

Female Advisors Between East and West

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Abstract This article discusses the role of female advisors in Mesopotamian and Greek texts. Case studies are devoted to the advisors of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal, and the female advisors in Herodotus, namely the daughters of Polycrates and Periander and Gorgo. While female advisors played an important role in Greece and Mesopotamia, the comparison revealed that, while in Mesopotamian texts the female advisors are mainly mother figures – whether human or divine –, daughters play an important role in Herodotus.

Keywords Female advisors. Herodotus. Ashurbanipal. Polycrates. Gorgo. Periander.

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1 Why Do Rulers Need Advisors?

How do rulers make decisions? This is a question that always seems to have occupied the minds of the rulers themselves as well as those of their subjects. To take important decisions can be already hard if they only affect one's private life, but decisions of rulers affect the whole state and a wrong decision might not only lead to the death or the ruler

but in the worst case also of thousands of his subjects. Therefore, it comes to no surprise that the decision-making process of rulers was embedded in a well-developed system of analysis and critique. In the earliest texts from Mesopotamia rulers claim to follow the advice of gods. As gods usually do not converse directly with rulers, mediation was needed to explore the divine will. The divine will was considered to be revealed through dreams, through prophecy and through all kinds of divination. The gods were continuously sending messages to be understood by those who knew to read them and the king was obliged to carefully study those messages. In the Cuthean Legend, a literary text, the king rebels against this obligation:

I summoned the diviners and instructed (them). I designated seven lambs, one lamb for each of the seven. I set up pure reed altars. I queried the great gods: Ištar, Ilaba, Zababa, Annunitum, Šullat, Haniš, and Šamaš, the hero. The 'latch-hook' of the great gods did not give me permission for my going and my demonical onrush. Thus I said to my heart (i.e. to myself), these were my words: "What lion (ever) performed extispicy? What wolf (ever) consulted a dream-interpreter? I will go like a brigand according to my own inclination. And I will cast aside that (oracle) of the god(s); I will be in control of myself".¹

This self-empowerment was not the best idea and the king Naram-Sin, who became the prototype of a bad ruler, lost his troops in a war for which he had no divine permission. His reluctance to listen to the advice of the gods was his central mistake. The Cuthean Legend was written down and copied by scribes, who themselves were often masters of all kinds of divination and the interpretation of the divine signs, in order to warn the kings of such a behavior. Divination was not an easy art, as the messages of the gods were sometimes tricky and could be misinterpreted. Therefore, a class of divination experts arose, which was consulted by the rulers. While openly criticising a powerful ruler is a rather dangerous task, these experts could guide the decisions of the king by referring to the ultimate authority: the gods.²

¹ The Cuthean Legend, 72-83. Westenholz 1997, 316-17.

² Fink 2020a; 2020b.

2 Advisors of the Assyrian King

According to the Assyrian conception of kingship the ruler is the foremost servant of the god Assur, who is the real king. The king has to explore the divine will with the help of his experts and his experts seemingly also took hard facts into account when they interpreted the divine signs.³ The Assyrian king was well aware that his experts could manipulate him and therefore he seems to have relied on different teams of experts in order to compare their results. We are well-informed about the discussions of the king with his experts for the late period of Neo-Assyrian times, because many letters of scholars to Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal are preserved and were masterfully edited by Simo Parpola.⁴ Besides these well-trained experts, the foremost scholars of their time, well-versed in all the texts of the immense cuneiform literature on divination, the king also relied on the advice of other people.

We can be quite sure that he relied on the advice of all kinds of experts for technology or military matters, but there is not much evidence for this, as most of these discussions might have taken place at the royal court or in the field and there seemingly was no necessity to document them in cuneiform. The best documented advisor of the king is their mother, or in some cases, even their grandmother. An old wise woman seems to be the appropriate person to give advice to a king. These wise women will be discussed below.

