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**WOMEN IN HERODOTUS' *HISTORIES***

Irene-Evangelia Georgiou

Submitted to the University of Wales in fulfilment of the  
requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Wales Swansea

2002

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## ABSTRACT

[Irene-Evangelia Georgiou, *Women in Herodotus' Histories*]

This thesis examines the role of women in Herodotus' *Histories*. It is the first monograph-length study of this important topic at the intersection of two major fields in ancient studies. As 'causes', victims or warrior fighters, women in Herodotus enter the male domain of war, in which they display the same valour as their men, when circumstances call for it. As queens, wise advisors and passive vehicles of power, they exercise influence but they are not portrayed as spiteful usurpers. They only assume such power under specific circumstances, and are in these cases portrayed as serious political actors. Sometimes, women are shown to reverse their gender-roles with men. They take control when the male is in no position to do so himself, only to revert to their anonymity after they have reinstated normality and order. In Herodotus' ethnographic treatments, the representation of women is not dominated by promiscuity, wantonness or rule over the male. Rather, worlds of polyandry and equality between the sexes are constructed. In the Persian world of Herodotus, women are not all-powerful rulers of men. If they are shown to exercise any influence, this is only in the context of the royal court. For the most part, they are pawns in Persian expansionism. As concubines, prostitutes and slaves, they are not presented as immoral, but rather as suffering fates imposed by the male, by custom or by war. Women's role in religious life is never questioned but is presented as one of utmost importance for the *polis*.

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It is to my parents that this thesis is dedicated.



## Introduction

Modern scholarship on the *Histories* and its author is so vast that Waters has quite sharply referred to it as 'Herodotolatry'.<sup>1</sup> However, there remains a major theme in the historian's work which has not yet received scholars' proper attention: that is, the subject of women. Although Herodotus' *Histories* are indeed saturated with their presence, it is curious that there has been no extended and in-depth study after Dewald's useful but unfortunately only summary article published more than twenty years ago.<sup>2</sup> Of course, there have been articles dealing with specific areas of study involving Herodotean women. Also, Lateiner and Gould devote a few pages to the subject mostly recycling Dewald's arguments.<sup>3</sup> Yet, there has been no attempt to take it a step further and provide a detailed discussion of the historian's representation of women and their role in the *Histories*. And this is despite the fact that, since Pomeroy, the study of antiquity -- history and literature alike -- has been deluged with investigations into women's studies. Why? Is it because scholars feel that this field of study is of no interest or importance? Or, is it because they find it too complex a subject to be examined even in a monograph-length study? Quite surprisingly, it appears that the answer lies in the latter fact, if one is to judge by Gould, who has stated that there is 'no single formula which covers the role of women in Herodotus'.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, at first sight, mainly because of their vast number, Herodotean women give the impression of being uncategorisable. This thesis, in contrast, sets out to demonstrate the following: Firstly, Herodotean women *are* categorisable. If we look deeper, we will discover that despite being vast in number, their representation in the *Histories* can be successfully articulated in terms of six focal categories: war, power, topsyturvydom, ethnographies, prostitution/concubinage, and religion. Secondly, and contrary to Gould's contention, although the historian introduces a wide range of women, either in groups or individually, in a wide range of contexts, their role in the

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<sup>1</sup> Waters, 1966, 157.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Dewald, 1981. There is a forthcoming fifteen page article by Dewald dealing once again with the subject of 'Women in Herodotus', which will be included in *A companion to Herodotus* (no further details are yet available).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. e.g. Walcot, 1978; Waters, 1985; Gray, 1995; Romm, 1998; Harrison, 1997. Cf. also Gould, 1989, 129-132; Lateiner, 1989, 135-140.

<sup>4</sup> Gould, 1989, 131.

*Histories* can be seen as overwhelmingly determined by a single formula. They are shown to be an inseparable part of society and vital to the maintenance of culture and custom. And thirdly, this thesis considers Herodotus' representation of the women he incorporates into his narrative.

Before we embark upon a brief account of the chapters comprising this thesis, attention should be drawn to the following. In the course of this study, we will not normally give centre-stage to passages in later authors which are reminiscent of those in Herodotus. Although an investigation of these parallel stories has been carried out, the space available in this study is too limited for detailed exposition of this material. Our focus must be chiefly on the Herodotean text itself. Nor can all Herodotus' discussions of women be quoted in full. Only the key portions are quoted or translated directly in this study. It is assumed that readers will have the full text of Herodotus by their side. The text used is the new Teubner (Rosen, 1987-1997), but no textual cruxes of significance bear upon the arguments made here. Moreover, for the sake of completeness and convenience, an attempt has been made at least to give mention to *all* significant references to women in Herodotus. But this has not been allowed to distort clarity of argument. Minor references that do not play an important or active role in the arguments of the various chapters -- of which there are surprisingly few -- are relegated to footnotes. It is also of significance that there are many overlaps between the data-fields of the different chapters, as many women in the *Histories* fall within more than one of the categories of analysis adopted in this study.

The structure of this study is as follows: CHAPTER ONE discusses the representation of Herodotean women in times of war. Herodotus opens his *Histories* with the series of rapes and counter-rapes, which notoriously triggered off the enmity between the East and the West. Moreover, one of the things that strikes the reader in this history of the Graeco-Persian Wars is the numerous references to women in the context of war who do not just experience it in passivity. On the contrary, in many, if not in most, cases they take an active part by identifying themselves with the war effort, or by becoming warlike fighters. The first issue examined in this chapter is the women's representation as 'causes' of war in the world of the *Histories*. The question that principally articulates this examination is whether the historian holds them responsible for the onset of the war between Greeks and barbarians, or whether he

exonerates them by looking into the deeper causes. Furthermore, it is asked whether the women's suffering is typically viewed from a male-centred perspective that stresses their supposed cowardice and their incompetence to fight, or whether a tone of sensitivity and understanding is adopted. In addition, Herodotus' portrayal of warlike women is looked at, as three queens and a group of women, namely the Amazons, invade the male domain of war in his narrative. Therefore, the issue under consideration is whether their representation is one of respect for their courage or one of condemnation for their involvement.

The portrayal of Herodotean warrior women leads on to the next subject, namely, the association of women and power. Accordingly, CHAPTER TWO sets out to investigate the representation of powerful individuals in the *Histories*. The historian devotes lengthy descriptions to nine queens, six of whom (Nitocris of Babylon, Nitocris of Egypt, Semiramis, Tomyris, Artemisia, Pheretime) enjoy sovereign power in their land and involve themselves in military and building projects, while the remaining three (Candaules' wife, Atossa, Amestris) may be said to hold the power behind the throne. Consequently, the attitude taken to their power is the first topic of this chapter's investigation. Are they hateful usurpers or political actors who assume control under specific conditions? The second issue looked at here is the theme of female 'wise advisors'. Six women are portrayed in the Herodotean narrative as possessing the political and military insight as well as the wisdom and judgement to warn and give crucial advice to the male. The third issue is associated with the passive role of women who transmit power owing to their role as heiresses to powerful fathers.

CHAPTER THREE deals with a topic similar in theme with the previous one but takes it a step further examining the issue of wider female power and its feared consequence, 'topsyturvydom'. In the ancient world, these two ideas were a way of thinking about a threat to society and order, as the men dreaded to think of the time when the female sex was in charge, overstepping the thin line between civilisation and chaos. This theme of female usurpation and control over the male is a recurrent one in Herodotus' work, as we not only come across groups of women reversing the roles but also customs that render this reversal possible. For Herodotus, these 'anarchic' groups of women surprisingly play a double role: They are shown to lead society to chaos and

disorder only to reinstate normality through colonisation and the preservation of their culture and customs.

Usually, the terms of female power and topsyturvydom point towards peoples outside the confines of Greece and civilisation. Indeed, ethnographic description constitutes a large part of Herodotus' work. The historian uses the Persian Wars as the core of his *Histories*, and in so doing grasps the opportunity to bring into his narrative information about the peoples who came into contact with, or who were engulfed by the Persian Empire. Sexual promiscuity, reversed-gender roles, odd rituals and customs, on the whole anything garish or curious seems to have attracted his interest. Accordingly, the issues pertaining to the representation in the Herodotean ethnographies are as follows. Firstly, Herodotus incorporates into his narrative a number of peoples' marital customs that involve promiscuity and even prostitution. Hence, the question raised is whether the historian portrays female wantonness as the norm in his ethnographic accounts, or whether his narrative rather indicates a more formal and 'ordered' polyandry or, in some cases, ritual consummation. Secondly, the gynaeocracy versus sexual-equality issue is examined, as there are examples of women who occupy spheres normally reserved for men. Thirdly, and perhaps to the surprise of some, the Greek city of Sparta receives treatment in this chapter, for it is thematically linked with Herodotean ethnographies as the historian projects it in an ethnographic manner, a fact which is overlooked by the majority of modern authors.<sup>5</sup> The investigation of the aforementioned comprises CHAPTER FOUR of this thesis.

CHAPTER FIVE turns to the subject of the women of Persia itself. Although they belong in part with the women of the Herodotean ethnographies, they deserve special treatment owing to their somewhat extensive role in the *Histories*. For, being the representatives of Persian culture, they are often made to embody the antithesis of Greece and its civilisation, and, consequently, the threat to Greek ideals and customs. Unfortunately, Herodotus' attention is mostly limited to members of the royal court and the nobility, most probably for the following reasons. It could either be because his narrative requires it or owing to the nature of his sources. A further reason could be that he was principally concerned about details that would sketch an effeminate

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<sup>5</sup> Cartledge, 1993, 80 and Hodkinson, 2000, 19, are the exceptions to this rule.

and decadent portrait of the Persian kings, who were anyway thought by the Greeks to be ruled by their women. This chapter focuses on the Persian royal institution of the harem, the marital customs of the kings and the nobles, the Persian customs related to women, and the two powerful Persian queens, Atossa and Amestris, as portrayed in the *Histories*. The chief point is whether in the historian's representation, Persian women enjoy control over the male and the state, proving themselves to be the all-powerful rulers of effeminate kings.

CHAPTER SIX looks into concubines, prostitutes and slaves in the *Histories*, which, curiously, are closely associated with the ethnographic peoples of Herodotus. Only the slave prostitute Rhodopis and the Persian concubine from Cos are of Greek origin, but they too are located in Egypt and Persia respectively, and, consequently, in countries outside the confines of Greece.<sup>6</sup> Of course, Herodotus does make a passing reference to sacred prostitution being practised in some parts of Cyprus, but this is not common prostitution for money, but a ritual and inseparable part of a city's cult.<sup>7</sup> Prostitution in the Herodotean narrative is not only of a sacred nature, but it results from financial or even personal motives. Concubinage, for the most part, is practised by the Persians. The chapter focuses on whether the historian's representation of these women is morally censured, attributing to them the low status that their position implies, or whether they are illustrated to be subjected to this lowly life by the male and custom.

Finally, CHAPTER SEVEN examines the theme of religion, which is an integral part of the Herodotean *Histories*.<sup>8</sup> The historian discusses both Greeks and non-Greeks participating actively in the religious life and festivals of their cities or countries. On the whole, women were an inseparable part of religious activities in antiquity. In fact, in the Greek world, religion appears to be the only aspect of public life in which they were actively involved and offered the only public office to be occupied by them, that of priesthood. Accordingly, the first theme in this chapter is the representation of women's participation in religious festivals in Greece and Egypt. The second topic involves the representation of women as cult founders, as the Herodotean narrative

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Hdt., 2.134-135 and 9.76 respectively.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Hdt., 1.199.

<sup>8</sup> For the subject of religion and Herodotus, cf. Harrison, 2000a.

focuses upon their association with the foundation of the oracular shrines of Libya and Dodona; the heroine cult in Delos is connected with two pairs of Hyperborean maidens, and the Danaids are connected with the establishment of the Thesmophoria. The third issue is the representation of women in priesthoods, both in their role as priestesses and that of prophetesses. The fourth theme is that of their involvement with the miraculous, the divine and the world of the dead. On the whole, the subjects addressed to in this chapter seek to manifest the importance, indeed the imperative, of Herodotean female participation in a city's cult.

## I. Ancient authors

If, as Lateiner has argued, 'Herodotus differs from his predecessors and successors both in his organisation of subjects and in his literary and scientific attitudes towards the material', then the question arises whether he differs in his organisation and attitude towards the women that appear in the *Histories*, as well.<sup>9</sup> Both ancient authors and modern scholars share the opinion that Herodotus' writing was considerably influenced by the Homeric epics and the Ionian logographers. Is this true specifically of his representation of women? Do women appear in their work as frequently as they do in Herodotus? If they do, how are they portrayed? And if they do not, what does that tell us about Herodotus? As we shall see, these authors had much to say about women. It should be noted though that one does not have to explain positively a decision to include women on the part of those authors. Indeed, there can be no such question as to *why* they included women, for it is rather self-evident in the world before Thucydides. What we are chiefly concerned with here is whether their representation of women evinces similar patterns, literary or other, to those in the *Histories*.

### a. Homer

Longinus made a passing allusion to Herodotus as 'the most Homeric' of historians while Dionysius of Halicarnassus regarded him as 'a great imitator of Homer'.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Lateiner, 1989, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Longinus, 13.3; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Letter to Gnaeus Pompeius*, 3.

Indeed, it seems that the Homeric epics provided a model for the writing of his *Histories*. Many scholars have pointed out that the opening sentences of the *Histories* echo the *Iliad*.<sup>11</sup> Both works can be equated in length, scope and grandeur, both are defined by a great war between the East and the West, both deal with the past, the renown of heroic actions, and use of speeches. In addition, so far as the *Odyssey* is concerned, Waters has observed that 'the vast flashbacks so prominent in the *Odyssey* could be compared with Herodotean practice'.<sup>12</sup> However, there is a further point of common reference overlooked by ancient and modern scholars alike, the subject of women.

