the lesson that he himself must learn must be suited to his own nature.’ The palace messenger also hints at the part played by Oedipus’ personality when he says that ‘the sorrows that give most pain are those that are clearly self-chosen’ (τῶν δὲ πημονῶν / μάλιστα λυποῦσ᾽ αἳ φανῶσ᾽ αὐθαίρετοι, 1230-31).

Like Oedipus, Jocasta privileges human reason over prophetic speech, suggesting that ‘there is nothing mortal that possesses mantic skill’ (ἐστί σοι / βρότειον οὐδὲν μαντικῆς ἔχον τέχνης, 708-9) and adducing as ‘proofs’ (σημεῖα, 710) the Delphic oracle to Laius that never came true. She does, of course, not deny the authority of Apollo himself: she only distinguishes between the god and ‘his servants’ (τῶν ... ὑπηρετῶν, 712).

In the notoriously difficult second stasimon the chorus pray for a ‘destiny’ (μοῖρα, 863) in which they possess ‘reverent purity in all words and deeds’ (τὰν εὔσεπτον ἁγνείαν λόγων / ἔργων τε πάντων, 864-5). On the story plane, they are not censoring Oedipus since they are, and remain, loyal to him to the very end. The audience, however, may hear in the words a criticism of the near-impuinos attitude to prophets and oracles just displayed by Jocasta and Oedipus, especially since the choreutai also display concern that ‘the oracles of Laius are fading’ (φθίνοντα γὰρ Λαΐου / θέσφατ᾽, 906-7) and ‘religious matters are disappearing’ (ἔρρει δὲ τὰ θεῖα, 910). Scodel 1982: 222-3
Oedipus’ belief in his superior intelligence leads to more serious flaws. The first is his propensity to draw conclusions too quickly – a trait displayed by Croesus too, who does not reflect on Solon’s wisdom and reads oracles in a way that best suits his ambitions. Since he is sure that he has not killed his father, he makes several deductions which on the story plane are logical but on the extra-dramatic level will be perceived as incorrect. First, when Tiresias accuses him of being Laius’ killer, he quickly assumes that the seer has an ulterior motive and is plotting with Creon. A mere probability has become a certainty in Oedipus’ mind. Secondly, when he sees Creon in the next scene, he gives him little chance to allay his suspicions and swiftly condemns him to death (623). The penalty is never carried out but the threat acts as a signal to the audience that the just and compassionate king is in danger of becoming a tyrant. In the Histories, Croesus showed the brutal side of his personality in his treatment of his brother Pantaleon; in Sophocles, Oedipus’ unwarranted condemnation of Creon is equally revealing.

In addition to this, Oedipus has the tendency to become indignant when challenged, another trait he shares with Croesus who became irate with Solon. This propensity is first emphasised when Tiresias’ refusal to help in the search for Laius’ murderers quickly drives Oedipus to ‘anger’ (ὀργάνειας, 335) but in the course of the play all the stage figures refer to the king’s temper.


99 Cf. Schmitt 1988 and n. 23. Near the end of the play Oedipus draws another incorrect conclusion: after the Corinthian messenger’s disclosure that he saved baby Oedipus and that the child came from someone in Laius’ household, Jocasta begs him to stop his search for his birth parents (1060) because she now knows his true identity. Oedipus, however, falsely assumes that she must be ashamed of his possibly lowly birth (1079).
100 In the second stasimon the chorus sing ‘hubris begets a tyrant’ (ὕβρις φυτεύει τύραννον, 873). On the level of the story, the expression is unlikely to be a criticism of Oedipus since ‘in tragedy … the word τύραννος … simply means “King”’ (V. Parker 1998: 158, but note Finglass 2018a: 436) and ‘tyrant’ in a negative sense … [is not] found elsewhere in Sophocles’ (Scodel 1982: 215). White 1955, however, notes that ‘for Athenian dramatists’ the word ‘almost always … contains the suggestion of a newly acquired or dangerously arbitrary power which is likely to be irresponsibly misused, … as in Sophocles’ Oedipus Tyrannus 873 … [while] in other passages there can be seen an effective double entendre between the conventional meaning king and the derogatory meaning of despot (3)’. On the extra-dramatic level, there are many details in the ode that can be understood as referring to the king and pointing to his coming downfall. Scodel 1982: 217-18 sees the historical Solon’s poetry with their themes of hubris and tyranny as an intertext. For further intertexts, see Lloyd-Jones, 1971: 110 and Burton 1980: 160-3. For detailed discussions of the term τύραννος in the OT, see Knox 1954 and Edmunds 2002. For analyses of the ode as a whole, including emendations of line 873, see n. 97.
101 An assortment of words is used: ὀργή (anger) by Tiresias (337, 344, 364) and the chorus (405, 524); θυμός (passion) by Tiresias (344) and Creon (674); μῆνις (wrath) by Jocasta (699), and λυσσῶντος (enraged) by the palace
Even Oedipus himself mentions it, and the audience are shown the vital role it played at the meeting of the three roads near Delphi where he encountered the old man and his entourage. When they attempt to drive him from the road by force, Oedipus strikes the driver of the wagon ‘in anger’ (δι᾽ ὀργῆς, 807), slays Laius who hit him with a goad, and crucially ends up killing them all (κτείνω δὲ τοὺς ξύμπαντας, 813). He even admits that the old man ‘paid an unequal penalty’ (οὐ μὴν ἴσην γ᾽ ἔτισεν, 810). Oedipus commits a crime which goes beyond what was foretold by Apollo and this shows that he possesses agency. He can, and must, also be held accountable for his actions.