2.1 Female Advisors: Mothers, Wise Women, Goddesses

Mesopotamian kings have a special relationship with the gods, which is sometimes expressed through genealogical relations, or by the claim that a goddess served as a wet-nurse of the king.⁵ Therefore the goddesses often take the role as a guide and advisor for the king. We can find many examples in the cuneiform evidence, where a wise woman, no matter if human or divine, gives advice to kings. The specific aspects of male and female wisdom in the ancient world were recently treated in a collected volume, to which the interested reader is referred.⁶ In the Sumerian tradition we can find wise women in the role of advisors, dream interpreters, and scribes.⁷ In her contribution

³ See Lanfranchi 1989 for the discussion of such a case.

⁴ Parpola 1993.

⁵ See Fink, Sazonov 2019 for a discussion of some examples of kings with special genealogies.

⁶ Anthonioz, Fink 2019.

⁷ Selz 2019.

to the aforementioned volume on the female sages in Akkadian literature Saana Svård discusses one example from literature, namely mother Ninsun from the Gilgamesh-epic and, maybe somewhat closer to historical reality, Adad-guppi, the famous mother of the last Neo-Babylonian king Nabonidus. In the epic Ninsun often acts as the advisor of her son, she guides him through analysing his dreams and tries to help him to overcome challenging situations.⁸ Adad-guppi also seems to have been such a supportive mother and she might have played a decisive role in bringing her son to the Neo-Babylonian throne. Svård hints at the close resemblances between these two characters and suggests that both are manifestations of a prototype, an ideal of a royal mother.⁹ In the late phase of the Neo-Assyrian empire Naqi'a played an important role. During the reign of three different kings she influenced Assyrian politics, through her influence on the king, but as well as an independent actor, as she concluded vassal treaties, where she makes people swear loyalty to Ashurbanipal. She left her imprint on Assyrian politics first as the wife of Sennacherib, then as mother of Esarhaddon and finally as grandmother of Ashurbanipal.¹⁰ As all human beings, also kings have a special relationship to their mother and therefore it comes to no surprise that kings rely on the advice of their closest and most trustworthy relatives. However, as mentioned above, several kings, among them Ashurbanipal, claimed to have a special relationship with certain goddesses - in the case of Ashurbanipal this is Ishtar, who, according to his inscriptions, developed maternal feelings for the king and protected her child from the evils of this world.

2.2 Ashurbanipal and Ishtar

Ashurbanipal, who reigned over the Assyrian empire from 668 to approximately 631 - we are not well informed about the end of his reign - claims that his reign was a time of abundance and prosperity for his subjects:

(i 27) The god Adad released his rains (and) the god Ea opened up his springs. Grain was five cubits high in its furrow (and) ear(s) of corn were five-sixths of a cubits long. Successful harvest(s) and an abundance of grain enabled pasture land to continually flourish, fruit orchards to be very lush with fruit, (and) cattle to successfully give birth to (their) young. During my reign, there was plenitude

8 See Svård 2019, 54-6.

9 Svård 2019, 56-8.

10 On Naqi'a see Melville 1999.

(and) abundance; during my years, bountiful produce was accumulated. (i 35) Throughout my entire land, (on account of) abundant trade, for one [sh]lekel of silver one could purchase ten donkey-loads of grain, one homer of wine, two seahs of oil, (and) one talent of wool. Year after year, I shepherded [the subjects of the god Enlil] in prosperity and with justice.¹¹

This abundance was a visible proof of the divine favor and Assyria prospered while Assurs enemies were thrown into despair. However, evil never rests and the Assyrian order was endangered by powerful enemies. Without divine approval the Elamite king Teumman decided to attack Assyria. Ashurbanipal who was residing at Arbela to participate in a festival of the goddess Ištar, hears the news about the approaching Elamite army and falls into despair:

(v 16) During the month Abu (V) – the month of the heliacal rising of the Bow Star, the festival of the honored queen, the daughter of the god Enlil (the goddess Ištar) – to revere her great divinity, I resided in the city Arbela, the city that her heart loves, (v 20) (when) they reported to me news concerning an Elamite attack, which he (Teumman) had started against me without divine approval, saying: “Teumman, whose judgement the goddess Ištar had clouded (lit. “altered”), spoke as follows, saying: ‘I will not stop until I go (and) do battle with him’”. (v 24b) On account of these insolent words that Teumman had spoken, I made an appeal to the sublime goddess Ištar. I stood before her, knelt down at her feet, (and) made an appeal to her divinity, while my tears were flowing.¹²