The *Iliad* is a war poem and, consequently, it largely deals with a domain outside women's involvement. However, female presence is not wholly excluded, for there is, indeed, a number of references to women who appear as 'causes' of war and enmity between men. as mothers, wives. and sisters of warriors, as sufferers in men's war, as priestesses and as goddesses. Yet, if we turn to the *Odyssey*, it is as if we enter a whole new world, for the presence of women is such that Graham has referred to it as 'a great panorama of womanhood'.<sup>13</sup> Undeniably, there is a wide variety of female representation consisting of divine and semi-divine women, female monsters and human women, all of whom come into contact with Odysseus on his journey back home. This prominence of women in the *Odyssey* can be easily explained if we come to think that its subject is, to some extent, the *oikos*; that is, the female domain. However, on further reflection, one discovers that the women's role in the poem is marked by a contradiction. On the one hand, we are faced with semi-divine or divine creatures, such as the Sirens, Circe, Calypso, Scylla and Charybdis, who display ominous and destructive qualities. These females constitute the non-Greek female element, both literally and fictitiously, for, apart from the fact that they inhabit foreign lands, with the possible exception of Calypso, their representation ascribes to them non-Greek characteristics. For, they 'constitute a series of diverse, wide-ranging

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Gould, 1989, 119; Nagy, 1987; Romm, 1998, 12-13, 19. Generally, for the influence of Homeric epics on Herodotus, cf. Gomme, 1954; Strasburger, 1972; Rosenmeyer, 1982, 239-259; Waters, 1985, 51; Dewald and Marincola, 1987, 13; Lateiner, 1989, 55. Cf. also Aly, 1969, 321-322, who believed that it did not have to do with the influence of one author on another but rather with the wider cultural influence of the epic.

<sup>12</sup> Waters, 1985, 51.

stories about the pleasure and dangers of human existence, stories that tend to represent what is 'human' as male and most of the 'pleasures' and 'dangers' -- or what a male imagination fantasises as such -- as female'.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, we come across women who feature as the female representatives of the Greek *oikos* and everything it stands for. They appear as wives (found in the persons of Penelope, Arete and Helen), as the ideal of unmarried maidens (found in the person of Nausikaa) and even as loyal servants (found in the person of Eurykleia). They are shown to display the same intelligence and moral capacity as men, working not for their own interest but for the 'reestablishment of the patriarchal order'.<sup>15</sup>

The prominence of women in the Homeric epics must have made a considerable impact upon Herodotus' representation of women. In all probability, because there existed no narrative work of the same length or scope as those two poems, Herodotus, being familiar with them since childhood, followed many of their literary patterns, with the portrayal of women being one of them.<sup>16</sup> The Homeric Greek females embody the Greek concept of the appropriate wife and partner, who displays the same moral standards with men during their absence, and who returns to anonymity when order is restored. Oddly, but also appropriately enough, although Herodotus' work is saturated with women, Greek women, especially Athenian ones, are heavily under-represented in his material.<sup>17</sup> Thus, his work could be seen to promote the Greek

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<sup>13</sup> Graham, 1995, 13.

<sup>14</sup> Schein, 1995, 19.

<sup>15</sup> Murnaghan, 1995, 63. Cf. Foley, 1995, 95. For a recent study of women in Homer, cf. Cohen, 1995, who has gathered in a book a number of articles by distinguished scholars.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Waters, 1985, 1.

<sup>17</sup> This silence does not include Io, Europa, Helen, Spartan women, the Coan lady, Polycrates' daughter, Melissa and Agariste. However, Io, Europa and Helen belong to the world of myth, Spartan women are treated as part of Herodotus' ethnographies, while the Coan lady is located outside the confines of Greece practising concubinage and prostitution. And so far as Pisistratus' wife, Phye, Polycrates' daughter, Melissa and Agariste are concerned, they are all women of tyrants, and as such, their dynastic context invites their conclusion. Cf. Chapters One (Io, Europa, Helen), Two (Polycrates' daughter, Agariste, Pisistratus' wife), Four (Spartan women), Six (the Coan lady), and Seven (Melissa, Phye).



ideal, which dictated that women should not give reasons to be discussed, retaining their anonymity and respect inside the Greek *oikos*.<sup>18</sup>

If there is a fundamental difference between Homer and Herodotus in this context, it is that the writer of the *Histories* manages to break free from the epic tradition and its mythical divine or semi-divine world.<sup>19</sup> This is obvious in the opening chapters where Herodotus introduces into his narrative the mythical rapes that caused the enmity between the East and the West only to dismiss them and write what he thought truly happened.<sup>20</sup> Yet, on the whole, both Homer and Herodotus display the same moral judgement. Murnaghan has observed that ‘the *Odyssey* testifies to the importance of the female without departing from the prevalent male-dominated ideology of ancient Greek culture’.<sup>21</sup> The exact same thing applies to Herodotus, as well.

## b. The Ionian logographers

Unfortunately, the works of the so-called Ionian logographers have not come down to us in full, and our knowledge rests mainly on the frequent mentions of them in later authors.<sup>22</sup> Herodotus himself refers to them (at least to the ones that he probably knew of, i.e. Hecataeus and perhaps Xanthus) frequently in connection with matters of geography or history, characterising them as ‘Ionians’ or the ‘Greeks’, and there are five occasions when he mentions Hecataeus by name.<sup>23</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus describes how Herodotus followed their footsteps, developing their style and improving on their work, while Thucydides certainly thought of him as one of them.<sup>24</sup> The question raised here is whether Herodotus followed their footsteps in his representation of women, as well. Sadly, the fragments seldom offer substantial

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Thucydides, 2.45 Cf. also Nagy, 1975; Schaps, 1977; Bremmer, 1981, 425-427; Pomeroy, 1997, 14, 18, 67, 82, 164, 227.

<sup>19</sup> For Herodotus’ labelling of his work as a *historie*, thus signalling his break from Homer and the epic, cf. Romm, 1998, 20-21.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Thomas, 2000, 274; Hartog, 1988, 276; Harrison, 2000a, 198 and 200; Moles, 1993, 96.

<sup>21</sup> Murnaghan, 1995, 64.

<sup>22</sup> For Herodotus and his predecessors, cf. Fowler, 1996, 62-87.

<sup>23</sup> For Hecataeus, cf. Hdt., 2.143; 5.36, 125,126; and 6.137. Cf. also Pearson, 1939, 2.

<sup>24</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Letter to Gnaeus Pompeius*, 3; Thucydides, 1.21.

material on this theme, but nevertheless, there are sufficient indications for us to draw a rough picture.

### 1. *Hecataeus*

Hecataeus is the author of two works. The first one, referred to as *Genealogiai*, *Heroologiai*, or *Historiai*, deals with mythography, while the second is a geographical/ethnographical work known as *Periegesis* or *Periodos Ges*. Being the first to write about peoples living outside the Greek borders, he was undeniably an important formative influence on Herodotus and his *Histories*; in fact, many Herodotean passages are thought to be based on Hecataeus' work.<sup>25</sup> Although Herodotus often contradicts Hecataeus, sometimes by name and sometimes by referring more generally to 'the Ionians', both are shown through their works to share the same interests in travel, geography, ethnographies of peoples, and the conservation of myths.<sup>26</sup>

To turn to the subject of women, they can be detected in thirty-five of his fragments of which, thirteen belong to his *Genealogies*. Unfortunately, no firm conclusions can be reached regarding Hecataeus' conceptualisation of women, owing to the way he presented his information. As Romm has observed, he 'merely listed his information as though writing a catalogue', and sadly, the same applies to his mention of women in their most part.<sup>27</sup> In the *Genealogies*, as the title itself indicates, the reader comes across passing references to women, in the cataloguing of a family's genealogy or in the justification of a city's or country's name. One could argue that they are important here owing to the nature of the work, for no one could write genealogies without women. However, there are three fragments which deal with women more extensively in comparison with the rest. In the first, Hecataeus introduces Heracles' labour against the Lernaean Hydra, reported to be a serpent-woman. Heracles features in the second fragment, as well, only this time Hecataeus introduces his relationship with Auge,

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Hecataeus, *FgrH*, 1 T1, T 18 and T 22. Cf. also Pearson, 1939, 21; Immerwarhr, 1966, 47; Fornara, 1971, 31 and 1983, 4-5; Lloyd, 1975, 136; Derow, 1994, 73; Romm, 1998, 25-26; Harrison, 2000a, 196.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Lateiner, 1989, 95, who refers to both of them as *barbarophiles*. For Herodotus' portrait of Hecataeus, cf. West, 1991, 144-160.

<sup>27</sup> Romm, 1998, 17.

Cepheus' daughter. The story goes that Auge got pregnant by Heracles and, when she gave birth, her father put her and her child in a wooden box and threw them into the sea. The third fragment briefly mentions the Amazons, their dialect and their drunkenness.<sup>28</sup> Two things are worthy of our attention here. First, although these three fragments do not tell us much on their own, they are an indication that Hecataeus, in his full work, must have referred to more such stories. And secondly, they offer some proof that Herodotus and Hecataeus referred to the same types of women in myth, namely easy victims of men's lust, androgynous women or women of a double nature.<sup>29</sup> Again, in the *Periegesis* or *Periodos Ges*, most fragments refer to women in passing and in connection with the naming of cities or nations after them. However, because of the ethnographical nature of this work, there are also mentions of women in connection with customs. Accordingly, Hecataeus reports on prostitution, origins of settlement, religion and heroine cults, as does Herodotus, which signifies either that Herodotus was in part influenced by Hecataeus' choice of female activities and his representation of women, or that the interests of the two Ionian authors at any rate coincide.<sup>30</sup>

## 2. *Xanthus*

Xanthus of Lydia wrote the *Lydiaca*, a work which deals with his country's history. Unfortunately, two problems arise when comparing the work of Xanthus with Herodotus' regarding female representation. Firstly, not many fragments survive, a fact which prevents us from knowing for certain to what extent his work was saturated with women. And secondly, scholars are divided as to whether Xanthus' *Lydiaca* preceded Herodotus' *Histories*, and, thus, one cannot tell whether it was Xanthus that influenced Herodotus or Herodotus that influenced Xanthus.<sup>31</sup> Of course, one must not rule out the possibility that they knew nothing of each other's work, or that they

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Hecataeus, *FgrH*, 1 F 24, 29 and 34.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. the story of Io and her impregnation by the captain of the Phoenician ship in Hdt., 1.5, the Amazons in 4.110-117 and the encounter of Heracles with the serpent-woman in 4.8-10. Cf. Chapters One (Io, Amazons) and Three (serpent-woman).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Hecataeus, *FgrH*, 1 F 127, 138a, 345 and 358. For Herodotus' mentions, cf. Chapters Three, Four and Seven.

<sup>31</sup> For Xanthus' work preceding that of Herodotus, cf. Ephorus, *FgrH*, 70 F 180; Pearson, 1939, 109. For the opposite view, cf. Fowler, 1996, 64 and Lateiner, 1989, 116. Cf. also Romm, 1998, 18.

shared a common third-party influence. Nonetheless, they were rough contemporaries, and consequently the question that concerns us here is not so much about who influenced whom, but whether they incorporated into their works similar patterns and attitudes.

Out of the thirty-three fragments of Xanthus in Jacoby, seven include women. These are not referred to merely in passing reference, as is the case with Hecataeus, except on one occasion; that is, when he mentions that the city of Ascalon was named after a maiden. It appears that Xanthus discussed women in connection with mythology, if we are to judge by his account of Niobe, who was punished by Leto for her *hybris*. Xanthus also offers an alternative story of Niobe according to which her father fell in love with his own daughter, and as Niobe would not give in, he set her children on fire. while she cast herself from a high rock. Another female punishment resulting from *hybris* is associated with Atergatis, who was thrown into lake Ascalon, and was eaten by the fish. However, the specific nature of the women's *hybris* is missing from both stories as preserved. One more tale drawn from myth is connected with the Amazons. According to Xanthus, if a baby boy is born to them, they take out his eyes with their own hands. Moreover, both Xanthus and Herodotus seem to share a fascination in the 'spicy' stories that the Orient had to offer. Accordingly, Xanthus mentions that Gyges was the first Lydian king to make use of women eunuchs instead of male ones. There is also a peculiar but entertaining tale about a gluttonous Lydian king, Camblytes. According to Xanthus, his excess in food was such that one night, he cut his wife into pieces and ate her. When he woke up the next morning with her hand in his mouth, he killed himself, as the rumour of his atrocious act had spread. This king reminds us of the Herodotean Candaules, for they were both Lydian rulers, expressing a comparable excessive behaviour; Camblytes, in terms of food. while Candaules, in terms of passion. Furthermore, the similarity of the names of Camblytes and Candaules is striking. Although the works of Herodotus and Xanthus bear close resemblance in these regards, especially concerning their portrayal of Lydian kings, Xanthus' record of sexual promiscuity and incestuous marriages among the Magi is missing from the Herodotean narrative.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Xanthus, *FgrH*, 765 F 4 (female eunuchs), F 8 (Ascalon), F 17 (Atergatis), F 18 (Camblytes), F 20 (Niobe), F 22 (Amazons), and F 31 (Magi). For Gyges and Candaules in Herodotus, cf. *Hdt.*, 1.8-13. For Xanthus' story of Atergatis, cf. Gera,

### 3. Charon

The fragments of Charon are even scantier than those of Xanthus and once again, it is uncertain whether his work preceded or succeeded Herodotus'. Plutarch and Tertullian speak of him as being older than Herodotus, but, as Pearson has observed, 'such remarks as these are untrustworthy, since they may simply reflect the opinion, common in later times, that all logographers were earlier than Herodotus'.<sup>33</sup> In addition, there are difficulties in the evidence regarding Charon's work. Suidas attributes to him a large number of works. However, despite Suidas' list, we can only be relatively sure that he is the author of two; that is, the *Persika* and the *Horoi Lampsakinon*.<sup>34</sup>

Charon's fragments, such as they are, indicate a female presence in his work. He manifests an interest in heroine cult, culture, and foundation legends, all of which are themes and patterns in Herodotus.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, there is a claim in Tertullian that he mentioned Astyages' prophetic dreams prior to Herodotus, but in very much the same way as in the *Histories*.<sup>36</sup> According to Charon, the Lydian king had a dream concerning his unmarried daughter Mandane, in which her urine overflowed the whole of Asia. A year after her marriage, the king had a second dream, only this time a vine grew from his daughter covering again Asia. These elements of the urine-flow and the vine belong to both Herodotus' and Charon's narrative. However, in Charon's account of the dreams, Astyages' worries, the dreams' interpretation by the Magi, and Mandane's marriage to a lesser man, who also happened to be the Persian king, are missing. It could be either that he included such details in his original narrative, but, for some reason, they are not preserved by Tertullian, or, that Charon did not record them in the first place, giving more emphasis to the king's dreams. Jacoby is of the opinion that Herodotus did not know of Charon's work or, consequently, his account

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1997, 70, who has observed that it is a variation of Ctesias' story of Semiramis' birth. Cf. Ctesias, *FgrH*, 688 F 1.4

<sup>33</sup> Plutarch, *Moralia*, 859b; Tertullian, *De anima*, 46. Cf. also Pearson, 1939, 139.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Suidas, s.v. *Charon*; Pearson, 1939, 140-141.

