



Afterthoughts about Polycrates, Anacreon, and Ibycus

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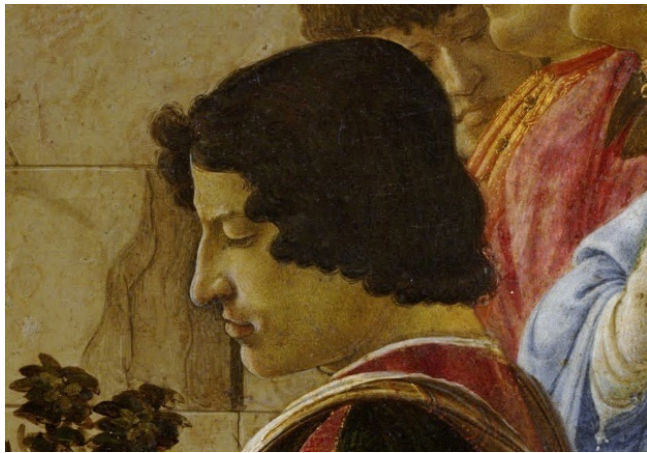
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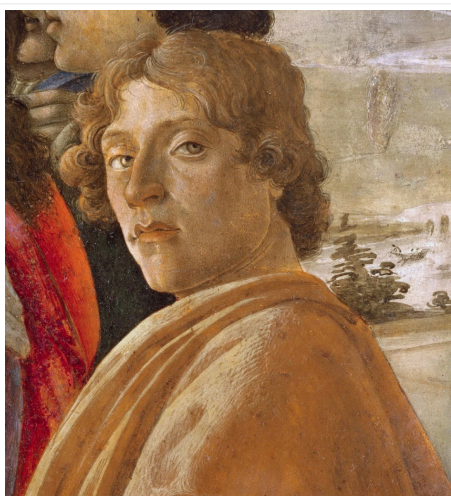
2017.09.14 | By Gregory Nagy

Further reflections on a paper originally presented 2017.09.08 at the symposium "Culture and Society in 'the Lyric age' of Greece": A Joint Conference with the European Network for the Study of Ancient Greek History and the Network for the Study of Archaic and Classical Greek Song, Princeton University, September 8–9, 2017. That earlier paper, with the title "[Polycrates and his patronage of two lyric masters, Anacreon and Ibycus](#)," was posted in *Classical Inquiries* on the same day. These reflections, written 2017.09.14, were revised on 2018.12.06.

[\[Essay continues here...\]](#)



Lorenzo de' Medici, depicted in Sandro Botticelli's *Adoration of the Magi*. [Image](#) via Wikimedia Commons.



Probable self-portrait of Sandro Botticelli, in his *Adoration of the Magi*. [Image](#) via Wikimedia Commons.

Above: Lorenzo the Magnificent as the generous patron, Botticelli as the glorifying artist.

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§0. While attending the Princeton symposium as described above, I benefited from conversations with others attending, especially with Lucia Athanassaki, Ewen Bowie, Maša Ćulumović, André Lardinois, Richard Martin, Anastasia Peponi, and David Rosenbloom. On the basis of these conversations, I offer some further reflections, supplementing what I posted in *Classical Inquiries* 2017.09.08, “Polycrates and his patronage of two lyric masters, Anacreon and Ibycus,” —hereafter abbreviated as PAI.

§1. I start with the song of Ibycus praising Polycrates, S151 (as in PAI, I use the edition of Davies 1991). Here again are the last two lines, which I quoted as Text 2 in PAI §8:

καὶ σὺ, Πολύκρατες, κλέος ἀφθιτον ἐξεῖς
ὡς κατ' αἰδοῦν καὶ ἐμὸν κλέος.

Ibycus S151.47–48

In PAI §8, I offered this translation:

So also you, O Polycrates, will have a glory-[kleos]-of-song that is unwilling [aphthiton],
| as in line with the song [aidē] and with my own glory-[kleos]-of-song.

Reading the interpretation of Bowie 2009:125, however, I am now considering this alternative translation:

So also you, O Polycrates, will have a glory-[kleos]-of-song that is unwilling [aphthiton],
| even as my own glory-[kleos]-of-song is in line with the song [aidē].