Quite contrary to the usual image of the Neo-Assyrian king as a heroic warrior, Ashurbanipal takes the role of a child that asks his mother for help in a dangerous situation. Ashurbanipal’s prayer for help works out well and Ishtar decides to take her role as a protective mother:

(v 45b) The goddess Ištar heard my sorrowful plight and said to me “Fear not!”. She gave me confidence, (saying): “Because of your entreaties, which you directed towards me, (and because) your eyes were filled with tear(s), I had mercy (on you)”. (v 48b) During the course of the night that I had appealed to her, a dream interpreter lay down and saw a dream. He woke up and (then) reported to me the night vision that the goddess Ištar had shown him, saying: (v 51b) “The goddess Ištar who resides in the city Arbela entered

¹¹ Ashurbanipal 003 / Prism B, i 27-38.

¹² Ashurbanipal 003 / Prism B, v 16-v 28.

and she had quivers hanging on the right and left. She was holding a bow at her side (and) she was unsheathing a sharp sword that (was ready) to do battle. You (Ashurbanipal) stood before her (v 55) (and) she was speaking to you like (your own) birth-mother. The goddess Ištar, the sublime one of the gods, called out to you, instructing you, saying: 'You are looking forward to waging war (and) I myself am about to set out towards my destination (the battlefield)'. You (then) said to her, saying: (v 60) 'Let me go with you, wherever you go, O Lady of Ladies!'. She replied to you, saying: 'You will stay in the place where you are (currently) residing. Eat food, drink wine, make music, (and) revere my divinity. In the meantime, I will go (and) accomplish this task, (thus) I will let (you) achieve (v 65) your heart's desire. Your face will not become pale, your feet will not tremble, you will not wipe off your sweat in the thick of battle'. She took you into her sweet embrace and protected your entire body. Fire flared up in front of her. She went off furiously outside. She directed her attention towards Teumman, the king of the land Elam with whom she was angr[y]".¹³

The text explicitly states that Ishtar took on the role of a mother, she wanted to protect her child and therefore she decided to go to battle against his enemies, while her child Ashurbanipal should eat food, drink wine, and make music. Seemingly Ashurbanipal was happy with this advice and stayed at home while the enemy's army was defeated by the goddess - in reality rather by a competent general of the Assyrian army. Obviously these ideas of Ashurbanipal do not necessarily have much to do with reality, but they demonstrate that this king presented himself as a crying child, asking his mother for help - for the best of his empire and his subjects, one could add. Besides being strong warriors, we could conclude, Assyrian kings should also have the competence to ask for help when help is needed and accept advice and help.

3 Preliminary Conclusions

In the Mesopotamian sources discussed above the main female advisor is the mother. This seems quite a natural approach, as mothers usually take the obligations to raise children and to teach them how to navigate in this world. The role of an advisor seems to be inherent in the role of a mother and the Mesopotamian texts discussed above shed light on the important role that royal mothers played in the life of their sons. However, the maternal role is not the only one

¹³ Ashurbanipal 003 / Prism B, v 45-v 72.

that is taken by female advisors in Mesopotamian sources. In the Gilgamesh epic, also the tavern-keeper and the prostitute – maybe both can be seen as different aspects of Ishtar – give important advice to the main characters.

4 The Advisor in Ancient Greek Literature

In ancient Greek literature, the motif of the advisor has occupied a prominent place virtually from its very beginnings. We need only look at Homer's epics: the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In the first one, it is worth noting the figure of Polydamas, who gives advice to Hector. However, his advice to Hector not to fight Achilles and to retreat to the city¹⁴ goes unheeded, which is fraught with consequences as Hector dies at Achilles' hand. In the *Odyssey*, on the other hand, appears the figure of Mentor – a son of Alkimos from Ithaca, whose name has become synonymous with an advisor who offers advice to young people and who plays the role of Telemachus' advisor. Mentor after Odysseus' departure at Troy held custody of his estate in Ithaca (Μέντωρ, ὃς ῥ' Ὀδυσῆος ἀμύμονος ἦεν ἑταῖρος, | καὶ οἱ ἰὼν ἐν νηυσὶν ἐπέτρεπεν οἶκον ἅπαντα) ("Mentor, who was a comrade of noble Odysseus. To him, on departing with his ships, Odysseus had given all his house in charge"; transl. by A.T. Murray).¹⁵ During the proceedings of the assembly in Ithaca, Mentor often opposes the actions of suitors. Among other things, he speaks out against the fact that the suitors are feasting at the expense of the absent Odysseus, who they believe is already dead.¹⁶ Sometimes, on the other hand, the goddess Athena herself appears under the figure of Mentor, who advises the son of Odysseus. Athena, in the form of Mentor, for example, accompanies Telemachus on his journey to Pylos, where, at the court of king Nestor, he tries to get some news about his father.