<sup>35</sup> Only six fragments are saved where the presence of women can be detected: Charon, *FgrH*, 262 F 1, 2, 4, 7, 12, 14.

<sup>36</sup> Charon, *FgrH*, 262 F 14 and 687b F2; Tertullian, *De anima*, 46. Cf. Hdt., 1.107-108.

of Astyages' dreams.<sup>37</sup> And this could very well be the case. After all, we cannot dismiss the notion that Herodotus' and Charon's knowledge of the Cyrus *logos*, and, thus, of Astyages' dreams, came from a third-party.

Sadly, apart from Astyages' dream, which indicates that Charon wrote about Persia's rise to power, nothing more is preserved for us to decide whether the *Persika* was a book of similar scope to that of Herodotus. Pearson and Fowler argue that Charon's and Herodotus' methods exhibit many similarities. Fowler even suggests that 'of all the early titles known to us, Charon's is the only which suggests a work anything like Herodotus'.<sup>38</sup> Whether this applies to women as well is hard to know. Although the extant fragments witness female portrayal, the evidence is too inadequate to justify a conclusion.

#### 4. *Hellanicus*

As far as the life and works of Hellanicus are concerned, we face the same difficulties and contradictions as with Charon's. It is difficult to decide when or how many works he wrote. Dionysius of Halicarnassus groups him together with Charon as an earlier contemporary of Herodotus, and Pearson certainly believes that he published his work before the Herodotean *Histories*, something which is also claimed by Dionysius.<sup>39</sup> Suidas refers to him as a prolific writer. Indeed, the fragments point to twenty-four titles, but no ancient author preserves a list of his works.<sup>40</sup>

Regarding the question of women in Hellanicus, the case appears to be somewhat simpler, for they are mentioned in no less than sixty-five fragments. They are spread quite evenly across the fragments and they cover a large proportion of his work in the form that we have it today. Consequently, if we are to judge by the frequency and distribution of women in Hellanicus, it could be argued that he is closer to Herodotus regarding this matter than the other Ionian logographers. Still, do women in

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<sup>37</sup> Jacoby, 1923-1958, IIIa, 22.

<sup>38</sup> Fowler, 1996, 68-69. Cf. also Pearson, 1939, 150.

<sup>39</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Letter to Gnaeus Pompeius*, 3. Cf. Pearson, 1939, 155.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Suidas, s.v. *Hellanikos*. Cf. also Gudeman, 1913, 104-151, who divides his work into three groups: mythographic, ethnographic and horographic or chronographic.

Hellanicus correspond in any way with Herodotus' conceptualisation? Like Hecataeus, Hellanicus appears to have a taste for introducing genealogies before embarking upon a narration, and, therefore, a number of references to women are found in connection with the cataloguing of ancestries.<sup>41</sup> However, his work was also rich in anecdotes concerning female characters, who were, nevertheless, drawn from mythology. The only exception is Atossa, who in herself poses a problem, since many of her attributes are conventionally given to the Assyrian queen Semiramis.<sup>42</sup> In Hellanicus' world, she features as a warlike, androgynous and well-educated queen, raised by her father Ariaspes like a man. She is reported to have inherited her father's kingdom, and she was the first to wear a tiara and trousers, to use eunuchs, and to reply in writing. It could be the case that Hellanicus recognised two separate queens with the name Atossa and that only the fragment concerning the Assyrian one has come down to us. In addition, because Assyria was once independent and ruled over Persia but later passed under Persia's power, he could be applying 'the terms of his own time to describe peoples and cities of earlier times', calling each Atossa a 'Persian' queen.<sup>43</sup> Or, it could simply be that Hellanicus thought of Atossa as a good name for an oriental queen. Nonetheless, Atossa/Semiramis remains the only substantial female character outside mythology in Hellanicus' extant work, a fact which indicates that the two historians may have typically treated women in different fields. This does not mean that there are not some common references to mythical women. For instance, they both dealt with the question of Helen's shamelessness or innocence and her presence in Egypt, with the Amazons, and with Europa's rape.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the literary patterns they follow exhibit similarities. Hellanicus, like Herodotus, portrays women in time of war, in religion as priestesses, as founders of cities, as concubines, as hateful slaughterers, as enjoying military and social power, and as mute objects in the hands of men.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Hellanicus, *FgrH*, 4 F 4, 6, 13, 21, 23, 24b, 36, 43, 59, 74, 77, 87, 89, 94, 99, 110, 112, 119, 121, 125, 135, 137-140, 148, 155-156, 162, 165, 169a-b, 170c and 179. Cf. Pearson, 1939, 176.

<sup>42</sup> Hellanicus, *FgrH*, 4 F 178a; *De Mulieribus*, 7. For the Atossa of Hellanicus, and the innovations in her story, cf. Gera, 1997, 141-150.

<sup>43</sup> Pearson, 1939, 206.

<sup>44</sup> Hellanicus, *FgrH*, 4 F 29, 134, 153 and 168 (Helen); F 51 (the non-rationalised version of Europa's rape); F 106-107, 166-167 (Amazons).

<sup>45</sup> Hellanicus, *FgrH*, 4 F 19a, 20, 24b, 26b, 31.3-4, 38, 51, 79b-c, 82, 84, 91, 97, 98, 108, 117, 127, 132, 133, 141, 149, 152b, 157, and 164.

### c. Thucydides

While Herodotus mentions women 375 times, his successor and rival historian, Thucydides, speaks of them on only 34 occasions.<sup>46</sup> This surprisingly sharp contrast has caught scholars' attention and many articles have been written seeking an explanation. As Hornblower observes, 'since the dates of Herodotus and Thucydides are so close, the difference of handling must be due to differences of outlook and subject-matter rather than to a difference in the periods in which the two men lived'.<sup>47</sup> Truly enough, Thucydides opens his *History* by distinguishing his work from that of others, and there is little doubt that he had Herodotus in mind in particular.<sup>48</sup> He differentiated himself and his work by narrowing the range of his history to strictly political and military history of Greece.<sup>49</sup> Obviously, women could have no part in Thucydides' war history. Excluded from the political and military arena, their domain was the indoors, the *oikos*, and to be passed over in silence was their virtue, a fact which is explicit in Pericles' *Funeral Speech*.<sup>50</sup> This absence of women has led Crane to characterise Thucydides as a misogynist.<sup>51</sup> However, this is too extreme. He is not without sympathy towards women's suffering, but his representation of female involvement in the masculine affair of war is not a positive one, either.<sup>52</sup> It appears that Thucydides was the conventional Greek male, who thought that 'true bravery, that is, the sort that was required in pitched battle, was beyond women's natural capacity. The best they could show was a combination of audaciousness and fortitude.'<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. Crane, 1996, 80; Dewald, 1981, 94-95; Harvey, 1985a, 67-68.

<sup>47</sup> Hornblower, 1987, 14-15.

<sup>48</sup> Thucydides, 1.1, 20-22. Cf. Hart, 1993, 224; Crane, 1996, 6; Thomas, 2000, 169.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Momigliano, 1966, 130; Hornblower, 1987, 191.

<sup>50</sup> Thucydides, 2.45; it should be pointed out that Pericles' *Funeral Speech* requires silence about widows, but this could well extend to all women in general. Cf. also Schaps, 1977; Cartledge, 1993, 70-71. Cf. Gould, 1980, 45; Sommerstein, 1980, 391-418; Bremmer, 1981, 425-426; and Harvey, 1985a, 71, for the question of the naming of respectable women in public in Athens.

<sup>51</sup> Crane, 1996, 75-76.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Wiedemann, 1983, 163

<sup>53</sup> Cartledge, 1993, 71. Cf. Thucydides, 3.74, for women taking an active part in the fighting.



All the aforementioned are reasons enough to justify the infrequency of women in Thucydides' narrative and their frequency in Herodotus. After all, the author of the *Histories* did not restrict his scope to contemporary Greek events but wrote, above all, a social history about nations outside the confines of Greece where the role of women could be imagined to be less constrained. Harvey has remarked that 'if we turn to Herodotus we are in another world'.<sup>54</sup> We truly *are* in another world and not in the Greek one. Despite the ratio of women's presence in Herodotus and Thucydides, they do not differ radically in all ways. First, as Wiedemann has observed, 'although Herodotus is quantitatively eight times more interested in women than Thucydides, yet, he shares his propensity to rank children before women'.<sup>55</sup> Secondly, and most importantly, Herodotus' silence regarding Greek women is almost total. This might seem peculiar, and one could certainly argue that Greek female representation is not missing from the Herodotean narrative. Spartan women, the Carian Artemisia, the Thracian Rhodopis, the Coan concubine, the Pythia are only a few examples that contribute in favour of this argument. However, it has already been mentioned that Sparta is portrayed as a case of ethnographic 'otherness', and that Rhodopis and the unnamed Coan lady, who was Pharandates' concubine, are both situated outside the confines of Greece. It is also worthy of attention that although Rhodopis is named because of her profession, which is hardly respectable, the Coan lady bears no name (thus, retaining a kind of respectability), for she became a Persian concubine by force as a war captive. And so far as the Pythia and Artemisia are concerned, it should not escape our notice that the former does not represent the 'ordinary' role of women, whereas the latter, although her manly courage is greatly admired by the historian, the emphasis should, nevertheless, be placed on 'manly', for she features as a warlike woman, and, consequently, displays elements which are not in accordance with female nature. Moreover, although she is Greek, she is on the anti-Greek side in the war. On the whole, if the Herodotean *Histories* are looked into more closely, one will reach the following conclusions regarding Greek women in the historian's world. Either they are not respectable (e.g. Rhodopis), they display improper behaviour, they contradict their female nature (e.g. Lycidas' stoning by Athenian women, Artemisia), or they are daughters or wives of powerful rulers and are brought into the narrative

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<sup>54</sup> Harvey, 1985a, 80.

<sup>55</sup> Wiedemann, 1983, 164-165. Cf. Powell, 1938, s.v. γυνή, who cites 16 instances of 'children and women' and only 3 of 'women and children'.

just to promote the historian's portrait of their fathers' negative personality, power and excess (e.g. Agariste). To put it more simply, the representation of more ordinary Greek women is missing from the Herodotean world. They are just mentioned twice in passing references as participants in the religious festivals of the Thesmophoria and Artemis Brauronia. Hence, despite the abundance of females in the *Histories*, Herodotus remains quite conventional regarding Greek women. It appears that Thucydides and Herodotus were not worlds apart, after all.

#### d. Ctesias

Ctesias is not an immediate successor to Herodotus. Nevertheless, his work is of importance here for the following reason. Being a physician at the Persian royal court from 415 to 398 B.C., he wrote a book known as *Persika* on his return to Greece.<sup>56</sup> Although he attacked Herodotus in it, referring to him as a liar and a storyteller, his work was a colourful account of Persia and the Persian Wars resembling in style that of Herodotus and the Ionian logographers, a fact which led Theopompus to class him as one of them.<sup>57</sup>

Out of seventy-four fragments, seventeen include female representation. The number in itself does not reflect the magnitude of women's portrayal in Ctesias. It must be taken into consideration that they are quite lengthy accounts, outweighing the rest of the fragments in size, while in most cases, there are more than one references to women in the individual fragments (in total, there are twenty-seven references to women in Ctesias' extant work). The very first fragment exemplifies this. It deals extensively with the life, achievements and building projects of the Assyrian queen Semiramis, presenting her not only as a powerful figure but above all as a very competent ruler. Semiramis' life begins and ends wondrously. Following Ctesias' account, Aphrodite, angered at the goddess Derceto, makes her fall in love with a Syrian mortal. Out of this union, Semiramis is born. Yet, her divine mother, being

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. Ctesias *FgrH*, 688 T 1-2. Cf. also Myres, 1953, 18. Ctesias is also credited with a work called *Indika*, showing -- like Herodotus -- interest in ethnographic accounts regarding sexual customs and the relationship between the sexes.

