Herodotus 3.34.4

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Cambyses was eager to know the opinions of the Persians about himself. While sitting with some Persians and with Croesus, he posed this question to them:

εἴρετο ὁ Καμβύσης κοῖός τις δοκέοι ἀνὴρ εἶναι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα †τελέσαι† Κῦρον.1

Cambyses asked what sort of man he seems to be in comparison with his father †τελέσαι† Cyrus.

This is the text as printed by Rosén.2 The line has for a long time been considered problematic, but no solution has yet won over. The manuscripts are divided between the readings τελέσαι (P.Oxy. XIII 1619, i/ii Δ + Ad) and καλέσαι (CPpM). Neither infinitive makes adequate sense in the syntax of the line or supplies a suitable meaning.

Scholars of earlier generations sought to interpret τελέσαι as an infinitival complement of κοῖος, with the resulting sense being a kind of purpose clause. The translation of Valla, therefore, reads as follows: “interrogarat Cambyses, qualis ipse videretur esse vir ad patrem Cyrum adaequandum”, ‘Cambyses had asked, what sort of man he himself seemed to be to compare with his father Cyrus’.3 The same approach is found in the edition of Wesseling, where a similar translation is found, “interrogarat Cambyses, qualis ipse videretur esse vir ad patrem Cyrum consummandum”, though consummandum gives awkward sense (‘to accomplish his father’) and is perhaps intentionally literal so as to

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1 Hdt. 3.34.4.
2 Rosén 1987, 275.
3 Valla’s translation was first printed in Brugnolus 1474.
display the difficulties of the reading τελέσαι. Later on, a number of scholars advanced the view that τελέσαι might stand as an equivalent for ὅστε τελέσαι, and translated the text as "ut ad patris exemplar perveniat" (‘that he might reach the example of his father’) or "ut eum equiparet" (‘that he might equal him’). The explanation that τελέσαι is the infinitival complement of κοῖος also appears in a modern reference grammar. The problem with this approach is that the sense ‘to compare with’ or ‘equal so-and-so’ is elsewhere unattested for τελέω.

The simplest solution proposed so far is that the infinitive should be deleted from the text. This was first proposed by Creuzer: “mihi quidem voce τελέσαι ejecta, omnia bene procedere videntur” (‘to me at least everything seems to flow well with τελέσαι removed’). However, later scholars usually wrongly attributed this deletion to Negris or Stein. Eminent scholars such as Grenfell and Hunt have supported the deletion of τελέσαι, which they have rightly described as “this inappropriate word” (P.Oxy. XIII 1619, p. 188). Naber went a bit further and deleted τελέσαι Κῦρον, arguing firstly that τελέσαι is never used with πρός (this observation is indeed correct) and secondly that it is improbable that Cambyses, who is himself the speaker here, would have added the name of his own father Cyrus after τὸν πατέρα.

Other scholars have resorted to emendation. The best attempt is arguably Stein’s tentative suggestion εἰκάσαι, in the sense ‘to compare with his father’ (for εἰκάσαι πρός τινα, see LSJ s.v. εἰκάζω II), and a more recent attempt is Griffiths’ (ἔργα) τελέσαι in the sense ‘what sort of man he seems to be at accomplishing works in comparison with his father’. It ought to be recognized that the latter proposal was anticipated long ago by Schweighäuser, who suggested that in the infinitive τελέσαι one ought to understand the phrase τελέσαι ἔργα and that the whole sentence ought to be translated as “qualis vir ad res gerendas videretur esse, cum patre collatus” (‘what sort of man he seems to be at conducting affairs, compared with his father’).