4.1 Wise Advisors in Herodotus

The motif of the counsellor is an extremely important element of the narrative also in Herodotus. In his *Histories*, it is often associated with Herodotus' historiosophy (i.e. his belief in the envy of the gods – φθόνος θεῶν (is envy of the gods)– and the instability of human fortune), nor is it a new issue in the subject literature. As early as the 1930s, works were being written that are still cited today, such as Heinrich Bischoff's

¹⁴ Cf. Hom. *Il.* 18.249-313.

¹⁵ Hom. *Od.* 2.225-6.

¹⁶ Hom. *Od.* 2.229 ff.

doctoral thesis (*Der Warner bei Herodot*)¹⁷ or Richard Lattimore's article (*The Wise Adviser in Herodotus*).¹⁸ The very title of the first publication indicates what aspect of the advisors' activities Bischoff paid particular attention to – warning of the various dangers that lurk for those who do not listen to the voice of the advisors (in his analysis, Bischoff focused on oriental rulers, e.g. Croesus, Darius, Xerxes, as well as the tyrant of Samos Polycrates). Richard Lattimore, on the other hand, in his article, singles out advice of a practical nature in addition to the warning function that advisors performed. In recent years, interest in this issue has not waned, as evidenced by works examining particular aspects of λόγοι in which the figure of the counsellor appears. Worth noting in this context is a very useful article by Iwona Wieżel of the Catholic University of Lublin (Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski), which unfortunately has not been published in any of the congressional languages, making its reach limited.¹⁹ She analyzes the construction of the various λόγοι in which the wise advisor appears. Wieżel points out that in the stories about wise advisors we are dealing with a compositional pattern, according to which first there is a description of the ruler's success, followed by a situation requiring advice or warning. This is followed by the introduction of the wise advisor giving the advice. The compositional framework closes with the outcome of the advice or warning, which is often synonymous with the ruler's failure. In my dissertation, published in November 2022, I also took up the theme of advisors in Herodotus' *Histories*, analysing the topos of the wise advisor through the lens of ethnicity.²⁰

5 Female Advisors in Greek Literature

In my part of this text, I would like to deal with female advisors, who are far fewer in Herodotus than men. However, this does not mean that they do not play an important role in Herodotus' narrative. This seems relevant since, despite the intensive interest in women's issues, the problem of female advisors in the *Histories* seems insufficiently researched or even overlooked. As an example, Wolfgang Will in his book *Herodot und Thukydides – die Geburt der Geschichte* writes the following in the opening paragraph of the section on advisors:

¹⁷ Bischoff 1932.

¹⁸ Lattimore 1939.

¹⁹ Wieżel (Domańska) 2006-07.

²⁰ Kuciak 2022, 127-9. The analysis focused on Amasis and the advice he gave to the tyrant of Samos, Polycrates. The aforementioned Pharaoh is the only non-Greek to give advice to a Greek in Herodotus, while non-Greeks give advice to other non-Greeks 21 times, a Greek to another Greek 23 times, and a Greek to a non-Greek 14 times.

