

*What follows is an excerpt of the Croesus tale from a book I am writing called, The Essential Herodotus. Your Athenaze textbook bases its text on selections from these stories, but often adjusts and changes details. For that reason DO NOT use the translation here as a basis for interpreting the details of the Athenaze text. The final exam will contain a sight reading based on one of the stories in this text, so you should read over this excerpt before the exam. -waj*

## CROESUS AND SOLON

Solon stands in as representative of archaic Greek wisdom. Solon was a famous man, one of the "founding fathers" for what would become democratic Athens; he is said to have died in c. 559 BC, and if that is right then the meeting here described is entirely legendary. Note the opposition between Eastern arrogance (hybris) and Greek wisdom; excess and moderation; selfish materialism and selfless piety (to family and the state as well as the gods). Some other key motifs: the figure of the wise advisor (twice: once heeded, once ignored); the hubristic claim of the ruler ("the most prosperous"); the uncontrolled urge to imperial expansion; the mutability of human fortune.

<MAP OPPOSITE of Lydian Empire, including Ephesus and the Ionian peoples [flesh out]>

[26] On the death of Alyattes, his son Croesus succeeded to the kingship, at the age of thirty-five years. The first of the Greeks he attacked were the Ephesians. The Ephesians, surrounded and under siege, tied a rope from the old city wall to the temple of Artemis, thereby putting the city under the goddess's protection— a distance of seven stades.<sup>1</sup> The Ephesians were the first he attacked; but he attacked in turn each of the Ionians and Aeolians, on one pretext or another, laying on a grave accusation where he could find it, and petty excuses for the rest.

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<sup>1</sup> A long distance, about 1200 meters or 3/4 of a mile. The strategy is to make the entire city sacrosanct by using a physical link from the sacred temple to the city wall; by implication, Croesus does not respect the sanctity thereby conferred and conquers the city anyway.

[27] Once he had subjected the Greeks on mainland Asia to the paying of tribute,<sup>2</sup> Croesus then formed a plan to build ships and attack the Greek islands. When he had everything ready for the construction of the ships, Bias of Priene came to Sardis, as some tell the tale, or as others tell it, Pittacus of Mytilene, and in reply to Croesus's inquiry about what news there was from Greece, said (and so stopped the ship building), "O king, the islanders are buying up thousands of horses, intending to march on you and Sardis." Croesus, taking the remark seriously, said, "Ah, ye gods, I pray you make this come to pass, that the islanders meet the sons of the Lydians on horseback!"<sup>3</sup> The Greek then replied, "O king, you eagerly pray to catch the islanders on horseback and on land, and no doubt with justice. But what do you think the islanders pray for? As soon as they heard that you were going to build ships to attack them, don't you think they prayed to catch the Lydians on the sea and thus take vengeance on you? That's exactly what they want, on behalf of the Greeks of the mainland, whom you made your slaves and now hold as such. " Croesus was delighted at the moral of the story — he thought the Greek spoke shrewdly — and so he decided to leave off the building of the ships. That then is how he came to make an alliance of guest-friendship with the Ionians who lived on the islands.

[28] Over time, almost all of the peoples in Asia who live on this side of the river Halys became his subjects. The Cilicians and the Lycians proved exceptions, but Croesus made everyone else his subjects: the Lydians, Phrygians,

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<sup>2</sup> Paying money as annual tribute to the King marks these Greeks as no longer free, in Greek terms effectively the "slaves" of the Lydian king.

<sup>3</sup> The Lydians were famous for their exceptionally well-trained and effective cavalry, whereas the inhabitants of the small Greek islands would have little opportunity to develop this skill. Conversely, the islanders were famed for their skills in fighting at sea.

Mysians, Mariandynians, Chalybes, Paphlagonians, Thracians both Thynian and Bithynian, Carians, Ionians, Dorians, Aeolians, Pamphylians.

[29] So, then, did Croesus subdue all these peoples and make them part of the Lydian empire. To Sardis, now at its height of prosperity, came all the Greek wise men of the time, one by one. And among these was Solon, an Athenian man. Solon had been asked by the Athenians to set up written laws and then had gone abroad for ten years— claiming to be off on a sightseeing voyage, but in fact so as not to be forced to repeal any of the laws he had made. You see, the Athenians couldn't make changes themselves, since they were constrained by mighty oaths to use for ten years whatever laws Solon set in place.

[30] For this reason, then — but to see the world too— Solon had gone abroad, paying a visit to the court of Amasis in Egypt and also, our focus here, to the court of Croesus in Sardis. On his arrival, Croesus received him hospitably and entertained him as a guest in his palace. Later, on the third or fourth day, Croesus had his servants take Solon around the treasure rooms and show him the magnitude of his prosperity. Solon gazed upon it all and examined it carefully. When the moment seemed right, Croesus asked, "Athenian friend, many a report has come to our court about you, your wisdom and your travels, how for love of knowledge and to see the world you have traversed many a land. So now, I cannot resist asking whether, of all men, there is one you have seen who is the most prosperous."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The Greek word here, *olbios*, sometimes translated as *happy*, means blessed with good fortune, but can also mean rich in material goods. The entire passage is suffused with this fundamental ambiguity as to whether human happiness or material wealth is the subject; both are related to divine favor.

Croesus put the question fully convinced that he himself was the one, but Solon, uninterested in flattery, spoke out the truth: "O king, yes I have — Tellus the Athenian." Croesus was taken aback. "And why," he asked sharply, "do you judge *Tellus* the most prosperous?" Solon said, "Tellus had sons in a time when the city was doing well, beautiful, refined sons, and he lived to see from each of them grandchildren, and the grandchildren survived and flourished; moreover, he had wealth, at least by our standards, and in this prosperity he ended his life in most glorious fashion — for at a time of war for Athens he came to the aid of his fellow citizens in Eleusis, broke the battle line of the enemy, and died with great bravery, for which the Athenians gave him a public burial on the very spot where he fell, and honored him greatly."