The kleos of the poet is ‘in line with’ (kata) the song that he is making, and now that the aidē (Doric aoidā) ‘song’ is coming to an end, the kleos of the patron will also be ‘in line with’ (kata) the song that will have been made. And what is the song about, in the lines that precede the final two lines? It is about the kallos ‘beauty’ of warriors who fought on both sides in the Trojan War: Kyanippos at line 37, Zeuxippos at line 40, and Troilos at line 41. Here is the line about beauty:

τοῖς μὲν πέδα κάλλεος αἰέν

They [= these beautiful warriors] will always have a share in the beauty [kallos]

Ibycus S151.46

Yes, these beautiful warriors on the one hand (men, line 46) will have a share in the beauty, and so also you, on the other hand, O Polycrates, will have such a share—all because of the reciprocal kleos shared by poet and patron—an eternal kleos created in terms of the song about the beauty. My paraphrase here makes sense, however, only if Polycrates himself is admired for his own beauty, to be compared with the beauty that radiates from the beautiful warriors of the Trojan War. Here is where the relevant interpretation of Bowie 2009:125–127 becomes pivotal: as he argues—and most convincingly so—Polycrates was still a young man at the time when the song of Ibycus was performed for him. Accordingly, Polycrates is being admired for his youthful beauty, though he is also being praised for his power as the new tyrant of Samos. This interpretation improves on the learned comments of Hutchinson 2001:232 about this song: he speaks of “praise for beauty alone.” And I would add this comparison: Ibycus the poet is linked with Polycrates of Samos much as Botticelli the painter and Poliziano the poet are linked with Lorenzo de’ Medici, the de facto ruler of Florence, whose magificence is commensurate with his patronage of the arts in general: Lorenzo is il Magnifico in large part because he is a magnificent patron.

§2. Next I turn to Text 10 as quoted in PAI §35:

ἀπικόμενος δὲ ἐς τὴν Μαγνησίην ὁ Πολυκράτης διεφθάρη κακῶς, οὔτε ἑωυτοῦ ἀξίως οὔτε τῶν ἑωυτοῦ φρονημάτων· ὅτι γὰρ μὴ οἱ Συρηκοσίων γενόμενοι τύραννοι, οὐδὲ εἰς τῶν ἄλλων Ἑλληνικῶν τυράννων ἀξιόσ ἐστι Πολυκράτει μεγαλοπρεπεῖν συμβληθῆναι.

When he [= Polycrates] arrived in Magnesia [where he was treacherously captured and then brutally executed by the satrap Oroites], Polycrates perished in a bad kind of way. It was undeserved [adverb of axio- ‘deserving, worthy’]—it did not befit either what he was as a person or what his ways-of-thinking [phronēmata] were. I say this because, except for those who [at a later time] became tyrants of the people of Syracuse, not a single one of the other Greek tyrants was deserving [axios] of comparison to Polycrates when it came to his grandeur [megaloprepeia].

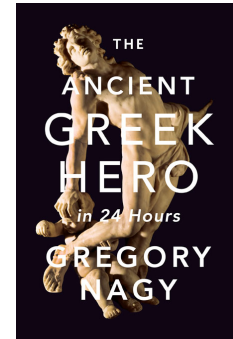
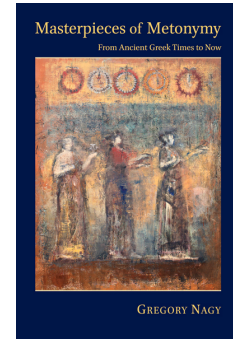
Herodotus 3.125

It could be said that my translation of phronēmata as ‘ways-of-thinking’ here in Herodotus 3.125 is so general that it needs to be justified. After all, a more specific translation such as ‘ambitious ways-of-thinking’ would fit even better in this context. I find it relevant to quote from an earlier phase in the story—where Oroites sends a letter to Polycrates, saying:

Ὅροίτης Πολυκράτει ᾧδε λέγει. Πυνθάνομαι ἐπιβουλεύειν σε πρήγμασι μεγάλοισι καὶ χρήματά τοι οὐκ εἶναι κατὰ τὰ φρονήματα.

Oroites speaks as follows to Polycrates: it is my understanding that you are devising plans to accomplish great [megala] things and that you do not have the material resources [khrēmata] that would match your ways-of-thinking [phronēmata].