Für die Ankündigung kommender schicksalhafter Ereignisse hat sich Herodot neben den Träumen und dem Orakelspruch noch ein drittes Medium geschaffen, das in Ansätzen bereits Homer nutzt, bei dem Ratgeber in Person weiser alter Männer immer die Funktion haben zu warnen.²¹

Based on this quotation, the reader might get the wrong impression that the advisors in Herodotus are only men. In fact, the case is much more diverse. In the following part the figures to be analyzed will be Greek female advisor: Gorgo, daughter of the Spartan king Cleomenes, and the unnamed daughter of Periander and daughter of Polycrates, although female advisors are also non-Greeks, Atossa, and the wife of the Pharaoh Sesotris. Artemisia, ruler of Halicarnassus, on the other hand, holds a special place. For it seems that she does not fit into an ethnic framework and should be considered as a figure between east and west, between the Greek world and the Orient.²²

Polycrates' daughter Gorgo and Periander's daughter are examples of female advisors among the Greeks. As we will see below, unlike the non-Greeks, among the Hellenes it is the daughters who fulfil an advisory function. Their advice, however, varies in nature, and so does the reaction of their fathers to whom the advice is given.

5.1 The Daughter of Polycrates

Let us begin with the daughter of the Polycrates, for she is a relevant element of the first two Samian λόγοι and helps to understand the role that this Samian tyrant played in the *Histories*. It is important to emphasize that in the first two Samian λόγοι, the advisors (whether men or women) play a prominent role. This is mainly about Pharaoh Amasis, who, as a friend, warns Polycrates of his good fortune – εὐτυχέων μεγάλως.²³ Amasis therefore sends a letter in which he expresses his worry regarding the fortunes enjoyed by Polycrates, for he knows that the deity is jealous – τὸ θεῖον ἐπισταμένῳ ὡς ἔστι φθονερόν. Thus pharaoh advises Polycrates to select from his treasury an item whose loss would make him unhappy, and then get rid of it, so that it would never fall into human hands. In chapter 3.41 Herodotus describes the reaction of Polycrates, who concluded that his friend's advice was right. So he chose from his treasury a ring with an emerald – made by the local artist Theodoros. He then set sail with this ring on the high seas and threw it into the water in front of

²¹ Will 2015, 100.

²² Cf. e.g. Munson 1988, 92-3.

²³ Hdt. 3.40.

everyone. On his return to the island indeed, according to Herodotus, Polycrates felt miserable. Five or six days after throwing the ring away, a Samian fisherman caught a beautiful and large fish, which seemed to him worthy of the tyrannical court. He therefore presented his catch to Polycrates, and the latter, pleased with the gift, invited the fisherman to a feast. Meanwhile, the servants who were engaged in preparing the fish for the feast, noticed while cutting up the discarded signet ring and, overjoyed, brought it to the tyrant. And the tyrant, seeing the whole incident as a divine act, reported it to Amasis. Pharaoh replied that since Polycrates was lucky in everything, an unhappy end awaited him soon. So he renounced Polycrates' friendship: for he did not want to feel sorry for a friend who is soon going to meet an unhappy end. Very interesting here is the reaction of Polycrates. The tyrant was concerned and did not disregard the advice given to him by his friend, realising that a jealous deity could lead him to his downfall. Faced with the incidents described, Amasis broke off the friendship relationship with Polycrates (διαλύεσθαι τὴν ξεινίην), for he did not want to see his *xenos* miserable. The figure of the female advisor does not appear until the second Samian λόγος. Here is Polycrates, deceived by the satrap Oroetes, who has promised him great treasures enabling him to rule the whole of Greece (εἵνεκέν τε χρημάτων ἄρξεις ἀπάσης τῆς Ἑλλάδος),²⁴ about to go to see him in Magnesia. However, everyone around him is aware of the risks involved in this expedition. Herodotus states:

ὁ δὲ πολλὰ μὲν τῶν μαντίων ἀπαγορευόντων πολλὰ δὲ τῶν φίλων ἐστέλλετο αὐτόσε, πρὸς δὲ καὶ ἰδούσης τῆς θυγατρὸς ὄψιν ἐνυπνίου τοιήνδε: ἐδόκεε οἱ τὸν πατέρα ἐν τῷ ἡέρι μετέωρον ἐόντα λουῖσθαι μὲν ὑπὸ τοῦ Διός, χρίεσθαι δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ ἡλίου. ταύτην ἰδοῦσα τὴν ὄψιν παντοίῃ ἐγένετο μὴ ἀποδημῆσαι τὸν Πολυκράτεια παρὰ τὸν Ὀροίτεια, καὶ δὴ καὶ ἰόντος αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὴν πεντηκόντερον ἐπερημίζετο. ὁ δὲ οἱ ἠπέιλησε, ἦν σῶς ἀπονοστήσει, πολλόν μιν χρόνον παρθενεύεσθαι. ἢ δὲ ἠρήσατο ἐπιτελέα ταῦτα γενέσθαι: βούλεσθαι γὰρ παρθενεύεσθαι πλέω χρόνον ἢ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐστερηῆσθαι.