[31] Solon's account of the great prosperity surrounding Tellus goaded Croesus, and so he asked who second to Tellus Solon had seen, thinking to carry off second prize at least. But Solon said: "Cleobis and Biton. These two, Argive in race, had livelihood enough, and in addition had remarkable bodily strength. They were both prize athletes, and the story is told that once, when the Argives were celebrating a festival for the goddess Hera, it was critical that their mother be brought to the temple by cart — but the oxen were not back from the field at the appointed hour. Want of time prevented them from doing anything else, and so the young men put on the yoke and dragged the cart themselves. The mother rode in the cart, traveling a distance of forty-five stades,<sup>5</sup> and thus arrived at the temple. This they accomplished, in full view of the entire crowd, and then enjoyed the best possible end of life— and the god made clear thereby that it was

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<sup>5</sup> About 8 km, 5 miles. This is a remarkable feat: ox carts were crude and heavy, and roads were primitive.

better for a man to die than to live. You see, the Argive men standing round were congratulating the young men on their strength, and the Argive women were congratulating the mother for the fine sons she had. The mother, greatly overjoyed with what her sons had done and what the crowd had said, stood opposite the cult statue and prayed for the goddess to give to Cleobis and Biton, who had honored her greatly, the best thing that mortal man can receive. Following this prayer, they sacrificed and feasted, and the youths lay down to sleep on the temple floor. And they never stood again — caught by life's end. The Argives made statues of the youths, since they had the greatest virtue, and set these up as offerings at Delphi."

[32] So Solon gave out the second prize for good fortune<sup>6</sup> to these two, and Croesus, seething, said, "O Athenian friend, do you so disdain my good fortune that you rank me below mere private citizens?"

"O Croesus," said Solon, "you ask me about human affairs, I, who understand only that the divine is always begrudging and baffling. Over a length of time there are many sights that no one wants to see, and many ills to suffer. I reckon the limit of a man's life at seventy years. These seventy years add up to twenty-five thousand and two hundred days, not counting the intercalary months;<sup>7</sup> and, if every second year you add a month to align seasons and calendar, there will be thirty-five intercalary months over the seventy years, and

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<sup>6</sup> The terms change here, from *olbios* ("happy, rich") to *eudaimoniê*, which is the usual Greek word for "happiness" but also refers to being blessed, literally "favored by the gods."

<sup>7</sup> The calendar year was based on 12 months of 29-30 days, 350 days a year.<< To bring the solar and calendar years into (approximate) alignment, the Greeks had to adjust by adding a 30-day month (the intercalary month) every other year, thereby making the average year 365 days. In this calculation, Solon displays his firm control over matters of science and mathematics, one aspect of his wise man persona.

those months add up to one thousand fifty days. The sum total of days over the course of seventy years is, then, twenty-six thousand two hundred and fifty, and of these not one day among them ever brings the same experience as another day. So you see, Croesus: all of life is but chance — what each day happens to bring.

"You appear to me to be very rich, and a king over many men; but that which you ask me, I cannot yet say, not until I hear that you have come nobly to the end of your lifetime. For the rich man is in no way more prosperous than the man who has only enough for a day, unless the good fortune follow that he who has many fine things also ends his life well. Many very rich people are without true prosperity, and many of those with modest livelihood have great fortune. The man who is very rich but not really prosperous has advantage over the fortunate man in only two ways, but the fortunate man has advantage in many. The rich man is more able to fulfill his desire and also to bear a great and ruinous fall, and in these things he holds the advantage; whereas the fortunate man has not the same capability for a ruinous fall nor for fulfilling desire, but his good fortune keeps these at bay, and he is sound of limb, without illness, without experience of evil, lucky in children, and well in how he looks. If in addition to all that he ends his life well, here then is the man you seek, here is the one worthy of the name "prosperous." But before he dies, you must hold back: do not yet name him "prosperous" or "blessed" but only a man of good fortune.

"No mortal man is able to have everything, just as no country is able to provide everything for itself, but has one thing and lacks another; and that country which has the most, is the best. Similarly the body of a man is not at all self-sufficient, but has one thing and lacks another; and he who continues to hold onto the most of these and then ends his life in blessed fashion, this man, O king,

is in my view the one who justly carries the title. One has to look to the end for everything, how it turns out: the god who gives many a glimpse of the heights of prosperity is also the god who overturns it by the roots."

[33] So spoke Solon. Croesus was not at all pleased, nor was he impressed; and so he sent him away, thinking the man surely a simpleton, who dismisses all the good that lies to hand and urges to look to the end for everything.

#### ATYS AND ADRASTUS

*This set piece, another legend attached to the figure of Croesus, explores further the mutability of human fortune, this time with an emphasis on the sort of irony we associate with Greek tragedy: the one who thinks to see the dream's meaning is blind to the god's intention; the protector unwittingly becomes the killer; the effort to thwart what is fated leads to fate's fulfillment. Motifs include then the limits of mortal understanding; the inescapability of fate; the ambiguity of divine messages. How the arrogance of Croesus exposed in the Solon episode relates to the tragic events here would have been clear to a Greek: to think oneself the best is to suffer hybris, since it shows a lack of awareness of mortal limitations; and the divine reaction to hybris is nemesis, that retribution that brings the arrogant man to suffer.*

[34] After Solon was gone, a mighty retribution (*nemesis*) from the god came to lay hold of Croesus— in all probability because he considered himself the most prosperous of all men. That very night a dream stood over Croesus in his sleep, and declared unerringly the evils that were to come to pass for his son. Croesus had two children, one of whom was crippled — he was deaf and mute — and the other far the first of those his age in every way. That one's name was Atys. The dream was about this Atys, and it revealed to Croesus that he was going to die from the blow of an iron spear. When Croesus awoke he thought it over, and he was frightened by the dream. So he brought in a bride for his son;

he stopped sending the son on military expeditions altogether, even though Atys had often been in command; and, gathering up from the men's quarters the spears and javelins and all such instruments of war, he heaped them up in the storerooms, to be sure that a spear hanging on the wall didn't chance to fall on his son.

[35] Croesus was busy with his son's wedding when there came to Sardis a man gripped by misfortune, with blood on his hands, a Phrygian by birth and of royal ancestry. This man came to the palace of Croesus asking for ritual purification, as was the custom of that place, and Croesus purified him — the purification ritual for the Lydians is similar to that of the Greeks. Once he had performed the customary rites, Croesus asked where the man came from and who he was, saying, "Who are you and what part of Phrygia do you come from, to sit here by the fireside?<sup>8</sup> And what man or woman did you slay?" The man replied, "O king, I am the son of Gordias son of Midas, and my name is Adrastus.<sup>9</sup> Against my will I killed my own brother, and I am here now being driven from the land by my father, stripped of all material possessions." "You are the offspring of men who are my guest-friends," answered Croesus, "and so you have come to friends. You will stay here in my palace, you will lack nothing in material goods, and if you bear your bad fortune as lightly as possible you will have very much to gain."

[36] And so Adrastus came to live at the court of Croesus. In this same time there was born on Mount Olympus in Mysia a great and monstrous boar.

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<sup>8</sup> This echoes the recurrent line in Homer's *Odyssey*, "Who are you? Who are your parents? Where do you come from?" and thus gives the scene a mythic atmosphere. The warning dream is likewise a motif taken from Homer.