Both in Herodotus and Sophocles, there is a moral explanation for the kings’ misfortunes. After the revelation of the truth, Oedipus, like Croesus, accepts the responsibility for his deeds. Although no one blames him, he sees himself as ‘the most hated by the gods’ (θεοῖς / ἐχθρότατον, 1345-6; θεοῖς γ᾽ ἐχθροδαίμων, 815), ‘ungodly’ (ἄθεος, 1360), ‘impious’ (ἀσεβῆ, 1382, 1441), ‘impure’ (ἀναγνόν, 1383), ‘stained’ (κηλῖδα, 1384), and ‘accursed’ (καταρατότατον, 1345; ἀθλίου, 1413). Through his act of self-blinding he takes ownership of his crimes. When asked by the chorus ‘which of the gods stirred you up’ (τίς σ᾽ ἐπῆρε δαιμόνων, 1328), he replies ‘it was Apollo, Apollo, my friends, who accomplished these things, these evil, evil sufferings of mine. Yet no one but my wretched self struck me with my own hand’ (Ἀπόλλων τάδ᾽ ἦν, Ἀπόλλων, φίλοι, / ὁ κακὰ κακὰ τελῶν ἐμὰ τάδ᾽ ἐμὰ πάθεα. / ἔπαισε δ᾽ αὐτόχειρ νιν οὔτις, ἀλλ᾽ ἐγὼ τλάμων, 1329-31).

Although his blindness was foretold messenger (1258). The frequency and variety of references to Oedipus’ temper is surely to be noted by the audience and, on the extra-dramatic plane, to be used as a guide to evaluate Oedipus’ personality and the role it plays in the calamities that befall him. The motive for the killing of Laius and his entourage is presented in an ambiguous way: it can be read as an act of self-defence or of aggression. Critics who see the killings as self-defence argue that Oedipus was driven from the road ‘by force’ (πρὸς βίαν, 805) and hit ‘in the middle of the head with a double goad’ (μέσον / κάρα διπλοῖς κέντροισι, 808-9), cf. Finglass 2018a: 72. Those who think that it was an act of aggression say that Oedipus should have given way to a man who was evidently of a higher status than himself and accompanied by a holy herald, cf. Schmitt 1988: 22.

103 See Allan 2013 on the principle of ‘double motivation’ (183) and the Aeschylean doctrine that ‘the doer must pay’ (178), no matter their intention.

104 Dodds 1966: 44 draws a parallel with Adrastus who kills himself on the tomb of Atys (1.45.3). He does so ‘for the same reason that Oedipus blinds himself. Morally innocent though he is and knows himself to be, the objective horror of his actions remains with him and he feels that he has no longer any place in human society.’

105 This short exchange is particularly rich in Herodotean echoes. First, the chorus use the same verb (ἐπῆρε, ‘stirred up’, 1328) as Croesus when he reproached the Pythia for ‘stirring me up’ (ἐπαείρας, 1.87.3) to wage war on the Persians. Secondly, Oedipus’ answer to the chorus and Croesus’ reply to Cyrus take a similar form but with added chiasmus: Oedipus sings that ‘it was Apollo, Apollo, my friends, who accomplished these things, these evil, evil sufferings of mine. Yet no one but my wretched self struck me with my own hand’ (Ἀπόλλων τάδ᾽ ἦν, Ἀπόλλων,
by Tiresias (419, 454-6), this act was not performed ‘unwittingly’ (ἀκοντα, 1213, 1230) like the earlier ‘evil, evil sufferings’, the parricide and incest. Now that he is knows his identity and the wrongs he has perpetrated, his own wish coincides with that of Apollo and, as the palace messenger suggested, he has blinded himself ‘willingly’ (ἐκοντα, 1230).

