

The instability of human affairs can safely be stated to be a constant denominator in both Herodotus and Thucydides. As Herodotus will describe cities both large and small because of their changing fates over time (1.5.3ff), so Thucydides, too, reports of communities overturned in reversals of fortune.

The paper investigates the behavior participants in such processes display at bifurcation points. Its main section compares King Croesus' conduct, beginning with his dismissal of wise Solon's arguments, vs. the Athenians' decision after their Pylos victory in 425 BCE to reject Sparta's peace offer. In either instance, the author in his own words indicates a misjudgment.

When Solon arrives at Sardis, King Croesus is at the height of his power. Seeking confirmation of his presumed status as the happiest man, Croesus is unimpressed by Solon's examples and the empirical argument that on any day of a long life something can go wrong, and that man is totally (mis-) fortune (1.32.2-4). Solon's argument is surprisingly close to Thucydidean chance (*tyche*), with its ability to strike unexpectedly at any time. And, like men in Thucydides' world, so Herodotean Croesus is not ready to draw the consequences of what has been presented to him. Accordingly, he will have to go through what he would rather not see or experience. Twice confidently elated, and twice despondent, first after the loss of his son, then after his defeat and upon being placed on the pyre, Croesus well exemplifies Herodotus' view of human nature and the human condition.

A comparable development in Thucydides is offered by the Athenians' conduct after their victory at Pylos. Having, supported by a number of lucky circumstances (the word *tyche* is employed repeatedly), cut off several hundred Spartan elite troops on the island of Sphacteria, the Athenians confidently reject a Spartan peace offer, delivered in a speech made by Spartan ambassadors in Athens (4.17-20). The speech points to the still available freedom of choice and appeals to Athens' experience of both good and bad outcomes, which should make them distrustful toward a situation of success and well-being. But the Athenians, deaf to sound arguments like Croesus, believe that they can have peace at any time "since they were holding the men on the island": they "*wanted more*" (4.21.2). Soon, however, their pawn on the island proves illusionary: the blockade is incomplete and cannot be extended for a longer time. So, "they felt remorse that they had not accepted the treaty" (4.27.2).

But soon an unexpected coup delivers almost 300 Spartiates from the island as prisoners into the hands of the Athenians, so they experience an invigorating renewal of the good fortune they originally believed to reap when "holding the men on the island." Will they choose more wisely when the Spartans once more come for a settlement? "...*they wanted more* and ...sent them away without having achieved their objective" (4.41.4).

It will, after initial successes, take the lost battles of Delion and Amphipolis to bring back the same depressed mood as before: having lost their earlier confidence, the Athenians now "felt remorse (*metemelonto* 5.14.2 = 4.27.2) because, after the events at Pylos, they had not entered an agreement." For a panel that investigates common features perceived by the two historians, it is a welcome confirmation to see that, the historically different situations of Croesus and Athens notwithstanding, both authors observe humans going through the same self-destructive twofold cycle of confidence-despondency-confidence-despondency.