<sup>9</sup> In Greek Adrastus means "Necessity," which will dovetail with the ironic conclusion to the story. Atys is a real Lydian name, but to a Greek sounds like the word for "Ruin" (*atê*).



Hurtling down from the mountain the boar would ravage the crops of the Mysians. Time and again the Mysians would go out to fight the boar but do him no harm while being hurt themselves. At last, then, messengers from the Mysians came to the court of Croesus and said, "O king, a great and monstrous boar has appeared in our land, and he is devastating our crops. We have done our best to kill him, but without success. We therefore make this request: send us your son and your pick of young men and dogs, so that we can drive the boar from our land." That then was their request. But Croesus, mindful of the dream, said, "Say nothing further about my son—I cannot send him along, as he is newly married and that is at the moment his main concern; but I will send my pick of the young men and the whole of my pack of hunting dogs, and I will command these to try their best to drive this wild beast from your land."

[37] So Croesus replied, and the Mysians were satisfied. But just then Croesus' son came in, having heard of the Mysians' request. And when Croesus refused to send the son along with them, the young man said, "Father, before now, to distinguish ourselves by going to wars and to hunts was all that was fine and noble. These days you keep me barred from both, though surely you haven't seen in me either cowardice or faintness of heart. What face am I to put on as I go to and from the central square? What sort of man will people take me for? And what of my newly-wedded wife—what kind of man will she think she's living with? Either let me go to this hunt, or tell me some compelling reason why doing it this way is better."

[38] Croesus then replied, "Son, I am doing it this way not because I have noticed cowardice or any thing else ignoble; rather, a dream vision stood over me in my sleep and told me that you would be short-lived, that you would die

from an iron spear. It was in reaction to this dream that I hurried along your marriage and do not send you along on the present expedition; I was being protective, to see if somehow I might be able to steal you for my lifetime. For you are really my only child — that other one, the cripple who cannot hear, I don't consider my own."

[39] The young man replied, "It's understandable that, after you saw such a vision, you were protective of me. But it's only right for me to point out what you don't understand about the dream, what it has made you forget: you say that the dream said that I will die from an iron spear. But what sort of boar has hands, and thus what sort of iron spear are you afraid of? If it said that I would die from being bitten, or of anything else appropriate to a boar, then you certainly ought to be doing exactly what you're doing. But as it is the dream said 'from an iron spear.' Therefore, seeing that the fight here is not against men, let me go."

[40] Croesus replied, "Son, in no way can I better your interpretation of the dream, and so you win. I change my mind: you are allowed to go to the hunt."

[41] So spoke Croesus. He then sent for the Phrygian Adrastus, and when he arrived said to him, "Adrastus, I performed the rites of purification for you when you were struck by a nasty misfortune — for which I do not reproach you — and I have welcomed you into my house, covering your every expense. Now —since you owe me a kindness in return for the kindness I rendered you— I need you to be my son's bodyguard as he sets forth to the hunt, to keep away the danger of thieves and criminals along the road. In addition to all that, it is but right that you too go where you can prove your valor and excellence: this is in your ancestry, and, besides, you are strong and able."

[42] "O king," replied Adrastus, "I would not otherwise go to this contest: someone with fortune as bad as mine ought not to be with those of his age who are prospering, nor even to want to be, and for that and other reasons I would hold myself back. But as it is, since you urge it and I want to please you—for I do owe you a kindness in return— yes, I consent to do this, and I expect that your son, whom you ask me to guard, will return home free from harm, as least so far as that lies in the power of the one guarding him."

[43] So Adrastus replied. He then went along, equipped with his pick of young men and dogs, and when they got to Mount Olympus they looked for the hunt and found it. The men were standing about in a circle hurling their spears at the monstrous boar. Then the stranger and guest-friend, this man who had been cleansed of murder, the one called Adrastus, hurled his spear at the boar, and he missed; but he hit — the son of Croesus. And so the son died, struck by the blow of an iron spear, and the dream's prophecy was fulfilled. Someone then rushed to tell Croesus what had happened; arriving at Sardis, he described to Croesus the fight with the boar and the fate of his child.

[44] Croesus was overwrought at the death of his child, bitter that the killer was the very one he himself had made pure. In grief and anger at this turn of fortune, with terrible cries he called upon Zeus the Purifier as witness of what he had suffered at the hands of his guest; and named also Zeus, Protector of the Hearth and Zeus Guardian of Friendship, the former because he had welcomed into his home and fed the stranger, unaware that he was to be the murderer of his child, and the latter because he had found that the one sent as a defender turned out to be the worst of enemies.

[45] Later, the Lydian men came along, carrying the corpse, with the killer following along behind. Setting himself before the corpse, he offered himself to Croesus, stretching forth his hands, telling him to strike him down upon the corpse. He spoke too of his earlier misfortune: since he had destroyed the very one who purified him, his life was not worth living. As Croesus listened, even in his own great personal misery he pitied Adrastus, and he said to him, "Stranger and guest-friend, I have all the justice I need of you, since you condemn yourself to death. You are not to blame for this disaster, or only in the sense that you did something unwittingly; no, it is some god, I suppose, and he signaled to me long ago what was going to happen." And so Croesus buried his son in fitting manner, and once the area near the gravestone was clear of people, Adrastus son of Gordias son of Midas, the killer of his own brother and killer of the one who cleansed him, recognizing that he was the worst fortune of all he had known, stabbed himself and fell upon the tomb.

#### CROESUS TESTS THE ORACLES

*Oracles in Greece had deep influence on human affairs. The oracle of Apollo at Delphi, in particular, acted as an instrument to resolve serious political and diplomatic problems, even wars, as we will see. At Delphi, the oracle was under the charge of the Pythian priestess, who in response to a request would become possessed by the god (as in the Exorcist) and would speak the god's reply in perfect hexameter verses. Some key motifs: mortal arrogance towards the divine ("testing" the oracles); the ambiguity in divine messages. The lengthy catalogue of Croesus' sacrifices and gifts exemplifies the theme of eastern luxury and material excess.*

[46] For two years Croesus sat about mourning deeply for the loss of his child. But then it came to pass that the dynasty of Astyages son of Cyaxares was overthrown by Cyrus son of Cambyses and the power of the Persians was growing; whereupon Croesus left off his grief, and began instead to ponder how

he could hold back the Persians before they became truly great. With that as his aim, he quickly fashioned a test for the oracles of the Greeks and the one in Libya too: he sent messengers to the Greek oracles at Delphi, at Abae in Phocia, and at Dodona; at the shrines of Amphiareus and of Trophonius; at Branchidae in Milesia; and as for Libya, he sent yet others to consult the oracle at Ammon <SMALL MAP INSET of these oracles + Sardis/Lydia>. And this is why he sent these messengers to test the oracles: he had in mind that if he found an oracle that had true knowledge, he would then consult it a second time, and ask whether he should make war upon the Persians.