<sup>57</sup> Theopompus *FgrH*, 115 F 381. Cf. also Strabo, 507-508; Lucian, *Philopseudes*, 2 and *Vera Historia*, 2.31; Ctesias, *FgrH*, 688 T 3. For a convenient commentary on the fragments of Ctesias and a French translation, see Auburger and Malamoud, 1991.

ashamed of her deed, abandons her daughter in a deserted place, kills the young man, and throws herself into the lake of Ascalon, where she is transformed into a creature with the head of a woman and the body of a fish. The abandoned baby is fed and kept warm by doves. At first, they feed Semiramis milk, but as she grows up, the doves bring her cheese. Being puzzled at the disappearing cheese, the herdsmen discover Semiramis, who is adopted by the leading herdsman. Ctesias narrates how Onnes, king Ninus' governor in Syria, is captivated by her beauty, marries her and brings her to Nineveh, where she bears him two sons. Onnes was so in love with her, that he could not do without her advice, and during a prolonged siege of the city of Bactra, he misses her so that he sends for her. Semiramis interprets this as an opportunity to prove her worth. She thus equips herself carefully and as soon as she arrives at Bactra, manages to succeed in what king Ninus and Onnes have failed. She subdues the Bactrians, and she attracts the king's interest and admiration, who asks for her hand in marriage from her husband, offering him gifts and his own daughter in return. When Onnes refuses, the king threatens to blind him.<sup>58</sup> Onnes hangs himself, Semiramis becomes Ninus' wife and the queen of Assyria, and she bears a son to the king, named Ninyas. After the king's death, she inherits the kingdom and proves herself to be a very wise politician and competent ruler. The first thing she does is to build a huge mound over Ninus' grave, which could be construed as a memorial to her own power. She founds Babylon in an attempt to outrival Ninus' Nineveh, the architectural works, public constructions and agricultural benefits of which are described in great length by Ctesias. She is also portrayed as a warlike figure displaying clever military tactics, in the lengthy accounts of her campaigns against Egypt, Libya, Ethiopia and India. Her life ends when her son Ninyas conspires against her. However, Ctesias does not record that he kills her, but rather that she finds out about his conspiracy, grants him smooth access to the throne, and then simply disappears. She was most probably transformed into a dove, and she was revered as such. Although Ctesias never actually explicitly states it, her positive and extensive representation reveals a certain respect and admiration of the queen. Herodotus, too, records Semiramis in his *Histories* but only in a brief account, downplaying her significance in favour of another Babylonian queen, Nitocris. Nevertheless, he seems to share Ctesias' admiration.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. Hdt., 6.62-63, for the comparable story of the Spartan king Ariston and Agetus. Cf. Chapter Four.

<sup>59</sup> Ctesias, *FgrH*, 688 F 1.4-23; Hdt., 1.184. Cf. Chapter Two. Cf. Gera, 1997, 65-83.

Ctesias' portrayal of women in time of war does not differ from that of Herodotus; it is mostly one of suffering. They are shown to part from their husbands and sons, as they are the first to be sent away, or they stay and suffer the consequences alongside their men. This does not mean that warlike women are non-existent in Ctesias; after all, Semiramis is one of them.<sup>60</sup> As for the causes that trigger off a war, women are certainly represented as such. In fact, Ctesias records the same story as Herodotus regarding the onset of enmity between Persia and Egypt, namely the involvement of the Egyptian Nitetis. Ctesias, like Herodotus, reports that the Persian king Cambyses asked the Egyptian king Amasis for one of his daughters in marriage. Amasis feared that Cambyses would not honour his daughter as a wife but would keep her as a concubine, and, thus, sent Nitetis, the daughter of the former king Apries, whom Amasis had slain. When Nitetis revealed the king's trick to Cambyses, he marched against him. In Ctesias' account, the Persian king wars against Egypt because he falls in love with Nitetis and desires to avenge her father's murder, whereas in Herodotus the Persian king is portrayed to feel betrayed by Amasis' trick.<sup>61</sup> Yet, both stories imply that Persian expansionism was the hidden cause.

Effeminate kings are not absent from Ctesias' *Persika*. and so far as women in the Persian royal court are concerned, their portrayal resembles closely Herodotus'.<sup>62</sup> Sadly, Ctesias, like Herodotus, reports nothing about common women. Nonetheless, Persian royal women are conceptualised as enjoying power over and exercising influence upon the king. The royal mother and wife occupy the first ranks in the royal harem and they are the ones who actually have a say in the king's decisions. Intermarriage and marriage to Persian women ensure the children's legitimacy and their succession to the Persian throne. If there is a difference observable between the Herodotean world and Ctesias' world, it is that in the latter's the women are pictured to hold the true power behind the throne, acting of their own accord and displaying inhuman cruelty with the aim of preserving their position and power.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> For the fate of women in time of war, cf. Ctesias, *FgrH*, 688 F 1b, 1.26-28, 13.20; for warlike women, cf. F 1 and 8.

<sup>61</sup> Ctesias, *FgrH*, 688 F 13a; Hdt., 3.1-3. Cf. also Chapter One.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Ctesias, *FgrH*, 688 F 1.23 and 6.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Ctesias, *FgrH*, 688 F 9.6, 14.39, 14.43-44, 15.54-56, and 26-27 for Persian women and cruelty; F 13.11, 14.42, 15.51-52, 15.54-56, 16, 17, and 26-29 for the power of the royal mother and wife; F 13.32 and 14, for the privileged life they must

## II. Modern scholarship and Herodotus

As has already been pointed out at the beginning of this introductory chapter, the scholarship on Herodotus is indeed vast. The historian's work has attracted numerous reactions at different times, with different methods of approach and contrasting ideas. Here, I briefly review some major representatives of different schools of thought and fields of study so as to demonstrate the place of this thesis amid modern scholarship.

In recent years, some scholars have argued that Herodotus was a mere storyteller and a liar. It is only during the last years that scholars have adopted a somewhat more positive attitude towards Herodotus' historical reliability. The allegation that the historian is a mere inventor of stories is associated particularly with Fehling (1989), the most important representative of the 'Liar School' of Herodotus. His book openly attacks the historian's reliability by attempting to demonstrate that, in a considerable number of passages, Herodotus' source citations are fictive beyond reasonable doubt. Fehling's method is to identify the elements of the legends that seem incompatible with the respective sources for them cited by Herodotus, to conclude that they are typically Herodotean literary creations put into the mouths of locals. He claims that even the inscriptions incorporated into the narrative are Herodotus' own inventions. Wherever the historian expresses doubt or criticism of a fictive oral source or inscription, he believes that this is just a trick of his to increase credibility. Furthermore, Herodotus' travels are dismissed as fiction, too.

Pritchett (1993) belongs to the opposite school of thought, which rather tends to take the historian at his word. His chief concern is the rebuttal of the theory associated with Herodotus' conscious fictionalising. He examines and dismisses the works and theories of West, Hartog and Fehling, on the basis that most of what they claim has been disproved by excavations and archaeological surveys. In his examination of Fehling, in particular, he also argues that he omits consideration of important scholarship, which, interestingly enough, disproves the thesis he seeks to demonstrate.

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have enjoyed as they receive no punishment when committing adultery; F 15.47, for intermarriage to ensure kingship and succession.

Furthermore, Pritchett is also concerned with the opinions of scholars upon the individual Herodotean *logoi* (e.g. Libya, Egypt).

Immerwahr (1966) and Fornara (1971) provide a basis for a better understanding of historical events in the *Histories*. It should be noted, though, that although they are both interested in the conceptual unity of Herodotus' work, they employ different methods of approach. Immerwahr is concerned with the construction of the Herodotean *Histories* investigating the historical philosophy behind Herodotean writing. He analyses his historical form and thought. He also investigates his ethical, religious and historiographical ideas, his notion of limit, and his ethnographic concept of Custom, which he treats as underlying the historian's concept of history. Fornara investigates historical episodes through the historian's eyes, and, thus, he is chiefly concerned with the Herodotean representation of history. His focus is on Herodotus' thought and understanding of historical events and upon Herodotus' projection of himself as a writer. He does not criticise or attack the Herodotean approach to history, even though he characterises the historian's method as artistic rather than as historical.

Lateiner (1989) and Hartog (1988: contrary to Pritchett's contention, Hartog does not wholly belong to the 'Liar School'), like Immerwahr, do not take sides with regard to history through the historian's eyes (i.e. the representation issue) or historical truth. Their work views the *Histories* both as history and fiction. Accordingly, Lateiner's work can be divided into two parts. The first deals with Herodotean time and chronology, and examines patterns of representation and literary structure. The influence of his predecessors upon the historian and his innovations and differences from later historians are also looked at. The second part is primarily concerned with Herodotean truth, reliability and accuracy. Hartog's book deals with a particular field of study, namely the Scythian *logos*. Hartog views the *Histories* as a mirror reflecting not only the historian's identity and method but also the identity and the world of the Greeks. By scrutinising the Scythian *logos* and their place in Herodotus' work (and mirror), he seeks to discover both the rhetoric and the fabrication of 'otherness' in the Herodotean narrative.

Gould (1989) resembles Fornara in that he looks into Herodotean representation rather than Herodotean historical reliability. His book places emphasis on reciprocity and causation. It also focuses on the mind of the historian, his methods of enquiry, his perception of the other cultures, and his ability to make sense of historical events and to explain them to his listeners/readers.

Fornara and Gould are much closer to the outlook of this thesis owing to the fact that they take Herodotus at face value and are, thus, primarily concerned with the historian's world rather than the underlying truth of his *Histories*. As Gould has very sharply put it, 'the question is how we are to read Herodotus, or, how we are to interpret his purpose in writing. ... Historians are liable to be led into misreading Herodotus by their common assumption that the business of reading him has to do with prising loose 'historical facts' from the storyteller's narrative and with substituting 'historical causes' for the storyteller's 'narrative devices'. Where there are no 'facts' there are 'lies' -- false assertions about the events of the past which is the reader's business to identify and erase from the historical record. In the process, it becomes difficult, even impossible, for us to use Herodotus for what he is'.<sup>64</sup>

Gould's argument conveniently draws attention to another issue. Since most scholars' principal focus is on the historical method and reliability of Herodotus, they have tended to overlook other themes in the *Histories*, that of women amongst them. Hence, their theories and studies are of little, if no, relevance to this thesis. However, one should not take this to mean that scholarship on Herodotean women is non-existent. On the contrary, a number of articles and books provided the background to this argument and have influenced some of the ideas developed in particular chapters of this study. Accordingly, Rossellini and Said (1978) look into women and their customs as portrayed in the ethnographies of Herodotus. Pembroke (1967) scrutinises some of Herodotus' anthropological observations, and focuses on the idea of matriarchy in the Herodotean ethnographies. Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1983) examines the portrayal of Persian women. Also Brosius (1996), in a more general study of Persian women and their lives, has provided a basis for looking into Herodotus' approach to them. Munson (1988) looks at the individual appearances of and the

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<sup>64</sup> Gould, 1989, 112.

dominant role of Artemisia in Herodotus. Walcot (1978) and Harrison (1997) have investigated the Herodotean concept of 'rape'. Walcot concentrates on the opening chapters of the historian's work and the supposed female association with the onset of the feud between Greeks and Persians. Harrison takes it a step further, examining the idea of not only physical 'rape' but also of emotional 'rape', to conclude that the Herodotean stories involving marriage and sex imply no romance or love but merely 'rape with meaningful looks'.<sup>65</sup> The exercise of power by women in the *Histories* is a theme that has attracted a lot of attention. Tourraix (1976) has discussed the implications of female power in the historian's narrative. Tyrrell (1984), in a mythological study of the Amazons, includes consideration of women in general holding power in the *Histories*, while in another article written in association with Brown (1985) the chief attention is on the Herodotean Amazons themselves and their role in the historian's narrative. Gera (1997) in a study of the women portrayed in the anonymous tract *De mulieribus*, offers insights into some of Herodotus' powerful individual women.

Due attention should be also drawn here to the commentaries on the text of the *Histories*. Although they do not of course focus on the subject of women, they nevertheless are indispensable tools for the reading of and research into Herodotus. Accordingly, the commentary by How and Wells still remains useful in that it offers good philological comments. However, it is almost entirely obsolete in matters of archaeology and the background of the Near-Eastern cultures. It has been superseded in part by the more detailed and up-to-date Italian Mondadori commentaries. Particular emphasis should be placed on Lloyd's commentary on Book 2 (there is also a condensed version of Lloyd's three-volume commentary in the Mondadori series). It still is the most detailed work of this nature as it includes much information and insight that is of relevance to the *Histories* as a whole.

Judging by the aforementioned, it is quite evident that no scholar has made a concerted effort to look into the women in the *Histories* as a whole. Only Dewald

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<sup>65</sup> Harrison, 1997, 197. Harrison, 2000a, has also provided an enlightening discussion of the association of divinity and history in Herodotus. His study often dissects aspects of Herodotean female representation, but, on the whole, it bears no relevance to this thesis.



(1981), as already pointed out, has provided a somewhat more dedicated study. She does not just concentrate on isolated aspects of female representation, but attempts to offer a wider -- although not a total -- account of women in the *Histories*. However, the depth and detail of her analysis is inevitably limited by her article's relative brevity, at thirty-six-page long. After all, as she herself observes, the historian refers to women in three hundred and seventy five occasions! Consequently, Dewald only scratches the surface when she articulates Herodotean women into just two categories for us, namely into those 'who act' and those who 'do not act', to conclude, somewhat simplistically, that 'Herodotus' portrayal of women emphasises their full partnership with men in establishing and maintaining order'.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Dewald, 1981, 92.