Herodotus 3.122



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Polycrates is 'thinking big' here, and Oroites can already see it. But I argue that such ambitious 'thinking big' aims at an admirable effect that is genuinely desired by the tyrant, and the object of this desire is a grandeur [megalo

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iā] that even Herodotus admires. After all, even gods 'think big', as we see for example in this wording:

οὐ γὰρ ἐὰ φρονέειν μέγα ὁ θεὸς ἄλλον ἢ ἑωυτόν.

You see, the god does not allow anyone else to think big [phroneîn mega] except for himself.

Herodotus 7.102

I would compare the tyrant's projects of greatness, of grandeur, to the magnificence projected by Lorenzo the Magnificent, il Magnifico.



"Botticelli's studio: The first visit of Simonetta presented by Giuliano and Lorenzo de' Medici," (1922). Eleanor Fortescue-Brickdale (English, 1872–1945). [Image](#) via Wikimedia Commons.

§3. Finally, I take another look at Text 5 as quoted in PAI §16:

[...] Ἰππάρχῳ, ὃς ἄλλα τε πολλὰ καὶ καλὰ ἔργα σοφίας ἀπεδέξατο, καὶ τὰ Ὀμήρου ἔπη πρῶτος ἐκόμισεν εἰς τὴν γῆν ταύτην, καὶ ἠνάγκασε τοὺς ῥαψῳδοὺς Παναθηναίους ἐξ ὑπολήψεως ἐφεξῆς αὐτὰ διέναι, ὥσπερ νῦν ἔτι {c} οἶδε ποιῶσιν, καὶ ἐπ' Ἀνακρέοντα τὸν Τήιον πεντηκόντορον στείλας ἐκόμισεν εἰς τὴν πόλιν, Σιμωνίδην δὲ τὸν Κεῖτον αἰεὶ περὶ αὐτὸν εἶχεν, μεγάλοις μισθοῖς καὶ δῶροις πείθων· ταῦτα δ' ἐποίει βουλόμενος παιδεύειν τοὺς πολίτας, ἵν' ὡς βελτίστων ὄντων αὐτῶν ἄρχοι, οὐκ οἰόμενος δεῖν οὐδενὶ σοφίας φθονεῖν, ἅτε ὦν καλὸς τε κάγαθός.

[I am referring to] Hipparkhos, who accomplished many beautiful things in demonstration [apodexis] of his expertise [sophiā], especially by being the first to bring over [komizein] to this land [= Athens and Attica] the verses [epos plural] of Homer, and he forced the rhapsodes [rhapsōidoi] at the Panathenaia to go through [diiēnai] these verses in sequence [ephexēs], by relay [ex hupo

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pre>seōs], just as they [= the rhapsodes] do even nowadays. And he sent out a fifty-oar state ship to bring over [komizein] Anacreon of Teos to the city [= Athens]. He [= Hipparkhos] also always kept in his company Simonides of Keos, persuading him by way of huge fees and gifts. And he did all this because he wanted to educate the citizens, so that he might govern the best of all possible citizens. He thought, noble [kalos k'agathos] as he was, that he was obliged not to be stinting [phthoneîn] in the sharing of his expertise [sophiā] with anyone.
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"Plato" Hipparkhos 228b–c

Perhaps I need to justify my translation οὐκ οἰόμενος δεῖν οὐδενὶ σοφίας φθονεῖν as 'he thought that he was obliged not to be stinting [phthoneîn] in the sharing of his expertise [sophiā] with anyone'. Could it be that the word sophiā 'expertise' here should be ascribed to the poets, and not to the patron of poets? I doubt. I argue that the patronage shown by the patron is seen as sophiā 'expertise' in its own right, and, in fact, that is what we read at the beginning of this quoted sequence: ὃς ἄλλα τε πολλὰ καὶ καλὰ ἔργα σοφίας ἀπεδέξατο 'who [= Hipparkhos] accomplished many beautiful things in demonstration [apodexis] of his expertise [sophiā]'. As we see in this passage, then, sophiā 'expertise' in poetry is reciprocal: the poet has such expertise because he is a poet, but the patron must also have it because he sponsors the poet.

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