[47] To test the oracles, he sent off messengers with this set of instructions: reckoning from the day they set out from Sardis, on the hundredth day forward they were to consult the oracles, asking what exactly Croesus son of Alyattes and king of the Lydians was doing; and they were to write down whatever divine utterance each oracle delivered and bring that back to him. No one now is able to say what the rest of the oracles responded; but at Delphi, as soon as the Lydians came to the temple to consult the god and asked what they were instructed to ask, the Pythian priestess said in hexameter verse: *I know the number of the grains of sand and the measure of the sea; / I understand the mute and hear the one who does not speak. / A smell comes to my senses, of a tortoise hard of shell, / boiled in bronze with the flesh of lamb: / bronze laid underneath, and bronze set on top.*

[48] Such were the prophetic verses of the Pythian priestess, and so the Lydian messengers wrote them down and went on their way, back to Sardis. Now as the other messengers brought back the oracular responses and appeared before him, Croesus unrolled each scroll and looked upon what was written, and not one of them pleased him; but when he heard what had come from Delphi, at

once he offered prayers and praises. The oracle at Delphi he considered the one true oracle, since it alone had revealed what he had done. For, after he had send the sacred messengers off to the oracles, Croesus watched for the day appointed and devised something that would be impossible to puzzle out or imagine: with his own hands he cut up a tortoise and a lamb and boiled them in a bronze cauldron with a bronze lid set upon it.

[49] That then was the Delphic oracle's response to Croesus. As to the reply of the oracle of Amphiaraus, no report survives and so I am not able to say what the oracle replied once the Lydians had performed the customary rites at the temple; but I can say that he considered this oracle also to possess unerring truth.

[50] After all this, he worked to gain the Delphic god's favor<sup>10</sup> with great sacrifices: he slaughtered every kind of domestic beast as sacrificial victims, three thousand in count; he heaped up couches overlaid with gold and silver, and golden chalices, and purple robes and gowns, and burnt them in a great sacrificial fire. And he gave commands to the Lydians, that everyone sacrifice everything they could to the god. After he was done with the sacrifices, he poured out heaps of gold, beyond measure, and had it beaten into ingots, making each six palms in length, three palms in width, and one palm high.<sup>11</sup> There were one hundred and seventeen of them: four were of refined gold, weighing two and a half talents each, and the rest ingots of gold alloyed with silver, two talents each in weight.<sup>12</sup> He also had a statue of a lion made, of refined

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<sup>10</sup> Apollo.

<sup>11</sup> Each palm is about 7.5 cm, 3 inches.

<sup>12</sup> Each talent is about 57 pounds, 26 kg.

gold, weighing ten talents. This lion, when the temple at Delphi burned down, fell off the ingots (whereupon it stood), and now is set up in the Corinthian Treasury; it now weighs six and a half talents, for three and a half talents melted away in the fire. <SMALL IMAGE inset of Corinthian Treasury>

[51] Once the ingots and the statue were finished, Croesus dispatched them to Delphi and alongside also two wine craters (Figure 00<ref to earlier crater image>), large ones of gold and of silver; the golden crater was set up on the right of the temple's entryway, and the silver crater to the left. These too had to be moved when the temple burned down: now the golden one is set up in the Treasury of the Clazomenians, weighing eight and a half talents plus twelve minas,<sup>13</sup> and the silver one stands in a niche in the front hall of the temple, with a capacity of six hundred amphoras<sup>14</sup>— the Delphians use it to this day as the mixing bowl for wine when they celebrate the feast day called Theophania. The Delphians claim that the craters are the work of Theodorus of Samos, and I think so too: the workmanship is not that of just anyone, or so it looks to me.

Croesus dispatched also four large silver casks, which have been set up in the Corinthian Treasury; and he also made an offering of two vessels for pouring holy water, one gold, one silver. <SMALL IMAGE inset of a perirrhanterion> The gold one has an engraving that claims it as an offering of the Spartans, but that is not correct: this vessel also is from Croesus. A Delphian man who wanted to curry favor with the Spartans made that engraving; his name I know but I will not make a record of it. There is, however, a statue of a boy with water running

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<sup>13</sup> A mina is 1/60 of a talent, thus about 1 pound or 1/2 kg.

<sup>14</sup> An amphora is large jug that contains about 40 liters or 10 gallons. The capacity — 24000 liters, 6000 gallons — seems to many commentators fantastically large.

through his fingers, and that is a gift of the Spartans— but not the water vessels themselves.

Croesus dispatched many other things too that did not have his name inscribed, including perfectly circular cast silver bowls, and a golden statue, over four feet high,<sup>15</sup> of a woman (which the Delphians say is an image of Croesus' bread maker). And, finally, Croesus dedicated the necklaces from his wife's neck and the sashes from her waist.

[52] Such were his dispatches to Delphi. To the oracle at Amphiaraus, once he had learned of the hero's valor and ill fate,<sup>16</sup> he dedicated a shield of solid gold and a spear also all of gold, the shaft as golden as the spearhead. In my time these were both still lying in Thebes, in the Theban temple of Ismenian Apollo.

[53] When the Lydians were ready to take the gifts to the two oracles, Croesus gave instructions to ask the oracles if he, Croesus, should make war upon the Persians, and if he should make an alliance with some other power. When they arrived at their destinations, the Lydians made their offering, and then made inquiry of the oracles with these words: "Croesus, king of the Lydians and other peoples, inasmuch as he considers you alone the true oracles among mortal men, has made offerings befitting your powers of divination. So now it is you he asks, if he should make war upon the Persians, and if he should add some other power as an ally to fight alongside him." Such was their inquiry; and both oracles came to the same judgment, making this prophecy for Croesus, that *if he should make war upon the Persians, he would destroy a great kingdom*; and they also

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<sup>15</sup> The Greek says, "three cubits": a cubit is the length of a man's forearm, slightly less than a half meter, or about 1.5 feet.

<sup>16</sup> In Greek myth, the hero Amphiaraus fought alongside the "Seven against Thebes" and was swallowed up by a sudden chasm in the earth. His tomb was the site of the oracle associated with him.



advised him to investigate which among the Greek states was the most powerful and to make those his allies.