## Chapter One: Women and war

The women who are associated with and depicted in the context of war in Herodotus' *Histories* can be divided into four categories: I) Women as 'causes' of war; II) Women in time of war; III) Women associated with cowardice; and IV) Warlike women. In my treatment of these categories, I will argue that Herodotus in some cases admired their 'manly' spirit and courage and in other cases sympathised with their suffering or loathed their behaviour. But, on the whole, he respected them all for their ability to survive and, for some, distinguish themselves in a male world.

### I. Women as 'causes' of war

Many ancient authors believed that even a mere threat of the enemy planning to 'rape' the women was reason enough to arouse enmity.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Herodotus seems to share this view. As Schaps notes, he explained 'much of his history in terms of the avenging of insults to women'.<sup>2</sup> In order to grasp this attitude -- that one must undertake an expedition for the sake of a woman -- we only need to understand that the *oikos* and the family was a domain of sanctity and honour. Any violation against it was an attack on male honour and the chastity of the women.<sup>3</sup> And as Schaps has also commented, 'if the women seem to have identified with their men, there can be no doubt at all that men saw themselves as fighting for the sake of the women'.<sup>4</sup> Yet, in the Herodotean world, men did not only fight over women to avenge insults inflicted upon them and defend their male honour. Herodotus lets slip the notion that there were deeper underlying causes beneath the expeditions they undertook; namely, expansion and wealth.

Herodotus begins his *Histories* with a war to avenge an abduction. More precisely, by skilfully employing the old legends, he opens Book 1 not with one but with a chain of acts of 'rape' so as to represent the onset of the struggle between the East and the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Thucydides, 7.68 and 8.74; Polybius, 9.39; Diodorus Siculus, 14.66.

<sup>2</sup> Schaps, 1982, 197.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Cohen, 1991, 154.

West, or, in other words, between the Greeks and the barbarians.<sup>5</sup> It is worth discussing, at this point, the word ἀρπαγή (usually translated as ‘rape’, but it rather means ‘abduction’ as will become obvious below), which is used more than often in the discourses of the first five chapters of Book 1 of the *Histories*. Here we are faced with a problem about the meaning of this word when used by Herodotus as well as about the context of its use. It is certainly not clear that it carried the same meaning as the modern word, let alone the fact that there are a number of available modern definitions of rape. Harrison makes use of it as ‘a layman’s definition: non-consensual sexual intercourse’.<sup>6</sup> Yet, it could also mean simply abduction, as sexual intercourse is not so obvious in all the cases of ‘rape’ in Book 1.

## a. Women being ‘raped’

### 1. Io

It is of importance that women are prominent at the very beginning of Herodotus’ work. Accordingly, the first woman to be abducted and thus the first step towards the enmity that would later result in war was Io, the daughter of king Inachus.<sup>7</sup> Although Greek myth held that Io had been turned into a cow by Hera and had wandered until she reached Egypt, Herodotus inserts in his *Histories* two different versions of the myth.<sup>8</sup> According to the first account attributed to the Persians, the Phoenicians kidnapped (ἀρπασθηναί) Io against her will together with other women and took her

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<sup>4</sup> Schaps, 1982, 196.

<sup>5</sup> Hdt., 1.1-5. Cf. Sealey, 1957, 8, who accuses Herodotus of seeking the causes of a war in a grievance or a chain of grievances, and Gomme, 1954, 79, who commented on the mutual rapes as being ‘a humorous little preface’. However, it should also be noted that these old tales suited Herodotus’ purpose, who used them to transcend from myth to history: cf. McNeal, 1986, at 1.5.11; Flory, 1987, 24-25; Bergren, 1983, 76-77, who also sees in the mutual rapes a *gamos* and thus the origin or perpetuation of a race.

<sup>6</sup> Harrison, 1997, 188.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Apollodorus, 2.1.3, for Peiren or Iasus being Io’s father. Cf. also Dowden, 1989, 118-124, his discussion about Io’s father.

<sup>8</sup> For Io’s legend and wanderings, cf. Polybius, 4.43.6-7; Aeschylus, *Prometheus bound*, 561-886. Cf. McNeal, 1986, at 1.2.2, who finds the omission of Io’s legend understandable, since the story was well known. Cf. also Fehling, 1989, 51, for Herodotus’ modification of Io’s story.

to Egypt.<sup>9</sup> Io's association with Egypt is noteworthy not only in this Herodotean tale but in all myths connected with her. Indeed, in the Herodotean narrative, she closely resembles the Egyptian goddess Isis.<sup>10</sup> Probably, the similarity of their names, Io's representation as a cow-headed goddess in other sources, or her connection with the rites of Demeter, which in Argos and Eleusis show signs of Egyptian influence, prompted this identification with Isis.<sup>11</sup> It should also be noted that Herodotus seems to have the tendency to either omit or rationalise the myths into plain matter of fact; and according to How and Wells 'in spite of his acceptance of the myths, Herodotus cannot escape the tendency to rationalise them, by changing the elements of the marvellous which they contain into commonplace of fact'.<sup>12</sup> This certainly seems to be the case with the Io legend, who in the Herodotean world is a woman who was reluctantly abducted.

## 2. *Europa*

Next follows another rationalised myth, and the second step towards the war, that of Europa.<sup>13</sup> According to Herodotus, some Greeks -- probably Cretans, as he remarks -- went to Phoenicia and carried off (ἀρπάσαι) the king's daughter, Europa. The usual form of the legend, though, was that she arrived in Crete on the back of Zeus, who kidnapped her in the form of a bull, and there she bore two children, Minos and Sarpedon or Rhadamanthus.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Herodotus' version could very easily be the rationalised version of the original Cretan myth.<sup>15</sup> Once again, there is no indication

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Apollodorus, 2.1.3, and Pseudo-Lycophron, *Alexandra*, 1291-1295, who record the same story with Herodotus about Io's kidnapping, also mentioning her marriage to an Egyptian king.

<sup>10</sup> Hdt., 2.41.

<sup>11</sup> For Io as cow-headed, cf. Apollodorus, 2.1.3; Pseudo-Lycophron, *Alexandra*, 1291-1295. For Io's connection with the rites of Demeter, cf. Thomson, 1941, 146-147 and 298.

<sup>12</sup> How and Wells, 1912, 32-3. Cf. also How and Wells, 1912, at 1.1.3; Asheri, 1997, at 1.1.3.

<sup>13</sup> Hdt., 1.2.3-7.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Hdt., 1.173 who seems to accept that her sons were Minos and Sarpedon. Cf. also Hdt., 4.45 for Europe being called after Europa; so, he must have been aware of the traditional myth.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 1.2; Asheri, 1997, at 1.2. Cf. McNeal, 1986, at 1.2.6, who comments that the original myth told nothing about Greeks or Cretans. 'In need

that Europa followed the Greeks willingly and thus her ‘rape’ is something that she should not be blamed for.

### 3. *Medea*

Herodotus is very explicit that the balance of blame was now equal and that the next act of aggression was due to the Greeks: ταῦτα μὲν δὴ ἴσα πρὸς ἴσα γενέσθαι, μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα Ἑλλήνας αἰτίους τῆς δευτέρας ἀδικίης γενέσθαι. (‘So far, then, the account between them was balanced. But after this, it was the Greeks who were responsible for the second wrong done’.)<sup>16</sup> For, according to the historian, the Greeks carried off (ἀρπάσαι) the Colchian king’s daughter, Medea. Herodotus’ use of the word μακρῆ νηϊ, which means ‘a ship of war’, clearly emphasises the fact that it was an organised raid and thus, in this version, Medea was abducted unwillingly.<sup>17</sup>

At this point, attention should be drawn to the following fact. Although, as we shall see, the historian makes mention of another tale regarding Io, in which she is represented as a cunning woman perfectly conscious of her acts, he keeps silent about the traditional myth of Medea. In this traditional version, Medea, daughter of Aetes, king of Colchis, who was a witch or a semi-goddess, was not ‘raped’, but left willingly with the Argonauts because of her love for Jason. Herodotus would almost certainly have had knowledge of this version not only from Pindar’s fourth *Pythian Ode* but also from Euripides’ *Medea*, of 431.<sup>18</sup> So, why does Herodotus choose to mention a second version of Io’s story but to omit Medea’s? Unfortunately, there can be no easy answer. Most probably, he took his audience’s knowledge of Medea’s myth for granted and chose not to recycle a well-known tradition.

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of an antithetical rape, Herodotus transforms Zeus into Cretans and he makes the whole affair an international incident.’ Cf. also Fehling, 1989, 53-54.

<sup>16</sup> Hdt., 1.2.7.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Fehling, 1989, 52, who argues that Herodotus’ inclusion of the words ‘having achieved their other objectives in coming’ (διαπρηξαμένους καὶ τάλλα, τῶν εἵνεκεν ἀπίκατο) alludes to the fact that Medea’s rape was not the chief reason why the Argonauts had gone to Colchis. This ties neatly with Herodotus’ implicit suggestion that there were deeper causes behind a ‘rape’, an expedition, a war, which is quite evident in Helen’s story.

<sup>18</sup> It could be the case that Herodotus was in Thurii when *Medea* was produced in Athens, and that he may well have written the section on Medea before 431, although I doubt that the historian was unfamiliar with the traditional Medea myth.

## b. Women being 'sexually immodest'

### 1. *Io (again)*

In Pseudo-Lycophron's and Herodotus' stories, Io is stripped of the blame for the onset of the feud between the two nations as she did not follow her kidnappers out of her own free will, but she was carried off by force, thus 'raped'. Yet, towards the end of the responding 'rape' Herodotus records a second version of the same tale where Io was perfectly complicit.<sup>19</sup> This time, it is attributed to the Phoenicians, who supposedly say that they did not abduct Io but she went with them to Egypt on her own accord, being pregnant by the captain of the Phoenician ship and fearing to face her parents and the consequences of her deed.<sup>20</sup> Thus, in the 'Phoenician' version, she is depicted as a very cunning woman and there are no signs that she could have been abducted without her own will. She knew what she was doing and was getting herself into, as was the case with Medea in the traditional myth, who willingly followed the Argonauts because of her love for Jason.

So far, Herodotus has informed us about the steps which led to the Greek expedition against Troy but not yet about the 'actual cause'. Thus, it is not clear yet that the women he is writing about are there to explain the male attempt to hide their true objectives. However, it is more than fair to say that although women in Herodotus -- whether 'raped' or travelling on their own accord -- are represented as the αἰτία for a war and as a means of explaining the hostility between nations, Herodotus is only too careful to make clear what he cannot be sure of or does not believe. Thus, following the 'rape' motif he states: ἐγὼ δὲ περὶ μὲν τούτων οὐκ ἔρχομαι ἐρέων ὡς οὕτως ἢ ἄλλως κως ταῦτα ἐγένετο ('for my own part, I will not say that this or that story is true').<sup>21</sup> And as we shall see in the Helen story, Herodotus seems to assume that there were more serious causes involved than the obvious one.

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<sup>19</sup> Hdt., 1.5.

<sup>20</sup> This 'Phoenician' version could have been shaped by the episode with the servant Eumaeus: cf. Homer, *Odyssey*, 15.415-484. Cf. Asheri, 1997, at 1.5. Furthermore, since Herodotus visited Tyre (cf. 2.44), we should not rule out the possibility that he heard this version of the story there.

<sup>21</sup> Hdt., 1.5.11.

## 2. *Helen*

Although the first account of the Helen story follows the 'rape' sequence in 1.3, we treat it separately because it at once embodies both the themes of 'rape' and 'sexual immodesty'. As we shall see, in Herodotus' representation, Helen is exonerated while Menelaus' eagerness to restore his honour is shown to be only partly connected with his wife fleeing with another man.

In the traditional myth, there was a beauty contest between Hera, Athena and Aphrodite in which Paris-Alexander was asked to pick the most beautiful one. His choice was Aphrodite, who promised him the most beautiful woman on earth, Helen. When Alexander went to Sparta, Aphrodite made Helen fall in love with him and follow him to Troy, leaving behind her husband and household and thus starting a war.<sup>22</sup> Herodotus' account does not mention Alexander's 'judgement' but it does mention that he went to Greece to get himself a wife and that he abducted (δι' ἀπραγῆς) Helen. When the Greeks demanded her restoration as well as compensation for her 'rape', the Trojans reminded them that they had not restored Medea upon request, either. That was the beginning of the Trojan War. However, it should be noted that this was not the first time that Helen was abducted and had thus been the bearer of problems and Herodotus was well aware of that. In Book 9, he reports that the Dioscuri, Helen's brothers, went up in arms to recover their sister who had been abducted and taken to Aphidnae in Attica by Theseus and Pirithous while she was still ten years old.<sup>23</sup>

As pointed out, Herodotus makes sure to inform his readers of the things he is not ready to believe. And one of the things he seems uncomfortable with is the justification of the Greek expedition against the Trojans. Thus, he is ready to dismiss Homer's version and question the wisdom of the Trojan War by referring to it as an act of ἀνοήτων. This was parodied by Aristophanes in his treatment of the supposed causes of the Peloponnesian War and infuriated Plutarch, who openly abused

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. the *Cypria* F 8-12 and particularly F 10 (Davies) where Paris and Helen are reported to make love.

<sup>23</sup> Hdt., 9.73. Cf. also Diodorus Siculus, 4.63. Pausanias, 1.17 and 41; Plutarch, *Theseus*, 31; Pindar, fr.258 (Snell); the *Cypria* F 12.