Polycrates then prepared to visit Oroetes, despite the strong dissuasion of his diviners and friends, and a vision seen by his daughter in a dream; she dreamt that she saw her father in the air overhead being washed by Zeus and anointed by Helios; after this vision she used all means to persuade him not to go on this journey to Oroetes; even as he went to his fifty-oared ship she prophesied evil for him. When Polycrates threatened her that if he came back safe, she would long remain unmarried, she answered with a

24 Hdt. 3.122.

prayer that his threat might be fulfilled: for she would rather, she said, long remain unmarried than lose her father.²⁵

In the passage quoted above, the relevant point in the narrative becomes Polycrates' daughter, unknown by name,²⁶ who, on the basis of a prophetic and ominous dream, tries to dissuade his plans at all costs. What is noteworthy here is both the behavior of the daughter and the reaction of Polycrates. The tyrant's daughter appears clearly here as a tragic warner and conveys a warning that is clearly a sign from the deity. Also the manner is not irrelevant, as prophetic dreams play a very relevant role in Herodotus' narrative. As J. Miklason states, the *Histories* of Herodotus are filled with all sorts of oracles, prophecies or dreams, and thus constitute the most comprehensive and best single source from the classical period relating to the aforementioned topic.²⁷ Tyrant, in contrast to the earlier part of the story and the advice Amasis gave him, refuses to listen to anyone and rejects all prophetic signs. He also ignores his daughter's prophetic dream, as he does not know how to interpret it correctly, which will prove fatal for him. In this respect, Polycrates is similar to Croesus,²⁸ who could not interpret the oracle that said that if he set out against the Persians a great state would fall.²⁹ Thus, in chapter 3.122 we see an enormous dissonance. On the one hand, we have Polycrates, who ignores all signs from the deity communicated to him by his own daughter and, as it were, seals his imminent and inevitable downfall and death. On the other hand, there is the daughter, correctly sensing the ominous meaning of the dream, thus distinguished by her wisdom and ability to interpret the divine signs, who is prepared to pay a high price to protect her father. The latter, however, is completely blinded and, in accordance with the prophecy, is put to death by Oroetes.³⁰

25 Transl. by A.D. Godley.

26 In Herodotus, and also in Lukian (*Salt*. 54), the name of the tyrant's daughter is not mentioned, although on the basis of papyrus fragments on which a Hellenistic romance is preserved, the name is reconstructed as Παρθενόπιη; cf. e.g. Georgiou 2002, 90 fn. 90; Asheri, Lloyd, Corcella 2007, 509.

27 Miklason 2002, 194-5. Jutta Kirschberg, who devoted her still-cited doctoral thesis precisely to the functions oracles fulfil in Herodotus' work, divided them into five categories: 1) the cathartic function (*die katharthische Funktion*), 2) the advisory and transmitting function (*die ratende und vermittelnde Funktion*), 3) the colonial-political function (*die kolonialpolitische Funktion*), 4) the cultic function (*die kultische Funktion*), and 5) the charismatic function (*die charismatische Funktion*). From the point of view of the present considerations, the advisory and transmitting function will be the most relevant, which appears "in difficult political circumstances" (*in schwierigen politischen Situationen*); Kirchberg 1964, 117-18.