[54] When Croesus heard the report of the divine prophecies, he was very pleased with the oracles, having now every expectation that he would destroy the kingdom of Cyrus. So he sent again to the Pythian priestess and — having found out how many Delphians there were— he gave two gold coins to each man in Delphi. In return, the Delphians gave Croesus and the Lydians the right to consult the oracle first, and exemption from all fees, and the honor of front-row seats at the games; and furthermore set up that for all time any Lydian who wanted to could become a citizen of Delphi.

[55] Once he had bestowed the coins on the Delphians, Croesus consulted the oracle a third time— having found revelation of truth in the oracle before, he was hungry for more. And so he inquired of the oracle as to whether his monarchy would last a long time. The Pythian priestess responded with these verses: *At which time a mule becomes king of the Medes, / then, tender-footed Lydian, beside the river Hermus of many pebbles / you must flee: do not stand your ground, and be not ashamed of cowardice.*

[56] Of all the prophecies he had heard from the oracle, Croesus found this the most pleasing. He now had every expectation that he and his descendants would rule without end — surely, he thought, the Medes could never have as their king a mule instead of a man.

#### CROESUS SEEKS AN ALLY

*Just at the moment when the narrator seems ready to depict the Lydian attack on the Persians — the ultimate focal point for the story of Croesus — there is a long pause while the narrator sketches out the early history of*

*Athens and Sparta. This retardation of the narrative's forward movement (a technique Herodotus takes from Homer) is important, since it substantially alters the reader's perspective on events. The focus on Delphi and now Athens and Sparta re-centers the narrative on Greece, and rewrites eastern events as events that include the west, even though in fact the alliance with Sparta will have no actual impact on the Lydian-Persian conflict.*

Croesus next turned his thoughts to investigating which among the Greek states was the most powerful, so that he could make those his allies. And on inquiry, he found that the Spartans and Athenians were pre-eminent.

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#### CROESUS ATTACKS CYRUS

*By this point in the narrative, the reader has been well trained to notice and reflect upon recurrent motifs like the wise adviser, the ambiguity of oracles, and so forth; and we will cease to note these. Two new motifs arise that prefigure important future events. First is the contrast of hard, rugged, poor peoples with those who are more "soft" and used to wealth and luxury. Second is idea of critical natural boundaries (here the river Halys) which delineate "natural" divisions among people; the one who crosses such boundaries is taken to be a transgressor, and thus a military attack can set in motion the machinery of divine retribution. Importantly, in Herodotus there is seldom a single causation: the narrative characteristically puts forward a mix of impersonal (including divine), political, and personal (often family-related) motivations.*

[71] Now as to Croesus, he had mistaken the oracle's meaning and thus began to make plans to attack Cappadocia, fully expecting to overpower Cyrus and crush the power of the Persians. While Croesus was making his preparations for the Persian campaign, a man came to offer him advice — a man the Lydians considered wise even before but whose words now brought him to very high repute. His name was Sandanis, and this is what he said: "O King, you prepare to march on men who wear trousers of leather, and whose other clothing is leather

as well;<sup>17</sup> who eat not as much as they want but as much as they have; who possess a rugged, rocky land. These men do not drink wine — they have only water—and do not eat figs, or any other delicacy. If you defeat them in battle, what will you get from them, they who have nothing? But if you are defeated, think what fine things you will lose. Once they have a taste of our luxuries, they will hold them tight, and never let go. For my part, I give thanks to the gods that they have never made the Persians think to march on Lydia." The Persians, you see, had no delicacy or luxury before the Lydians made their attack. But Croesus did not listen to what Sandanis had to say.

[72] The Cappadocians are called "Syrians" by the Greeks. The Syrians, before the Persians came to power, were subject to the Medes, who were at this time ruled by Cyrus. The border between the kingdom of the Medes and that of the Lydians is the river Halys, which flows from the Armenian mountains through Cilicia, with the Matieni on the right and the Phrygians on the left, but then turns and flows northward, there skirting Cappadocia on the right and Paphlagonia on the left. The Halys thus carves off almost the entire western part of Asia, the lowland from the sea off Cyprus all the way up to the Black Sea. Here the peninsula of Anatolia is at its most thin, a five day journey by land.<sup>18</sup>

<MAP OPPOSITE of Anatolia with the river Halys and these points of demarcation, along with Cyprus. Note on the actual course of the river if possible. Include Sardis, Pteria.>

[73] Many were the reasons that Croesus marched on Cappadocia: for land lust, wanting to add territory to his empire; because a trusted oracle had

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<sup>17</sup> Greeks wore tunics and robes made of fabric, so this will seem obviously uncomfortable and distinctly less civilized.

<sup>18</sup> "Five days" is a typical expression, meaning "a few" days. The actual distance is far greater, at least 460 km, 285 miles.

told him; but also because he wanted to take revenge on Cyrus on behalf of Astyages. Now this man Astyages the son of Cyaxares was Croesus' brother-in-law as well as king of the Medes (that is, until Cyrus son of Cambyses came to overthrow him). And this is how Astyages came to be Croesus's in-law. In a time of civil strife, a band of Scythian nomads came as refugees to the land of the Medes, and at that time Cyaxares son of Phraortes son of Deioces held the kingship. In the beginning he treated them well—they were suppliants after all—and he held them in great esteem, asking them to teach some Median youths their language and also their skill in archery.

The weeks passed; time after time the Scythians went on the hunt, and time after time they brought something back. But one day it so happened that they failed to catch anything. They arrived at the court empty-handed and Cyaxares (who it seems had a nasty temper) mistreated them badly, far beyond the bounds of decency. To have suffered such an outrage was intolerable as well as undeserved, and so the Scythians formed a plan of action: taking one of the boys who had been given over for them to teach, they killed him and cut him up. They then prepared the meat just as they would game, took it to Cyaxares as though a gift from the hunt, and got out of the country as fast as they could—to Sardis, to the Lydian king Alyattes son of Sadyattes. So, Cyaxares and his fellow diners partook of this meat, even as the Scythians presented themselves as suppliants to Alyattes.