Herodotus for the passive resistance he attributed to the worshipped Io and for 'expressing the view that the Trojan War, the finest and greatest achievement in Greek history, was embarked upon through the folly of a worthless woman' (ἀποφαίνεται γνώμην τὸ κάλλιστον ἔργον καὶ μέγιστον τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἀβελτερία τὸν Τρωικὸν πόλεμον γενέσθαι διὰ γυναικῆς φαύλην).<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Herodotus seems to have given the Trojan War serious thought and preferred a second version of Helen's story, that of her never reaching Troy but being taken to Egypt.<sup>25</sup>

In the second book of his *Histories*, being hesitant to accept the 'rape' of Helen as the true cause of the war, he writes about what 'really' happened, according to his sources, ridding Helen of all guilt and portraying her as a mute object and thus a victim.<sup>26</sup> According to the Herodotean narrative, Alexander, having fled from Sparta with Helen, encountered strong winds, which brought him to Egypt, where Thonis, the warden of the Nile mouth, kept her until her husband went looking for her. After criticising Alexander heavily for the double wrong done to his host -- carrying off his wife and possessions and abusing his hospitality -- and being unable to punish him himself, he kept Helen in Egypt and let Alexander return to his homeland, Ilion. The Greeks demanded Helen's restoration, but as they did not believe that she was not in Troy, they marched against the Trojans. Herodotus states that he was told this story by the Egyptian priests.<sup>27</sup> As Lloyd has remarked, 'the tradition must have existed' before Herodotus (and it did, in Stesichorus' *Palinodiai*). Lloyd further observes that 'its creator cannot be Herodotus; otherwise, he would not possibly have treated it so seriously. It was evidently a firmly established *logos* even though it was not

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<sup>24</sup> Aristophanes, *Acharnians*, 524; Plutarch, *Moralia*, 856e-f. Cf. Neville, 1977, 7, who certainly seems to agree with Herodotus' characterisation of the Trojan War as being foolish. Cf. also Wardman, 1961, 138, who is in accord with Herodotus.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Hdt., 2.120 where he openly says that he prefers this version of Helen in Egypt and gives his reasons why. Cf. Fehling, 1989, 59, who argues that the story of Helen in Egypt in the *Histories* is a combination of Homer's *Odyssey* (4.227-230 and 351-359) and Stesichorus' *Palinodiai*.

<sup>26</sup> Hdt., 2.113-120. For Helen's guilt and adultery in the sources, cf. Homer, *Iliad*; Euripides, *Andromache*, 592-604 and *Troades*, 1037-1038. However, cf. Euripides, *Troades*, 962-963, where Helen admits that she was carried off by Paris but says that it was by force and not willingly. Yet, one could argue that she says this under the threat of the sword, as her husband is about to kill her. For a defence of Helen, cf. Gorgias, *Encomium of Helen*, 6.

<sup>27</sup> Hdt., 2.113.1. Cf. Homer, *Iliad*, 3.349-354; 7.362-364; and 13.620-627, for the twofold crime of Paris. Hdt himself lays stress on it twice in 2.114 and 115.



canonical'.<sup>28</sup> Homer himself seems to have been aware of Alexander's and Helen's stop in Sidon on their way to Troy, and Herodotus makes sure to draw our attention to it, observing that δοκέει δέ μοι καὶ Ὅμηρος τὸν λόγον τοῦτον πυθέσθαι, ἀλλ' (οὐ γὰρ ὁμοίως ἐς τὴν ἐποποιίην εὐπρεπὴν ἦν τῷ ἑτέρῳ, τῷ περ ἐχρήσατο) ἐς ὃ μετῆκε αὐτὸν δηλώσας, ὡς καὶ τοῦτον ἐπίσταιτο τὸν λόγον. (I believe that Homer too knew of this story, but it did not suit epic poetry as well as the story which he used, to such a degree that he omitted it, showing that he knew also this story'.)<sup>29</sup>

Interestingly, three aspects of the Herodotean representation of Helen in the second book seem to be contradictory. The first aspect appears in 2.115 where Thonis, while giving his sentence to Paris, among his accusations blames him for 'giving wings' (ἀναπτερώσας) to Helen; in other words, exciting her passion. Following this argument, it could be said that Helen was not so innocent after all, for how could her passion be excited without her willing it to be so? Indeed, Herodotus does not use any words such as 'forced'.<sup>30</sup> Secondly, Helen remains remarkably silent -- as she is not given a speech in the narrative -- throughout the story. She is not allowed to speak and thus she is not given the opportunity to either admit her guilt, or accuse Paris of carrying her off without her consent. Is it because the historian wished to create a dramatic atmosphere leaving it to his audience to decide whether she is guilty or just a victim of her womanly nature? And thirdly, almost every time the Herodotean Helen is mentioned, so are the possessions that came with her, absolving her, at least in part, of guilt, as they imply financial motives beneath the whole expedition of the Greeks after

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<sup>28</sup> Lloyd, 1988, at 2.113.

<sup>29</sup> Hdt., 2.116; Homer, *Iliad*, 6.288-292. Cf. Homer, *Odyssey*, 4.125-130 and 227-230, for Menelaus' and Helen's visit to Thebes. Cf. Hellanicus, *FgrH*, 4 F 153, who believes that this visit was on their way back from Troy. For the Homeric passages of Helen and Menelaus at Thebes being interpolations, cf. Powell, 1935a, 72; How and Wells, 1912, at 2.116. For Helen being in Egypt while only her phantom being at Troy, cf. Stesichorus, *Palinodiai*, fr 192; Hesiod, fr. 358; Plato, *Phaedrus*, 243a and *Republic*, 9.586; Aelius Aristides, *Orations*, 1.128; Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses*, 11.40; Euripides, *Helen*. Cf. Lloyd, 1988, at 2.114, who argues that in later literature there is a tendency to strip Helen off responsibility.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Pelliccia, 1992, 70-72, the discussion about Gorgias' exculpation of Helen, which rests mainly on being the victim of her own beauty. For the literary treatments of Helen, cf. Suzuki, 1989.

all.<sup>31</sup> What is quite remarkable is that apart from Helen, Paris is reported to have stolen much treasure from Sparta.<sup>32</sup> As Harrison has remarked, in the final passage of Helen's story in the *Histories*, it seems almost that the plundering of Menelaus' wealth is the climax of Proteus' denunciation of Alexander'.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Herodotus, as he lets slip in 2.120, exonerates Helen of the blame for the Trojan War, as, had she been there, the Trojans would not have been so foolish as to not give her back. It appears that the mention of her and the stolen treasures implies the historian's belief that there lay deeper incentives in the Greek expedition against Troy. Indeed, Helen is seen as just one of the stolen possessions.

It is not just Book 1 of the *Histories* that attempts to explain the enmity between two nations in terms of avenging insults to women. Herodotus also opens Book 3 with three different versions of the same story, another act of wrongdoing that caused the feud between the Persians and the Egyptians. Although the motif of women's responsibility as 'causes' for the outbreak of a war changes radically compared to Book 1 -- no 'rape' or 'sexual immodesty' is involved -- yet, the fundamental point is that deeper reasons lay behind the wrongs done to women.

### c. Women being 'vengeful'

Following Herodotus' narrative, and according to the supposed Persian account, when the king of the Persians, Cambyses, asked the Egyptian king Amasis for his daughter in marriage, the latter deceived him by sending Nitetis, daughter of the former king Apries, and not his own child. The reason why Amasis resorted to such trickery was because 'he knew well that Cambyses would make her not his wife but his concubine' (εὖ γὰρ ἠπίστατο, ὅτι οὐκ ὡς γυναῖκά μιν ἐμελλε Καμβύσης ἔξειν, ἀλλ' ὡς

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<sup>31</sup> Hdt., 2.114, 115, 118, and 119. Cf. Thucydides, 1.1, where the interest in the early development of power and wealth is more explicit in his theory about the cause of the Trojan War.

<sup>32</sup> For the stolen treasure, cf. Homer, *Iliad*, 3.70, 72, 91, 255, and 282. For Helen, cf. Homer, *Iliad*, 2.161, 177, 356, 590; 3.154; 4.174; 9.339; 11.125; 19.325. For Helen and the treasure, cf. Homer, *Iliad*, 3.70, 91, 282, 285, 458; 7.350, 401; 22.114. Cf. also How and Wells, 1912, at 2.118, who comment that 'it is characteristic of the later rationalisations of the epic story that as much stress is laid on treasures as on Helen herself'.

<sup>33</sup> Harrison, 1997, 190.

παλλακήν). Now, according to the supposedly Egyptian story, things happened the same way except for the fact that they claimed that Cambyses was one of their own people. Herodotus also tells another tale according to which Cambyses made the expedition against Egypt only to avenge his mother's disgrace by Cyrus, who honoured the Egyptian Nitetis more than her.<sup>34</sup>

Once again, the Persian expedition against Egypt is portrayed as caused by a woman, only this time they are conscious of what they are getting the men into in order to avenge them.<sup>35</sup> In the first two accounts, it is pure revenge on the part of Nitetis for the murder of her father and her being sent by Amasis to Persia to become the king's concubine, when it should have been his daughter.<sup>36</sup>

#### **d. Women being 'sexually jealous'**

In 3.3 comes the last version of the outbreak of the war between Persia and Egypt, according to which it was all due to Cambyses' mother's sexual jealousy towards the Egyptian Nitetis, and so, when Cambyses became king, he saw fit to avenge his mother. Although this account has a wedding between Cyrus and Nitetis in common with the 'Egyptian' version, even so it denies that Nitetis was Cambyses' mother.<sup>37</sup>

Three things are worthy of mention in these three Herodotean episodes of Persian and Egyptian history that reveal the fact that, despite the involvement of women, it was a man's indifference and lust for personal honour, or even power, that was ultimately responsible for the war. The first issue concerns the fact that Amasis did not send his daughter to Cambyses for fear that she might become a *παλλακή* and not a legitimate royal wife. Herodotus will later justify the Egyptian king's fear, for he reports that a Persian king can only get a wife from the families of the Seven.<sup>38</sup> That is also the reason why the historian did not believe the Egyptian version as it involves a violation

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<sup>34</sup> Hdt., 3.1-3.3.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Livy, 1.9, where the same motif occurs in the history of early Rome.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Ctesias, *FgrH*, 688 F 13a, for the Persian account. For the Egyptian account, cf. Dinon, *FgrH*, 690 F 11; Lykeas of Naukratis, *FgrH*, 613 F 11.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Asheri and Medaglia, 1997, at 3.3.

<sup>38</sup> Hdt., 3.84. For Persian legitimacy and succession to the throne, cf. Brosius, 1996, 32. Cf. also Chapter Five.

of the Persian customs, for no child of a foreigner and a Persian could inherit the throne.<sup>39</sup> As How and Wells have suggested, ‘the story of 3.2 is due to the vanity of a conquered nation (as Herodotus saw) claiming a share in its conqueror’.<sup>40</sup> Secondly, it is odd that Herodotus should mention the beauty and height of Nitetis, something which occurs two more times in his *Histories* when talking about women.<sup>41</sup> Is it because he wants to indicate that her beauty played an important role in the king’s decision to go to war against Amasis? Yet, it is overt in the Herodotean narrative, that the alliance of Egypt with Lydia and mere lust of conquest were sufficient reasons enough for undertaking a war against Egypt.<sup>42</sup> And thirdly, it is noteworthy how similar this Herodotean episode is to Cyrus’ march against the Massagetae. The only difference observable is that in the latter, the theory of Persian expansion as the true cause of the war is more evident in Cyrus’ proposition to the queen of the Massagetae: ταύτην πέμπων ὁ Κῦρος ἐμνάτο (τῷ λόγῳ θέλων γυναῖκα ἔχειν)· ἡ δὲ Τόμυρις συνειῶσα οὐκ αὐτήν μιν μνώμενον, ἀλλὰ τὴν Μασσαγατέων βασιλῆην, ἀπέπειπατο τὴν πρόσσοδον (‘Cyrus sent a message to her with a pretence that he wanted to make her his wife. But Tomyris, knowing well that he was not after her but after the Massagetan kingdom, she rejected his advances’). And as Tomyris did not consent to Cyrus’ wedding proposal, he involved himself in a war.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, it could be argued that Cyrus or Cambyses proposed an alliance to Amasis, sealed with a wedding, so that he might inherit the throne without having to get involved in a war.

So, what is the actual role of women as ‘causes’ of war in the *Histories*? It seems as if Herodotus characteristically conceptualises causes of war in terms of personal motives and he has certainly been accused of that.<sup>44</sup> Yet, it is important to recall that all the aforementioned tales are not given to us in Herodotus’ own voice, but are presented as the views of others. In Book 1, the historian’s Persian informants make the cynical

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Evans, 1965, 148 and Benardete, 1969, 69, who agree with Herodotus’ rejection of the Egyptian version.

<sup>40</sup> How and Wells, 1912, at 3.2.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Hdt., 1.60 and 5.12.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Hdt., 1.77 and 1.153.