28 Harrison 2000, 45.

29 Hdt. 1.53.

30 Transl. by A.D. Godley. Hdt. 3.125.

5.2 Gorgo

Let us now look at two further examples of female advisors in the Greek world, namely Gorgo and the daughter of the tyrant of Corinth, Periander. The figure of Gorgo,³¹ in the context of giving advice, appears twice in Herodotus.³² The first time is in book five, where the actions of Aristagoras (who was in power in Miletus) are described in order to enlist support in a revolt (the Ionian Revolt) against the Persians.³³ Seeking the support of other Greeks, Aristagoras first arrives in Sparta, to king Cleomenes. He evidently deceives the Spartan king by promising him that the Lacedemonians could easily rule all of Asia (τῆς Ἀσίας πάσης ἄρχειν εὐπετέως) if only they supported the rebels.³⁴ Aristagoras also resorts to flattery by calling the Spartans the first among the Greeks (πρόεστατε τῆς Ἑλλάδος). The Milesian was so convincing (Herodotus mentions that Aristagoras was a cunning man) that Cleomenes needed three days to think about it. When the king refused the visitor's help, Aristagoras did not break down and began to offer more and more until the offer reached fifty talents. Then Gorgo spoke: 'πάτερ, διαφθερέει σε ὁ ξείνος, ἢν μὴ ἀποστὰς ἴης' ("Father, the stranger will corrupt you, unless you leave him and go away").³⁵ Cleomenes heeded his daughter's advice and left for another room, while Aristagoras left Sparta having achieved nothing. In the logos above, the advice given by the daughter to her father already appears in a different light than it was in the case of Polycrates. It is important to reflect on the nature of the advice given by Gorgo – certainly, one should agree with those who argue that this story is intended to highlight the incorruptibility of king Cleomenes,³⁶ which *nota bene* Herodotus mentions earlier in the third book, when Maian-drios escaping from Samos tried to bribe Cleomenes.³⁷ However, it is worth noting the lexical layer of the advice given by Gorgo, above all the verb, which is understood as 'to bribe' – διαφθείρειν. In the sentence above διαφθείρειν can be translated in this way, although I personally would have expected an addendum in the form of phrases such as ἀργυρίῳ or χρήμασι. Above all, however, διαφθείρειν means to destroy completely (also to kill) and in this sense it also appears in

31 *Generalia* on Gorgo cf. Branscome 2021.

32 Cf. Georgiou 2002, 87-90.

33 Hdt. 5.36-8; more on Herodotus and the Ionian Revolt cf. e.g. Blamire 1959; Evans 1963; Manville 1977; Forrest 1979; Kuciak 2012.

34 Hdt. 5.49.

35 Hdt. 5.51.

36 Georgiou 2002, 88; Branscome 2021.

37 Hdt. 3.148.

Herodotus.³⁸ If this is how we understand the aforementioned verb, then the phrase διαφθερέει σε should be understood as: he will destroy you completely. At that point, the advice given by Gorgo would be more far-reaching, no longer likely to be of a merely practical nature, but could be taken as a tragic warning. Sparta's involvement in the uprising in Ionia could have had far-reaching consequences for it and for Cleomenes himself. Perhaps, then, this advice should be viewed in a similar way to the warning expressed by Polycrates' daughter and seen as a life-saving warning. It is also symptomatic that Cleomenes, unlike Polycrates, listened to his daughter's advice. This is the second time Gorgo, already as Leonidas' wife, appears at the very end of book seven.³⁹ In this case, her advice is clearly of a practical nature. For it concerns the hidden information that Demaratos sent to Sparta. Demaratos, knowing the intentions of Xerxes, who intended to make an armed expedition against the Greeks, sends a message which is hidden on a tablet beneath the surface of the wax, so as to protect the messenger from danger.⁴⁰ When the messenger arrived, Gorgo instructed the Lacedemonians to get rid of the wax and then they would see a message on the tablet. This is what they did. Although this advice is of a practical nature, its importance should not be underestimated as it relates to the events at the centre of Herodotus' attention in Books 8 and 9. It also reveals Gorgo's wisdom, as well as her commitment to Sparta.⁴¹

5.3 The Daughter of Periander

The final figure among the Greek female advisors in this article is the daughter of the tyrant of Corinth, Periander. She occurs here in the context of the animosity between Periander and one of his two sons, Lycophron.⁴² The aforementioned hostility stemmed from the fact that Lycophron learned that Periander had killed his mother Melissa.⁴³ For this reason, he was exiled from Corinth. However, as Periander grew older, he realized that he no longer had as much strength to rule Corinth. So he longed to recall Lycophron from exile and sent

38 According to Powell's dictionary, the verb appears 86 times in the *Histories*. It is worth noting that Powell also understands διαφθείρειν in the story from Gorgo as to corrupt; cf. Powell 2013, s.v. "διαφθείρω".