[74] Cyaxares demanded the Scythians be handed over, but Alyattes refused; and so war broke out and for five years the Lydians and Medes fought. Often the Medes won, but just as often the Lydians were the victors. One battle was even fought at night. Now in the sixth year of this evenly-fought war, the

two sides were joined, and it so happened, just as the battle was raging, that the day suddenly turned to night. This transformation of daylight to darkness had been foretold to the Ionians by Thales of Miletus, who fixed as the year this very one in which the eclipse occurred.<sup>19</sup>

The Lydians and Medes, when they saw night replacing day, stopped from their fighting and both sides were anxious to broker peace. Appointed to negotiate the truce were Syennesis of Cilicia and Labynetus of Babylon. These two quickly agreed to swear oaths to peace, but also made a marriage connection part of the deal: they decided that Alyattes would give his daughter Aryenis to Astyages the son of Cyaxares, reasoning that without a strong bond the treaty too would not remain strong. These peoples make sworn oaths using the same rituals as the Greeks; but, as an added seal to the oath, they also slit the skin on their arms, and lick up each other's blood. <SMALL INSET: kinship chart showing the kings and the marriage>

[75] This was the Astyages whom Cyrus overthrew, even though he was his own maternal uncle, and Cyrus presently held him as prisoner— for reasons I will discuss later on. It was in objection to this very coup that Croesus sent to the Delphic oracle in the first place, to ask whether he should march upon the Persians. When he got the prophecy, a cryptic one as we have seen, Croesus — convinced that the oracle favored himself — marched into Persian territory.

When Croesus reached the river Halys, my opinion is that he crossed over along existing bridges. But Greeks generally tell a different story, that Thales of Miletus got him across. The story goes that Croesus was at a loss as to how to cross the river (since the bridges of our time did not yet exist), and that Thales,

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<sup>19</sup> Probably the eclipse of 28 May 585 BC. Thales was considered the earliest of the Seven Sages.

who was with the army, worked it out so that part of the river flowed left of the army and part to the right. And this is how he did it. Starting upstream of the camp, he had them dig a deep channel in the shape of a crescent moon, so that it went along the back of where the camp was situated; the channel ran out from the ancient river bed and, once it had passed the camp, ran back in again. In this way, with the river split between the two channels, it proved possible to ford the river on both sides. Others tell yet a different story, that the whole of the river was diverted, and that the old river bed dried up. This, however, I cannot accept: for how then could they have crossed the river on their way back?

[76] Now when Croesus had crossed the river with his army, he came to the part of Cappadocia called Pteria — the most powerful polity in the land, situated in the area near the city of Sinope on the Black Sea. There they set up camp. Then, they pillaged the Syrian farmsteads; captured the main city, enslaving its inhabitants; and overran all the towns round about. And so the Syrians — who had no responsibility for any of this— were driven from their homes.

Cyrus meanwhile collected his own army, enlisting all he could from the lands along his route, and came to face Croesus. Before his army had set out to march, Cyrus had sent heralds to the Ionians, urging them to revolt from Croesus—but they did not do as he asked. So, Cyrus arrived and set up camp opposite Croesus. There, in the territory of Pteria, the armies pitted strength against strength. The battle was fierce; many men fell on both sides; at last night came on and they separated, but neither side had won— so hard did the two armies fight.

[77] Croesus blamed the size of his army —his fighting force was far fewer in number than that of Cyrus — and when Cyrus did not come out to fight on the next day, he marched back to Sardis. What he had in mind was to summon the Egyptians in accordance with their treaty (he had made an alliance with the Egyptian king Amasis, before he made the one with the Spartans), to send for the Babylonians (whose king was Labynetus at that time, and whom he had also made his ally), and to tell the Spartans to be there at the time appointed. Once the allies had all gathered and his own army assembled, his thinking went, they would march upon the Persians — at springtime, right after winter had passed. Such were his thoughts, and so on arriving at Sardis he sent messengers to these allies, telling them to gather at Sardis in the fifth month hence. As for the current army, the one that had fought with the Persians, he sent away all the mercenaries and they scattered to their homes. As he saw it, there was no chance that Cyrus, whose army had been fought to a standoff, would march against Sardis.

[78] As Croesus was thinking this through, the outer parts of the city started to swarm with snakes. And as the snakes appeared, the horses left off grazing in the pastures and came to gobble them down. Croesus recognized the sight as an omen, as indeed it was— and so he quickly sent sacred messengers to Telmessus, where there were seers who could interpret such things. Though the messengers got there, and the seers told them what the omen meant to convey, they could never tell it to Croesus—for before they had sailed back to Sardis, Croesus was captured. What the Telmessians revealed was that a foreign army was to come against the land of Croesus, and once it came it would conquer those native to the land. "The snake," they said, "is a child of the earth, and the horse a warrior and one who comes from afar." Such was the reply that the

Telmessians fashioned for Croesus, at a time when he was already captured, but when they knew nothing yet of what had happened to Sardis and to Croesus himself.

#### CYRUS COUNTERATTACKS: THE SIEGE OF SARDIS

*<lack of remarks deliberate>*

[79] Even as Croesus was marching home after the battle of Pteria, Cyrus found out that Croesus was intending to disband his army for the season. Taking stock of the situation, he concluded that his best course was to march upon Sardis at once, before the Lydians could assemble their forces a second time. No sooner was this resolved than done: marching his army into Lydia Cyrus arrived as herald of his own coming, outpacing all news of the attack. Croesus was stunned — matters had worked out so entirely opposite to what he had expected — but he nonetheless led the Lydians out to give battle. For at that time, there was no one in Asia more manly and valiant than the Lydians. They fought from horseback, carrying long spears, impressive in their equestrian skill.

[80] The two armies joined battle on the great unwooded plain that lies before the city of Sardis. There several rivers, among them the Hyllus, join and dash their streams together into the largest of Lydian rivers, the Hermus; and the Hermus itself flows down from the mountains sacred to Cybele and disgorges into the sea near the town of Phocaea. *<SMALL INSET PLAN of Sardis and environs>*

Here, as he saw the Lydians taking up their battle positions, Cyrus grew fearful of the cavalry, and so set in motion a plan that Harpagus, one of the Medes, had suggested. In the army's baggage train were camels carrying the food and equipment; these he had gathered and stripped of their cargo. He then had men



mount them, using horse harnesses and saddles, and moved them into position — in front of the rest of his own army and opposite the horse of Croesus. He ordered the line of infantry to follow the camels, and behind the infantry he positioned the whole of his regular cavalry. When all was arranged, he instructed his men to kill without mercy every Lydian they encountered; but not to kill the Lydian king Croesus, not even if he resisted as they were trying to capture him.

Now the reason Cyrus had placed the camels opposite the Lydian cavalry was this: horses are frightened of camels and they can tolerate neither the sight nor the smell of them. Cyrus's stratagem had this aim, then: to render Croesus' horse useless— for the Lydian cavalry were the centerpiece of their prospects for victory. And in fact when they did join battle, the horses turned back as soon as they caught sight and smell of the camels, and Croesus found his hopes dashed. Yet even then the Lydians were not at all cowardly; rather, as they absorbed what was happening they leapt down from their horses and joined the infantry in the fight against the Persians. Time passed; many men fell on both sides; but the Lydians were forced to flee. Crowding into the city walls they now found themselves under siege.