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4 Wesseling 1763, 212.
5 As summarized in Schweighäuser 1825, s.v. πρός III.2 (the book is unpaginated).
6 Cooper 2002, 2517.
7 Creuzer 1832, 65.
8 Negris 1833, 177.
9 Stein 1868, 38.
10 Naber 1854, 479. The same arguments appear in Abicht 1862, 37.
11 Stein 1868, 38.
12 The conjecture is reported in Wilson 2015, 52, and in the apparatus to Wilson’s OCT (2015).
13 Schweighäuser 1825, s.v. πρός III.2.
Perhaps it is bold to propose a new textual suggestion at this late stage, but it seems to me that something more can be said about this problem. After Cambyses asks his question, the Persians and Croesus reply by specifically commenting on his achievements: firstly, that Cambyses not only has all the things Cyrus had, but also possesses Egypt and the sea (τὰ τὲ γὰρ ἐκείνου πάντα ἔχειν αὐτὸν καὶ προσεκτήσθαι Αἴγυπτόν τε καὶ τὴν βάλασσαν); and secondly, that Cambyses has no son, unlike Croesus (οὐ γὰρ κὼ τοί ἐστιν υἱός, οἶδον σὲ ἐκεῖνος κατελίπετο). These answers are fairly specifically focussed on Cambyses’ achievements, which suggests that τελέσαι—that is to say, the matter of a king’s accomplishments—ought to have some function in the question posed by Cambyses. With this in mind, it is perhaps essential to keep τελέσαι, and the textual proposal I wish to put forward is as follows:

εἴρετο ὁ Καμβύσης κοῖός τις δοκέοι ἀνὴρ εἶναι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα (κατὰ τὸ) τελέσαι {Κῦρον}.

Cambyses asked what sort of man he seems to be in comparison with his father (as regards) achieving/achievement.14

With this reading of the text, the awkward construction of an infinitival complement in κοῖος ... τελέσαι is replaced with a simple prepositional clause of κατὰ with a substantivized articular infinitive, and Κῦρον is removed as an interpolation on τὸν πατέρα. The sense of κατὰ ‘concerning, in relation to, in respect of, as regards’ is common in Herodotus (Powell lists more than fifty occurrences).15 Other examples of Herodotus’ use of the articular infinitive as a substantive dependent on a preposition have been collected before (he uses ἀντί τοῦ, peri τοῦ, ἐν τῷ, εἰς τὸ, and metat τὸ): see e.g. 1.136.1, ἀνδραγαθίη δ᾽ αὕτη ἀποδέδεκται μετὰ τὸ μάχεσθαι εἰναι ἀγαθόν, δὲ ἀν πολλοὺς ἀποδέξῃ παιδίας; 3.132.1, πλὴν τε ἐνός τοῦ ἐς Ἑλλήνας ἀπίεναι πάντα τὰλλα οἱ παρῆν; 7.10(ξ), ἐν δὲ τῷ ἐπισχεῖν ἐνεστὶ ἀγαθά.16 Although Herodotus himself does not elsewhere use κατὰ with the substantive infinitive, it is found a few times in Thucydides with the sense ‘in reference to, with regard to, in relation to’ (‘in Bezug auf’), e.g. 2.72.2, ὡς ἔνορκοι ὡντες κατὰ τὸ ἀμφοτέρους δέχεσθαι; 2.89.5, πολὺ δὲ ὡμοιοῖς ἑκείνοις πλείον φόβον παρέχετε καὶ πιστότερον κατὰ τὸ προνενικηκέναι καὶ ὅτι οὐκ ἂν ἡγοῦνται μὴ μέλλοντας τι ἄξιον τοῦ παρὰ πολὺ πράξειν ἀνθίστασθαι ύμᾶς; 2.97.4, ὅμως δὲ κατὰ

14 For the sense of the verb as ‘achieve, accomplish’, see LSJ® s.v. τελέω III.
15 Powell 1938, s.v. κατά III no. 9.
16 Birklein 1888, 45-49; also Krapp 1892, with the additional examples listed in the review of this work by Sitzler 1896, 57.
The textual solution proposed here may help to explain the different readings of the manuscripts, τελέσαι and καλέσαι, which could be survivals on both sides of a damaged manuscript, e.g. κα(τα το τε)λέσαι or κα(κα το) τελέσαι, errors which in the process of textual transmission could have given rise to corrections which went one way (as τελέσαι, the reading preserved in P.Oxy. XIII 1619, i/ii AD + Ad) or another (as καλέσαι, the reading preserved in CPPpM).

Bibliography


17 The examples are discussed in Birklein 1888, 50-58 (56 for κατα); Krapp 1892, 25. For further background, see Behrendt 1886.