<sup>43</sup> Hdt., 1.205. Cf. the section on Tomyris later on in this chapter.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. How and Wells, 1912, 45, who claim that ‘he continually confuses the mere occasion and cause...Hence Herodotus is always laying stress on personal activity and motive’. However, we should not deny the fact that personal activities and motives *do* play a part.

remark that women were not mere victims but guilty parties: τὸ μὲν ἀρπάζειν γυναικας ἀνδρῶν ἀδίκων νομίζειν ἔργον εἶναι, τὸ δὲ ἀρπασθεισέων σπουδὴν ποιήσασθαι τιμωρέειν ἀνοήτων, τὸ δὲ μηδεμίαν ὥρην ἔχειν ἀρπασθεισέων σωφρόνων· δῆλα γὰρ δὴ, ὅτι μὴ αὐταὶ ἐβουλέατο, οὐκ ἂν ἠρπάζοντο. ('They believe that the rape of women is the deed of wicked men, but to be eager to avenge the rape is the deed of foolish men; and to take no account of the raped, is the deed of wise men. For, it is obvious that if they had not wished it themselves, they would not have been raped').<sup>45</sup> Walcot has argued that the woman is assumed to be guilty, finding it particularly noticeable that women inspired or motivated by sexual jealousy did terrible things at 3.3.<sup>46</sup> Harrison lies somewhere in the middle, stating that 'the belief in the uncontrollable nature of women co-exists with another belief in their free will, and in their potential responsibility for their actions' and going on also to say that 'women can be held responsible for their misdeeds, but at the same time held to know no better'.<sup>47</sup> Yet, it seems as if Herodotus uses the women's involvement, whether an active or a passive one, to indicate the actual causes. After all, there is a huge difference between 'excuse' and 'true cause'. And Herodotus certainly seems to think that the women were just the 'excuse' for the 'true cause', mainly male vanity, a material world, lust for power and expansion. Flory, indeed, endorses this point of view, commenting that 'Herodotus sees in the acts of the mutual rapes impersonal economic reasons' (sic).<sup>48</sup> Herodotus does his best to choose the most reliable version available, and none of these various tales of rape was sufficient to persuade him of its reliability, not even after a rationalising approach.<sup>49</sup>

## II. Women in time of war

There is no doubt that war is a calamity for all involved, whether a man or a woman. Especially in Greek antiquity, 'it is easy to believe that women, removed from the persuasive oratory of the *ecclesia* and the excitable atmosphere of the crowd, saw that

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<sup>45</sup> Hdt., 1.4.

<sup>46</sup> Walcot, 1978, 139, 141-142.

<sup>47</sup> Harrison, 1997, 191-192.

<sup>48</sup> Flory, 1987, 26.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Groten, 1963, 83.

fact more clearly than men'.<sup>50</sup> Consequently, many questions can be raised as far as women and war in the Herodotean world are concerned. Did they identify with the war effort? Did they consider a victory their victory and a defeat their defeat? Or were they mere bystanders? In the discussion that follows, we will consider not only how the Herodotean women felt in time of war but also what Herodotus thought of them in the context of war.

#### a. The male attitude towards women in wartime

Whatever the reason for the outbreak of a war, in the *Histories* the men seem to do their best to defend their women from a possible attack of the enemy. Especially in the cases when the battle came too close to their cities and homes, the men's first concern was to evacuate the women, the children and the other non-combatants.<sup>51</sup> Herodotus narrates how the Scythians take care to send their women and children away while they stay behind to defend the city.<sup>52</sup> What should be mentioned here is that the sending of women and children away from the places of war operations in case there was an invasion was common among the Greeks, as we shall see. So, Corcella and Medaglia have commented that the Scythians parallel the Greeks in this episode.<sup>53</sup> Whatever the case, it implies that in the historian's view, every nation was prepared to save its women and children first before anything else. Similarly, the Delphians first take care to send their women and children to Achaia in safety when their city is in a crisis of war before they take care of their own escape.<sup>54</sup> And likewise, the Athenians send their women and children to Troezen, Aegina and Salamis to keep them away from the war and, thus, from falling into the hands of the enemy.<sup>55</sup> Sometimes, when

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<sup>50</sup> Schaps, 1982, 193.

<sup>51</sup> However, it should not escape notice that the removal of women and children to places of safety could not be seen as entirely humane, for it could be argued that women were seen as property and child-bearers, while children were valued as future citizens.

<sup>52</sup> Hdt., 8.36.

<sup>53</sup> Corcella and Medaglia, 1993, at 4.121.

<sup>54</sup> Hdt., 4.121.

<sup>55</sup> Hdt., 8.40-41. Cf. also Plutarch, *Themistocles*, 10. For the Themistocles decree, cf. Meiggs and Lewis, 1969, ML no23.

defeat was inevitable, the men would leave with the women, as was the case with the Phocaeans.<sup>56</sup>

On the whole, in the *Histories*, there is special care taken for the safety of the women. Yet, when the situation became crucial and 'sauve qui peut' there were no rules.<sup>57</sup> That is when we get the notion that women were portrayed as useless because they were thought of as too weak to offer help during a war. For instance, in Book 8, after the city of Athens was heavily afflicted by the Persians, the Lacedaemonians offer to nourish the women and the servants which are τὰ ἐς πόλεμον ἀχρηστοῦ ('unserviceable for war').<sup>58</sup> Again, earlier in Book 3, when the Babylonians revolted from the Persians, each chose a woman from his household to become a bread-maker, and they strangled the rest ἵνα μὴ σφεων τὸν σίτον ἀναισιμώμωσι ('so that they [the women] would not consume their [the men's] bread') – a worry that goes back to Hesiod.<sup>59</sup> However, it is of significance that the Babylonians were careful enough to send away the mothers. Thus, it would seem that even in this case in the *Histories* the women were the men's first concern, by sending away those who they felt had a purpose in life -- here, the mothers -- and by strangling the rest so that they would not have to face starvation and, possibly, the consequences of defeat.

## b. The hardships of defeat

If defeat came in the end, the women would have to suffer the consequences.<sup>60</sup> In the best of cases, women's fate upon defeat would have been an honourable death before they fell into the enemy's hands. Indeed, as Schaps has remarked, 'the destruction of a city's men, women, children and wealth to keep them from the enemy was an act of heroism, even for barbarians'.<sup>61</sup> In Herodotus' conceptualisation, this was the case

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<sup>56</sup> Hdt., 1.164.

<sup>57</sup> Schaps, 1982, 200.

<sup>58</sup> Hdt., 8.142.

<sup>59</sup> Hdt., 3.150. Cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 3.150, who do not believe that the Babylonians actually killed the women. Cf. also Thucydides, 2.78, for the Plataeans keeping 110 bread-makers. Cf. Dubois, 1988, 116, who sees a sexual connotation in the Babylonians keeping women bread-makers. Cf. Hesiod, *Theogony*, 594-99, where the women are pictured as 'drones', and, thus, consumers of bread.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Hektor's words to Andromache in Homer, *Iliad*, 6.450-458.

<sup>61</sup> Schaps, 1982, 201.

with the Lycians. Being worsted in battle although they fought valiantly, they gathered their women, children and possessions together and, having set them and the citadel on fire, came out and died fighting. And, according to Herodotus, the Caunians died the same way, too.<sup>62</sup> What should also be stressed in this story is that although it was the men who took the decision to destroy the city and slaughter the population, the women are not shown to have opposed it. There seems to be an implication that Herodotus -- in silence -- sympathised with them but at the same time admired their 'bravery' to accept the fate that war and the male had imposed upon them.<sup>63</sup>

If they were to fall into the enemy's hands, women were put to death by the conquerors to get at the men. Herodotus mentions that Polycrates had the intention of burning the men and the women of the Samians should they desert.<sup>64</sup> But this would happen only if they were lucky enough. In the worst of cases, they are portrayed to have suffered either enslavement or rape and death. In Book 6, the Persians threaten the Greeks that if they should be worsted in battle, they would 'make eunuchs of the boys and carry their maidens captive to Bactra'.<sup>65</sup> In Book 9, two incidents occur where the fate of women is again enslavement. In the first, they are more or less described as spoils and, thus, things.<sup>66</sup> In the second one we have a woman of Greek birth and a concubine to a Persian called Pharandates, who was taken captive when Cos was ravaged and who deserts to the Greek camp, begging Pausanias to save her and restore her freedom.<sup>67</sup>

Although more than one campaign was allegedly undertaken to get a wife by means of 'rape', oddly enough rape is rarely mentioned in connection with the sack of a city.

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<sup>62</sup> Hdt., 1.176. For the Lycians displaying a similar desperation against Brutus, cf. Plutarch, *Brutus*, 31; Appian, *Bellorum civilium*, 4.80. Cf. Asheri, 1997, at 1.176, who has remarked that the Lycians represent the way of self-destruction for the ideal of freedom.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Arieti, 1995, 170, who draws our attention to the fact that although the Lycians were named after their mothers (Hdt., 1.173) which for the Persians would probably be degrading (they considered it an insult to be called a woman) they fought gallantly.

<sup>64</sup> Hdt., 3.45.

<sup>65</sup> Hdt., 6.9. Cf. also Hdt., 6.19, for the enslavement of the Milesian women and children by the Persians.

<sup>66</sup> Hdt., 9.81. Cf. Walcot, 1978, 142, who remarked that 'women qualify as a type of property and to the victor goes the spoils'.

<sup>67</sup> Hdt., 9.76. Cf. Pausanias, 3.4. Cf. also Chapter Six.



Herodotus mentions such a case only once when the Persians kill some Phocian women as a result of having intercourse with them in multitude.<sup>68</sup> Harrison has argued that this passage is ‘the high-water mark of Herodotean feminism’.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, the very phrase *μισγόμενοι ὑπὸ πλῆθους* (‘having intercourse with them in multitude’) is intended by Herodotus to convey the horror of the deed. And as Harrison has commented, ‘this is the only case in the pages of Herodotus in which rape or sexual violence is apparently conceived as an evil on the basis that it is inherently cruel to the object of violence’. Herodotus does actually seem to sympathise with the women’s suffering.

### c. The female attitude towards war

One might wonder how the Halicarnassian portrays the women’s actual feelings about war and whether they are shown to have identified themselves with the war effort. The most striking indication occurs in the opening of Book 9. Following the narrative, Lycidas, an Athenian councillor who supported obedient submission to the Persians, was stoned to death by his fellow Athenians, who were very angry at his cowardly proposal. When the Athenian women learnt what happened, they stoned to death his wife and children.<sup>70</sup>

This episode seems to coincide with the one of Cyrillus in Demosthenes, whose name Herodotus is said to have substituted with the ominous patronymic ‘Lycidas’, which means ‘son of Lycus’ (the son of the wolf). And wolves are animals characterised by both cunningness and cowardice, exactly like Lycidas and his proposal.<sup>71</sup> The Lycidas incident certainly sounds like mob violence and in it, Herodotean women acquire an active role. Yet, the ‘female violence is presented as the complement and mirror of male violence, not its antithesis’. Indeed, the similarity of patterns in both stonings suggests that they are both portrayed as ‘spontaneous acts of mob violence, the

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<sup>68</sup> Hdt., 8.33.

<sup>69</sup> Harrison, 1997, 188.

<sup>70</sup> Hdt., 9.5. For the female attitude towards war, cf. Sappho, fr. 16; Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 589-593.

<sup>71</sup> Demosthenes, *De Corona*, 204. Cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 9.5 for the substitution of Cyrillus with Lycidas. For Lycidas’ name meaning ‘wolf-son’, cf. Ogden, 1997, 42.

community's instinctive reaction to its sense of being betrayed'.<sup>72</sup> So, it is evident that the women identify themselves with the men's decisions and, in a way, that they encourage them to act with bravery. Herodotean stories seem generally to have told of women encouraging their men to be more warlike. Atossa urges her husband Darius to undertake the expedition against Hellas 'so that the Persians will know that they are ruled by a man'.<sup>73</sup> And in Book 8, at the most crucial point of the battle, the phantom which appeared before the Greeks and encouraged them to take action so loud that all heard was in the shape of a woman. This reminds us of the Spartan mothers who would rather have their sons brought on shields rather than without them.<sup>74</sup>

However, this does not mean that all Herodotean women should be regarded as patriotic any more than men should be. In Book 6, we learn of the story of a Parian under-priestess called Timo whose treachery was double. Not only did she betray her country to the enemy -- that is Miltiades and the Athenian army -- by revealing a secret passage to enter Paros; she also betrayed her priesthood as she was told to have revealed to Miltiades the rites that no male should know.<sup>75</sup>

In (b) we saw the suffering of the losers as portrayed in the *Histories*. Yet, what about the case of a victorious expedition? Even though they were not exposed to danger and discomforts, war certainly had an impact on the lives of women even when it was fought far from home.<sup>76</sup> The distress that Herodotean women must have felt towards war is evident in Book 5. When only one man of the Athenian army returned home alive from the attack against Aegina, he was killed by the wives of the men who died in the battle who stabbed him with their brooch-pins, each asking at the same time

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<sup>72</sup> Dewald, 1981, 98; Rosivach, 1987, 237.

<sup>73</sup> Hdt., 3.134. Cf. Chapters Two and Five.

<sup>74</sup> Hdt., 8.84. For a discussion of epiphany, cf. Sinos, 1993, 79-80. Cf. also Chapter Seven.

<sup>75</sup> Hdt., 6.134-135. Cf. Ephorus, *FgrH*, 70 F 63, for a rationalised version of the story and Hdt., 5.82-83, for secret rites confined to women. Cf. also Chapter Seven. For treason among the Scythians, in which case all the males of the family are punished but the women are spared, cf. Hdt., 4.69.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 589-593, for women's loneliness in time of war. Cf. also Schaps, 1982, 206.

where her man was.<sup>77</sup> It must be pointed out that the throwing of stones, as in the case of Lycidas, or, in this case, murder with the help of brooch-pins of dresses, was a widespread usual procedure in the archaic society -- akin to 'scapegoating' or φαρμακεία -- in order to punish the one who brought the message that disaster had befallen the city.<sup>78</sup> Yet, although this Herodotean account seems to be including some misogynistic folk motifs, what it rather indicates is the women's grief and anger for the wars that men undertook and in which they had no say.

Dewald has argued that Herodotus uses women in groups in the context of war to show the vulnerability of a culture as a whole to outside attack. Most commonly, someone either threatens or mistreats enemy women and children, or a group anticipates attack and removes its own women and children to safety.<sup>79</sup> One further reason though could be that Herodotus wanted to bring into his *Histories* the real suffering of the population of women during a war so that their effort to associate with the men and the state and, in many cases, their bravery could be appreciated. Herodotean women could not have seen themselves as an entirely disfranchised group.<sup>80</sup> Herodotus, on his part, seems to be very understanding of their suffering, and he makes sure that this opinion is let slip in every case possible.