[81] So the Persian siege of Sardis began. Croesus, on the assumption that the siege would last a long time, sent messengers out to his allies. The first messengers had gone to tell the allies to assemble at Sardis in four months, but these he now dispatched to request immediate help— for he, Croesus, was under siege.

[82] Among the allies to whom he sent were, of course, the Spartans, and at this very time the Spartans were involved in a dispute with the Argives over a

region called Thyrea. The Spartans had occupied Thyrea, effectively annexing it from the Argolid. (At this time all the land to the west, extending as far as Males, belonged to the Argives, and not just the mainland but also Cythera and the other islands.) <SMALL MAP INSET of the Peloponnesus> The Argives arrived in force to liberate the occupied territory, and thereupon the two sides negotiated an agreement. Three hundred from each side were to do battle to the death; the land would belong, then, to whichever side prevailed. Moreover, the bulk of the armies were to leave, each to their own land, not staying to witness the fighting — the thought being that if the armies were present, the side being worsened would intervene and try to defend their men. With this agreed upon, the armies withdrew, and the ones chosen, three hundred on each side, stayed behind. These now began to do battle. The fight was an even match and in the end, as night fell, only three —out of six hundred— were left: the Argives Alcenor and Chromius, and the Spartan Othryades.

The two Argives, joyous at their victory, rushed home to Argos. The Spartan Othryades, however, stripped the armor off the Argive corpses and dragged it to his camp, where he took up his position. The next day both sides came to learn the result of the contest. For quite a while they both claimed victory, the Argives saying that more of their men had survived, the Spartans that these men had run away, as anyone could see, and that their man had stayed and stripped the enemy corpses of their armor. In the end the quarrel grew violent and they fell to fighting. Many were killed on both sides; but the Spartans were victorious.

Ever since then, the Argives have worn their hair short, they who had before required men to wear their hair long; they made it a law, with a curse

added thereto, that no Argive man should grow out his hair, nor any Argive woman wear golden jewelry, before they reclaimed Thyrea. The Spartans did exactly the opposite: they who had never worn their hair long before, from this moment forwards always had long hair. As for the one Spartan left from three hundred, Othryades, they report that he was ashamed to return to Sparta, since the rest of the band of brothers had died. So he cut himself down on the spot, there in Thyrea.

[83] These were the matters occupying the Spartans when the messenger came from Sardis, asking help for Croesus, whose city was under siege. The Spartans, despite their own difficulties, set out to lend assistance as soon as they heard the message. But just as they completed their preparations and were ready to launch the ships, a second message came, that the Lydian city was taken, and that Croesus had been captured alive. And so the Spartans left off, despite their distress at his great misfortune.

[84] Here is how Sardis was captured. On the fourteenth day of the siege, Cyrus sent horsemen along the ranks, announcing a reward for the first man to scale the city wall. The army then made an assault in force, but without success. But when all the others had given up, a Mardian man, named Hyroeades, made an attack by climbing a part of the acropolis where no guard was posted. The Lydians, you see, had no fear of the wall being breeched here, since the acropolis was sheer and impregnable on that side.

In that spot alone had Meles, an earlier king of Sardis, not led the lion that his concubine had born to him. (The Telmessians, you see, had predicted that it would be impossible to capture Sardis if the lion were led about its walls.) Meles had led the lion around the rest of the city wall, to each spot where the acropolis

was vulnerable; but he did not bother with this sheer and impregnable spot, where the acropolis faces Mount Tmolus.

The day before, this Mardian man, Hroeades, had seen one of the Lydians climb down from the acropolis to pick up a helmet that had rolled down; noticing this, he set it in his heart. And so the next day he climbed up along that very route, and other Persians after him. More and more went up and over the wall and so Sardis was taken; and the Persians fell to plundering the entire city.

[85] As for Croesus, this is how things turned out. He had a son who, as I mentioned earlier, was unable to speak, though a fine young man otherwise. Back in his time of prosperity, Croesus had done everything for him he could think of, including sending an inquiry to Delphi about his son. The Pythian priestess had spoken these verses in reply: *Croesus, born of Lydia, king of many, great fool: / Do not wish to hear in your palace the cry you pray so much for, / of your son speaking. Much better for you that it never be. / For he will speak his first words on a day of ill fortune.*

When the city wall was breeched, one of the Persians, not recognizing Croesus, came up intending to kill him. Croesus saw his attacker but in his misfortune was beyond caring— it did not matter to him if he was struck and killed. But the son — the one who could not speak — when he saw the Persian attacking, was seized with terror at the calamity before him and broke out with a sound, saying "*Do not kill Croesus!*" These were the first words he uttered; and after that he spoke for the whole rest of his life.

[86] The Persians occupied Sardis and took Croesus alive in the fourteenth year of his rule and on the fourteenth day of the siege. Just as the oracle had declared, a great kingdom had fallen— his own.

## CROESUS ON THE PYRE

*The pyre is a large bonfire built to ceremonially incinerate corpses, and it is highly unusual to use it to burn people alive. In this famous and extraordinary scene, there are two allusions that cultured Greeks will have recognized. First is killing of enemies on the pyre. In Homer's Iliad, Achilles honors his dead friend Patroclus with a funeral at which he slaughters and adds to the pyre twelve of the Trojan enemy; in the Iliad, this human sacrifice is a strong signal that Achilles' excessive grief is transforming him from great warrior to someone dehumanized, increasingly detached from any sense of the mortal condition. Second is the allusion to the "twice-seven" (and we will have noticed the emphasis on fourteen already in the story of Croesus). The phrase, "twice-seven," is used of the seven boys and seven girls who, in Greek mythology, were sent each year as human sacrifices to the Minotaur, a half-man and half-bull monster.*

The Persians seized Croesus and took him to Cyrus. Cyrus had had his men pile up wood for a great pyre, and now had them place Croesus upon it, bound in shackles, and alongside him twice seven Lydian youths. It is not clear what he had in mind. Perhaps he wanted to make a human sacrifice to one of the gods. Or maybe he wished to fulfill some vow. But it may be that he put Croesus up on the pyre when he found out his piety to the Greek gods, wanting to see if some divinity would save him from being burned alive. In any case, this, they say, is what Cyrus did. <INSET PICTURE of Myron Vase depicting Croesus on the pyre>

As Croesus was standing on the pyre, even in such great misery the words of Solon came into his mind, words spoken with the gods' inspiration, that "no one who is still alive can be called blessed." He pondered this in a deep silence; then sighed and groaned, and thrice called out the name, "Solon!" Cyrus heard him and told the interpreters to ask who was this he called upon; so they approached him and asked.