39 Hdt. 7.239.

40 The manner in which the message is concealed is similar in the story of Histiaios, who encouraged Aristagoras to spark an uprising in Ionia.

41 Georgiou 2002, 89.

42 Hdt. 3.50-3.

43 Hdt. 5.92.

his daughter to Kerkyra to convince him to do so. Arriving at the site, she said to her brother:

ὦ παῖ, βούλειαι τήν τε τυραννίδα ἐς ἄλλους πεσεῖν καί τὸν οἶκον τοῦ πατρὸς διαφορηθέντα μᾶλλον ἢ αὐτός σφεα ἀπελθῶν ἔχειν; ἄπιθι ἐς τὰ οἰκία, παῦσαι σεωυτὸν ζημιῶν. φιλοτιμίη κτήμα σκαιόν. μὴ τῷ κακῷ τὸ κακὸν ἰῶ. πολλοὶ τῶν δικαίων τὰ ἐπιεικέστερα προτιθεῖσι, πολλοὶ δὲ ἤδη τὰ μητρῶια διζήμενοι τὰ πατρῶια ἀπέβαλον. τυραννὶς χρῆμα σφαλερόν, πολλοὶ δὲ αὐτῆς ἐρασταί εἰσι, ὁ δὲ γέρον τε ἤδη καὶ παρηβηκός: μὴ δῶς τὰ σεωυτοῦ ἀγαθὰ ἄλλοισι.⁴⁴

Child, would you want the power to fall to others, and our father's house destroyed, rather than to return and have it yourself? Come home and stop punishing yourself. Pride is an unhappy possession. Do not cure evil by evil. Many place the more becoming thing before the just; and many pursuing their mother's business have lost their father's. Power is a slippery thing; many want it, and our father is now old and past his prime; do not lose what is yours to others.⁴⁵

The advice the sister gave to her brother Lycophron should be qualified as practical advice, which, however, as in the case of Gorgo, is linked to political issues and concerns the succession of power in Corinth. However, reading the quoted words filled with wisdom, it is hard to resist the impression that it is not the daughter, but Periander himself who is speaking. This is all the more likely because Periander himself appears in Herodotus' Histories as a wise advisor. This is all the more likely because Periander was counted by the Greeks among the group of so-called seven sages. So in this case, Periander's daughter can be understood as an intermediary between father and son Lycophron. It is noteworthy that the advice given to Lycophron contributed to his death, as he was killed by the inhabitants of Korkyra, which he was about to leave on his way to Corinth. In his place, in turn, Periander was to arrive.

Thus we see that among Greek female advisors, these functions are performed by the daughters, either of tyrants or kings. In all three cases, advice was given out of concern for their loved ones, and sometimes in the context of state affairs. Also very relevant is the reaction of the person to whom the advice was given - he could accept it, or ignore it. The example of Gorgo shows that if we are dealing with a wise ruler, advice is accepted and protects from danger or even death (vide the understanding of the verb διαφθείρω). In the

⁴⁴ Hdt. 3.53.3-4.

⁴⁵ Transl. by A.D. Godley.

case of the daughters of tyrants, on the other hand, we see that the advice they give does not have the desired effect. While Lycophron accedes to the advice given to him by his sister, Polycrates completely disregards the very clear signs given to him by his daughter, which leads to his death.

6 Conclusion

In Mesopotamian as well as in Greek sources female advisors play an important role. An interesting difference is that in the Mesopotamian sources discussed above, the mother is the most important female advisor, while in Herodotus daughters are the most important advisors. As far as we can see, daughters play no role as advisors in the Mesopotamian literary evidence. In the case of Herodotus, the person to whom the advice is given is extremely important – if it is a wise ruler, such as Cleomenes, he can make use of it. If not – like Polycrates, who is blinded by the false promise of wealth, the advice falls on deaf ears.

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