In the end, the two kings recognise their error of judgement: Croesus acknowledges that Solon was right to advise him to look to the end of all things; Oedipus recognises that Tiresias correctly identified his plight. Again, Aristotle’s analysis, this time of the character of the tragic hero, works for both Sophocles and Herodotus. Their protagonists cannot be described as entirely ‘decent men’ (ἐπεικεῖς ἄνδρας, 13.1452b33) nor ‘depraved’ (μοχθηρούς, 13.1452b35); instead, each is ‘someone not preeminent in virtue and justice’ (ἀρετῇ διαφέρων καὶ δικαιοσύνῃ, 13.1453a7) who falls into adversity through ‘a great hamartia’ (δι’ ἁμαρτίαν μεγάλην, 13.1453a15). As the discussion has shown, ἁμαρτία is no longer a term that simply denotes an error of fact but one that has moralistic overtones and is particularly appropriate for powerful people who think that their situation is stable and secure and unlikely to deteriorate with time. Altogether, for both Croesus and Oedipus, fate and responsibility work hand in hand.

Despite some basic differences in the narratives of Croesus and Oedipus, then, not least the emphasis in Herodotus’ account on Croesus’ somewhat cautious drive towards imperial expansion and the focus in the OT on acts committed against the family, it is clear that there are a number of striking parallels between Herodotus’ Croesus logos and Sophocles’ OT. First, the story-lines echo each other: in both texts, powerful τύραννοι experience complete ruin. While still at the height of their good fortune, Croesus and Oedipus ignore the words of wise men who warn them of the discrepancy between appearance and truth. Both dismiss their interlocutors, not realising that it is they themselves who are ignorant. They even entertain the hope of maintaining

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106 Cf. Cairns 2013: 136. Contra, e.g., Kovacs (2019: 113) who argues that throughout the play Apollo ‘tricks Oedipus into ruining himself and his parents’. In his translation of the OT, however, his view is more balanced, since he concedes that ‘his [Apollo’s] intervention does not destroy Oedipus’ freedom’ (2020: 14).
or increasing their success but, crucially, find out when it is too late that their expectations were false. Prophecies also play a major role, with the two kings insuffciently appreciating that the language of gods cannot be interpreted like that of mortals.

Secondly, there are clear thematic affinities between the two texts, especially in their conception of human fortune. Both the Histories and the OT offer two parallel, and seemingly contradictory, explanations for human misfortune. According to one reading, human life is inherently unstable and mortals experience changes of fortune irrespective of the way they lead their lives. Personal culpability or innocence are, then, irrelevant. A moral interpretation, however, is also possible: it is true that the Delphic god has foretold the destinies of Croesus and Oedipus, but it is their personalities, their weaknesses and their strengths, that make it possible for certain prophecies to be fulfilled. Human agency and responsibility, here, play a much greater role.

The two texts, which of course belong to different genres, also employ similar narrative devices: in both, there are two lines of communication, one between the characters within the world of the story, the other between the narratorial or authorial voice and the audience outside the world of the play or text. Since the authors and their audiences possess greater knowledge than the characters in the narratives, both discourses can be read on two levels: a simpler, surface level and a more complex, deeper plane that subtly comments on the action and foreshadows what is to come. This manner of composition encourages the audience to get involved in a more analytical manner and allows each individual to interpret the discourse in accordance with their personal level of competence.107

Finally, the discussion has illustrated how both the OT and the Croesus logos can be called ‘tragic’ – in the Aristotelian sense of the word. Neither king is entirely virtuous; both make errors which, while leading to greater self-understanding, bring about terrible suffering and the complete reversal of their lives. The effect on the audience is also as described by Aristotle. The events presented are indeed ‘fearful and pitiable’ (φοβερῶν καὶ ἐλεεινῶν, 13.1452b32-3).

107 For a similar idea in comedy, see Revermann 2006: 115 ‘[Aristophanes’ Thesmophoriazusae] works on many registers and is designed for stratified decoding by a diversified audience’; similarly for tragedy, Alan and Kelly 2012: 8 ‘tragedy’s very status as a polyphonic form of popular art meant that their creations had to offer something for everyone in the audience’.
Someone who sees the fate of Croesus and Oedipus as a paradigm for all humankind, will experience fear as ‘for one like themself’ (περὶ τὸν ὅμοιον, 13.1453a4): their own wheel of fortune could also turn at any time. Even a person who finds Croesus or Oedipus morally deficient is likely to feel pity ‘for the man undeserving of misfortune’ (περὶ τὸν ἀνάξιόν ... δυστυχοῦντα, 13.1453a4) since neither king’s shortcomings are so great as to warrant the depth of their calamity.

Although it is impossible to say with any certainty whether Herodotus and Sophocles alluded to each other, the frequency and variety of the affinities we have traced (thematic, verbal, narrative) seems to represent more than ‘a body of proverbial wisdom to a large extent taken for granted by both Herodotus and his contemporaries’ (Harrison, 2000: 39).108 Rather than being chance echoes, they suggest that the two authors may have been more closely connected.

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108 For less extensive thematic parallels with other ancient authors, see Harrison 2000: 38-9, nn. 17-20.
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