For a time Croesus kept silent, not answering their questions; but then they used force. "He is the one whom I would have every king consult,

regardless of the expense." What he said made no sense to them, so they asked him again what he meant. As they were persistent, and getting ready to use force again, he told the story— how Solon, an Athenian, had first come to Sardis, and though seeing for himself all of the Lydian's prosperity, he had made naught of it; how everything had turned out exactly as Solon had said; and how Solon's words were not so much for Croesus as for all mankind— though especially for those who think themselves prosperous or blessed.

Even as Croesus was telling his story, the fire was lit and the outer edges began to burn. But when Cyrus heard from the interpreters what Croesus had said, he had a change of heart, thinking, "I, a man, am burning alive another man, who as I am now once too was blessed." Besides, he was fearful of divine retribution, and was thinking how unstable were all human affairs. So he told his men to extinguish the blaze at once and to have Croesus and the Lydian youths step down. Try they did, but it was no longer possible to bring the fire under control.

[87] The Lydians tell this tale of what happened next. Croesus, realizing that Cyrus had changed his mind, saw that the men were trying to extinguish the fire yet unable to get it under control. So he called out to Apollo in a loud clear voice: "If any of my gifts have pleased you, come to my side and save me from this disaster!" With tearful cries he called upon the god; and suddenly in a clear and windless sky clouds gathered, a storm broke, a violent rainfall poured down— and the fire was extinguished.

## CYRUS AND CROESUS

*We get a view here of the complex intersection of human action, divine power, and pre-ordained fate in the unstable fortunes of men. That the priestess herself explicates the god's riddling oracles is unusual, perhaps meaning to highlight the ironically close relation that Croesus has built to the god through his gifts and piety.*

In this way Cyrus came to know that Croesus was a noble man, loved by the gods. Stepping him down from the pyre Cyrus said, "Croesus, what man persuaded you to march upon my land and make yourself my enemy rather than my friend?" "O king," Croesus replied, "I did it myself, to your good fortune and to my bad. But the one to blame for all this is the Greek god, who encouraged me to attack. No man is so foolish so as to choose war over peace: for in peace, children bury their fathers, while in war fathers bury their children. No, I suppose it was dear to some god that things work out this way."

[88] So spoke Croesus; Cyrus released him from his shackles and sat him at his side, as he held him in great esteem. Indeed Cyrus and all those nearby gazed on him with wonder. Croesus, lost in thought, kept silence. After a while he looked up and turned his attention to the Persians who were plundering the Lydian capital. "O king," he said, "should I say what I am thinking, or is it better to keep quiet for the present?" Cyrus told him to speak out as he pleased. So Croesus put this question to him: "What is it that these men of yours are actually accomplishing with their rushing about?" Cyrus said, "Why, they are despoiling your city and plundering your possessions." "But," Croesus replied, "it is not my city nor my possessions that they despoil; these things no longer have anything to do with me; no, they are grabbing and taking away *your* things."

[89] Cyrus grew worried at Croesus' remark, so he sent the others away and asked Croesus his view of the present goings-on. Croesus said, "Since the

gods have handed me to you as your slave, I think it right to let you know what I foresee. The Persians are by nature violent men and not used to riches. If you let them plunder and store up a great mass of wealth, this, I think, will be the outcome: expect the one who has stored up the most to challenge you. If this account seems right to you, do as follows: position your spearmen as guards at each of the city gates, and have them take the loot from each soldier as he carries it out, telling him that the property must be tithed — a tenth of it must be offered up to Zeus. In this way you will not be hated, as you would be if you took the loot by force; instead, the soldiers, thinking that you are doing what is right, will willingly hand it over.

[90] Cyrus was delighted at these words, as he thought it excellent advice. Thanking Croesus, he bid his spearmen do exactly as Croesus had suggested. Then he spoke to Croesus, saying "Croesus, I see that you, once a king yourself, are willing to serve me well in both word and deed. Therefore ask for a gift, whatever you want to have, and it shall be yours immediately." "O master," he said, "you will do me a great favor if you let me ask a question of the god of the Greeks, the one I have particularly honored. I wish to send him these shackles, asking if it is his custom to deceive those who have done him well." Cyrus asked what offence prompted such a request. In return Croesus told him the whole story, his original plan and the oracle's reply, laying special emphasis on the rich offerings he had made, and how it was at the urging of the oracle that he came to attack the Persians.

He ended by asking once again that he be allowed to reproach the god in this way. Cyrus said, laughing, "This you will have from me, Croesus, and whatever you request in the future as well." So Croesus sent to Delphi men of



Lydia, instructing them to set down the shackles at the entry of the temple, then to ask if the god was not ashamed that his oracles had urged Croesus to attack the Persians and thereby check the power of Cyrus, when from that he had gotten these first fruits— shackles. Asking this, they were then to inquire if it was the custom for Greek gods to be so thankless.

[91] The Lydian men arrived at Delphi and did as they had been told. In reply the Pythian priestess said, "It is impossible even for a god to escape fate preordained. Croesus has now paid for the crime of his ancestor of the fifth generation past, a spearman of the Heraclids, who, caught in a woman's scheme, killed his master, and held kingly power and office not rightly his. Apollo Loxias wanted that Sardis fall not in Croesus' time but in the time of his children— but the Fates proved impossible to turn aside. What favor the Fates allowed, however, Apollo brought to pass: for he held off the capture of Sardis for three years. Have Croesus understand this, then, that the capture of Sardis was three years later than was preordained; and also this, that Apollo was the one who helped him when he was being burned alive. As for the oracle, Croesus finds fault unjustly. The words of Apollo Loxias were: *if he makes war upon the Persians, he will destroy a great kingdom*. But Croesus needed to come and ask one more question —did the oracle mean his own kingdom or that of Cyrus?— if he was going to plan properly. Neither understanding what was said nor asking additional questions, Croesus himself clearly was the one to blame. Moreover, when he asked his last question, and the god spoke about the mule, not even this did Croesus understand. The mule was in fact Cyrus, he who was born from people unlike in race and breeding: his mother an aristocratic, a Mede and the daughter of Astyages king of the Medes; and his father, low-born, a Persian and

the Medes' subject, an inferior who took as wife one to whom he should have been the slave." So did the Pythian priestess reply, and the messengers brought the reply back to Sardis, where they relayed it to Croesus. Croesus listened and came to realize that the fault was not the god's but his own.

[92] Such then is the tale of Croesus' rule and the first subjugation of Ionia.