

Herodotus, *Histories* 7.44-6
[text discussed by Rowena Hewes]

ἐπεὶ δ' ἐγένετο ἐν Ἀβύδῳ μέση, ἠθέλησε Ξέρξης ιδέσθαι πάντα τὸν στρατόν· καὶ προεπεποίητο γὰρ ἐπὶ κολωνοῦ ἐπίτηδες αὐτῷ ταύτη προεξέδρη λίθου λευκοῦ, ἐποίησαν δὲ Ἀβυδηνοὶ ἐντειλαμένου πρότερον βασιλέος, ἐνθαῦτα ὡς ἴζετο, κατορῶν ἐπὶ τῆς ἡϊόνος ἐθηεῖτο καὶ τὸν πεζὸν καὶ τὰς νέας, θηεῦμενος δὲ ἰμέρθη τῶν νεῶν ἄμιλλαν γινομένην ιδέσθαι. ἐπεὶ δὲ ἐγένετό τε καὶ ἐνίκων Φοίνικες Σιδώνιοι, ἦσθη τε τῇ ἀμίλλῃ καὶ τῇ στρατιῇ. ὡς δὲ ὥρα πάντα μὲν τὸν Ἑλλήσποντον ὑπὸ τῶν νεῶν ἀποκεκρυμμένον, πάσας δὲ τὰς ἀκτὰς καὶ τὰ Ἀβυδηνῶν πεδία ἐπίπλεα ἀνθρώπων, ἐνθαῦτα ὁ Ξέρξης ἐσωτὸν ἐμακάρισε, μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο ἐδάκρυσε. μαθὼν δὲ μιν Ἀρτάβανος ὁ πάτρως, ὃς τὸ πρῶτον γνώμην ἀπεδέξατο ἐλευθέρως οὐ συμβουλεύων Ξέρξη στρατεύεσθαι ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα, οὗτος ὠνήρ φρασθεὶς Ξέρξην δακρύσαντα εἶρετο τάδε. "ὦ βασιλεῦ, ὡς πολλὸν ἀλλήλων κεχωρισμένα ἐργάσαο νῦν τε καὶ ὀλίγῳ πρότερον· μακαρίσας γὰρ σεωτὸν δακρύεις." ὁ δὲ εἶπε "ἐσῆλθε γὰρ με λογισάμενον κατοικτεῖραι ὡς βραχὺς εἶη ὁ πᾶς ἀνθρώπινος βίος, εἰ τούτων γε ἐόντων τοσοῦτων οὐδεὶς ἐς ἑκατοστὸν ἔτος περιέσται."

When they were in Abydos, Xerxes wanted to see his whole army. Indeed, a throne of white stone had already been prepared for him on a hilltop in advance (the men of Abydos had constructed it at the king's command beforehand), and as he sat down, he looked down towards the shore and he gazed at his army and his ships, and when he saw them he desired to see the ships engaging in a contest. When this had taken place and the Phoenicians of Sidon had won, he took equal delight in the contest and the army. But when he saw the whole of the Hellespont covered with his ships, and all of the headlands and plains of Abydos full of his men, Xerxes congratulated himself, but immediately afterwards he began to weep. His uncle Artabanus, who at first had freely demonstrated his point of view, advising Xerxes not to march against Greece, caught sight of Xerxes and, addressing him as he wept, he said, "King, you have done things that are so contradictory to each other now and a little beforehand: for before you congratulated yourself and now you weep." Xerxes replied, "As I was reflecting, suddenly it occurred to me how short a human's life is, since not one of this vast crowd of men will still be alive in one hundred years."

[Translation by Rowena Hewes]