### III. Women associated with cowardice

Women were conventionally regarded as weaker in mind and body and, thus, subservient to men.<sup>81</sup> The most striking example of this notion in the *Histories* involves a portent revealed to Xerxes while on his way to war against Greece. Following Herodotus' narrative, a mule gave birth to a mule that had double genitals, both male and female, with the male's being on top. As the Herodotean narrative indicates about the meaning of another marvel that appeared to Xerxes, namely that a

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<sup>77</sup> Hdt., 5.87-88. Cf. Euripides, *Hecuba*, 1169-1171, for a similar incident. Cf. Stern, 1989, 14, who argues that the stabbing recalls an archaic sacrifice, which became historicised.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Nenci, 1994, at 5.87-88. For a discussion of 'scapegoating', cf. Ogden, 1997, 15-23.

<sup>79</sup> Dewald, 1981, 93

<sup>80</sup> Schaps, 1982, 213.

<sup>81</sup> Lateiner, 1989, 139.

mare gave birth to a hare, what the portent meant was that although Xerxes was to march against Hellas with boldness (male genitals) he was to flee for his life in due course (female genitals).<sup>82</sup> Indeed, anything female stood for cowardice and effeminacy. However, in the world of the *Histories*, the women's representation in the context of war seems to be one of understanding and, in some cases, even admiration.

#### a. A disgrace for men to be called or treated as 'women'

Anyone who did not follow an expedition of war or did not fight bravely enough was regarded as effeminate and consequently a 'woman'. That war was a man's business and women had no part in it is revealed in Hector's words to Andromache, echoed by Aristophanes in his *Lysistrata*: 'Ἄλλ' οὐ μοι Τρώων τόσσον μέλει ἄλγος ὀπίσσω, ... ὅσσον σεῦ, ὅτε τις Ἀχαιῶν χαλκοχιτώνων δακρυέεσσαν ἄγηται, ἐλεύθερον ἡμᾶρ ἀπούρας· καί κεν ἐν Ἄργει ἐοῦσα πρὸς ἄλλης ἱστὸν ὑφαίνοις, καί κεν ὕδωρ φορέοις Μεσσηίδος ἢ Ὑπερείης πόλλ' ἀεκαζομένη, κρατερὴ δ' ἐπικείσεται ἀνάγκη.' (but the pain I feel is less for the people of Troy. .... than my pain for you, when one of the bronze-clad Achaeans carries you away in tears and takes away the day of your freedom. And you will live in Argos. weaving at the loom at another woman's command, and carrying water from a foreign spring, Messeis or Hypereia, much against your will, but compulsion will lie harsh upon you).<sup>83</sup> Disgrace, thus, should follow anyone who acted cowardly, for war undoubtedly crowned human existence and achievement, as excellence in battle secured honour and glory. Croesus' advice to Cyrus when Lydia revolted against the latter is very characteristic: ἀπειπε μὲν σφι πέμψας ὄπλα ἀρήια μὴ κεκτῆσθαι, κέλευε δὲ σφεας κιθῶνάς τε ὑποδύνειν τοῖσι εἴμασι καὶ κοθόρνους ὑποδέεσθαι, πρόειπε δ' αὐτοῖσι κιθαρίζειν τε καὶ ψάλλειν καὶ καπηλεύειν παιδεύειν τοὺς παῖδας· καὶ ταχέως σφέας, ὦ βασιλεῦ, γυναῖκας ἀντ' ἀνδρῶν ὄψεαι γεγονότας, ὥστε οὐδέν δεινοί τοι ἔσονται μὴ ἀποστέωσι. ('Send and order them not to have weapons of war in their possession, and command them to wear tunics under their cloaks and buskins on their feet, and to teach their sons lyre-playing and song and dance and how to be retail-dealers. And very soon, my king, you

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<sup>82</sup> Hdt., 7.57.

<sup>83</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 6.490-493; Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 518-520.

will see them turned to women instead of men, and they will not pose a fear that they might revolt.’)<sup>84</sup>

In the final book of the *Histories*, we learn that the worst insult for a Persian is to be called a ‘woman’. After the Persian disaster, Masistes reviles the admiral Artyantes, bitterly saying that his generalship proved him ‘worse than a woman’ (γυναικὸς κακίω). And as Herodotus remarks, παρὰ δὲ τοῖσι Πέρσησι γυναικὸς κακίω φᾶς ἀκοῦσαι δέννος μέγιστός ἐστι (‘it is the greatest of all insults in Persia to be called worse than a woman’).<sup>85</sup> Again, a bit earlier, the Persians, while attacking the Greeks, besides doing them much physical hurt, also hurt them morally by calling them women.<sup>86</sup> After all, this must have been a great taunt for the Greeks as well if we are to judge from Thersites’ words to Agamemnon and his army: Ἀχαιίδες, οὐκέτ’ Ἀχαιοὶ (‘you are Achaeans and not Achaean men’).<sup>87</sup> Following this same argument and because only women stayed behind and did not participate in an expedition, it is relatively easy to understand that Artabanus’ punishment by Xerxes, to be left behind with the women in the war against Hellas, was the greatest punishment and mockery of all.<sup>88</sup> Lastly, the story of Telines should be mentioned about whom Herodotus said: θῶμά μοι ὦν καὶ τοῦτο γέγονε πρὸς τὰ πυνθάνομαι, κατεργάσασθαι Τηλίην ἔργον τοσοῦτον (‘the story that is told to me makes me wonder that Telines should have achieved such a great feat [that is, the restoration of exiles to Gela]’).<sup>89</sup> The reason for this was that Telines produced a great political result, which required someone of ‘noble heart and manly strength’ (ψυχῆς τε ἀγαθῆς καὶ ῥώμης ἀνδρῆτης) whereas he was of ‘a soft and womanish habit’ (θηλυδρῆτης τε καὶ μαλακώτερος ἀνήρ).

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<sup>84</sup> Hdt., 1.155. Cf. Tellos’ life and death in Solon’s speech in Hdt., 1.30.

<sup>85</sup> Hdt., 9.107.

<sup>86</sup> Hdt., 9.20.

<sup>87</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 2.235. Cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 9.20, who argue that calling someone a woman is an epic motif and reminiscent of epic.

<sup>88</sup> Hdt., 7.11.

<sup>89</sup> Hdt., 7.153.

## b. The pillars of king Sesostris

In the second book of the *Histories*, we learn about the Egyptian king Sesostris and his achievements. Herodotus records the Egyptian view that Sesostris, being a fine warrior himself, set up pillars in the countries of warlike peoples inscribing how he defeated them with his own power, thus wishing to grant them a share of honour. Yet, in the countries that showed no resistance he set up pillars inscribing female genitals, 'wishing to show clearly that they were unwarlike' (δῆλα βουλόμενος ποιέειν, ὡς εἴησαν ἀνάγκιδες).<sup>90</sup> The same story appears again in 2.106, as Herodotus wants to confirm the story told to him by the priests by means of the *stelae* in Palestine of Syria, which he himself saw.<sup>91</sup>

## IV. Warlike women

So far, it has been quite apparent that in Herodotus' world, men thought war their business and women were not expected to take any part in it. Yet, there are exceptions to every rule as three women and a group of them play a very important role in the *Histories*, for they do not only seem to think that war is their concern but they also make it their concern. Moreover, a further factor that makes them exceptional is that they are all queens and non-Greeks. They are Tomyris of the Massagetae, Artemisia of Halicarnassus, Pheretima of Cyrene and the Amazons. Tomyris and Artemisia are remembered and admired for their mental and military services, the latter also for her manly courage. Pheretima and the Amazons are notorious for their monstrous deeds.<sup>92</sup> The issue under investigation in our treatment of these women is the following: whether famous or notorious, they are mentioned in the *Histories* because, on the whole, they were respected for their courage in questioning and challenging the male authority by invading a domain which was thought to belong only to men, that of war.

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<sup>90</sup> Hdt., 2.102. Cf. also Manetho, fr.34; Diodorus Siculus, 1.55.

<sup>91</sup> Kimball-Armayor, 1980, 62. Cf. Lloyd, 1988, at 2.102 and Griffiths, 1960, 44, who argue that although there was a hieroglyph based on the female sexual organ, it was never used to denote cowardice. However, cf. Hornblower, 1987, 97, who, although cautiously, accepts that it was 'an insulting term applied to enemies.'

## a. Tomyris of the Massagetae

Tomyris and Artemisia are the two female rulers who are allotted the greatest share of description and detail by Herodotus. Tomyris presides over the death of Cyrus in Book 1 and Artemisia presides over Xerxes' defeat in Book 8. Some could argue that the two queens are not really comparable as Tomyris gloats over Cyrus personal vengeance, whereas Artemisia is simply involved in the battle in which Xerxes was defeated. However, it is of importance, as Dewald comments, that 'both queens take pains to articulate the moral and political basis for their actions. Both see, as their Persian and male counterparts do not, that human power has its limitations; both predict defeat for the Persian if he oversteps these bounds.'<sup>93</sup> Tomyris is portrayed as a woman capable enough to run a state, defy a great king and avenge her son's death in the most brutal way.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, she is a paradigmatic figure in the *Histories* in marking both the limits of the Persian expansion and proving herself manlier than her enemies, despite being a woman.

### 1. *The onset of the war*

Following Herodotus' narrative, the Massagetae are ruled by a queen who succeeded her husband to the throne after his death.<sup>95</sup> When she receives a marriage proposal from Cyrus, the Persian king, she immediately sees through his false pretences, realising that it is only her throne he is after, and so she turns him down. Cyrus campaigns openly against her, showing his true intentions. Immediately, Tomyris sends a message asking him to remain at peace. But if he is not willing to do that, and wants to experience the strength of the Massagetae, then she asks him to either allow them three days to withdraw from the river and then attack the Massagetan land or suffer the Massagetae to attack Persia. On hearing this, Cyrus summons his chiefs

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<sup>92</sup> Lateiner, 1989, 136.

<sup>93</sup> Dewald, 1981, 109.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Gera, 1997, 187.

<sup>95</sup> In later sources, Tomyris is often called a Scythian queen because ancient writers viewed the Massagetae as Scythians: cf. Strabo, 11.6.2, 11.8.2, 11.8.8; Diodorus Siculus, 2.43; Justin, 1.8.1; Ammianus Marcellinus, 23.6.7; Lucian, *Charon*, 13; Polyaeus, 8.28; Strabo, 11.6.2, 11.8.5-6; Suidas, s.v. *Tomyris*. However, Herodotus is careful enough to note their similarities but not to identify them: cf. 1.215, 1.201, 1.216, 4.11.

among the Persians, all of whom urge Cyrus to let Tomyris and her army enter his country.<sup>96</sup>

Although it is impossible to confirm or reject the authenticity of queen Tomyris, as Asheri has remarked, two things should be noted in her story as narrated in the *Histories*.<sup>97</sup> Firstly, the Massagetae have a queen on the throne after her husband's death despite the fact that she had a son, and consequently a male heir to the throne.<sup>98</sup> However, we are not told whether this is an example of the Massagetan rules of succession, or a special case. Indeed, in Herodotus' portrayal of the customs of the Massagetae, it is not implied that the position of their women was a privileged one.<sup>99</sup> Maybe Herodotus wanted to exaggerate the contrast between the illusory fortune of Cyrus and his miserable fate at the hands of a woman. Yet, Cyrus believed that through his marriage to Tomyris he would inherit the rule of the Massagetae, something which reminds us of the matrilineal system in Phaeacia in the opening lines of Homer's *Odyssey* Book 6 as well as Oedipus' marriage to Jocasta, wife of his predecessor's Laius, in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*.<sup>100</sup> Secondly, Tomyris is not conceptualised only as a woman clever enough to see through Cyrus' plans and intentions. She is also shown to have the courage to defy and challenge him even in his own territory if he was not willing to remain at peace. What is also striking is that she has the prudence to warn him that his deeds might not work to his advantage. She has also the boldness to threaten and give him a choice when she is the one threatened with invasion and war. Moreover, she seems quite confident of herself and her power, which is evident in her message to him.<sup>101</sup>

Tomyris' offer seems quite strange on first reading. She sends a message to Cyrus saying that, depending on where the war was to take place (that was either in the Massagetan land or Persia), either side should be allowed to cross the river Araxes in peace, with three days allowed and without the need of bridges. Yet, her offer becomes understandable once we realise that 'in view of Cyrus' willingness to bridge rivers or

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<sup>96</sup> Hdt., 1.205-206. For Tomyris, cf. also *De Mulieribus*, 12.

<sup>97</sup> Asheri, 1997, at 1.205.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Hdt. 1.211.

<sup>99</sup> Hdt. 1.216.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Asheri, 1997, at 1.205. Cf. also Gera, 1997, 189.

<sup>101</sup> Hdt. 1.206.



divert them or destroy them, we are to see Tomyris' piety and respect for the sacredness of rivers in contrast to Cyrus'.<sup>102</sup> So far, we witness Tomyris outgrowing her gender and displaying such *andreiê* and wisdom as would be envied even in a man. And Herodotus makes sure to make this obvious.

## 2. *Cyrus' devious plan*

While all Persian chiefs advise Cyrus to have Tomyris come against him, Croesus advises that it would be wiser for the battle to take place in the territory of Tomyris, adding that it would be a shame to give ground to a woman. However, he does not think it is a shame to defeat a woman through guile, for he suggests a trick, which Cyrus actually follows. The plan was to use the Massagetae's primitivism to their advantage, knowing that they were unfamiliar with delicate food and particularly with wine.<sup>103</sup> The use of wine in Cyrus' devious plan is of particular importance for two reasons. Firstly, as Romm has suggested, the Persians' culture 'has habituated them to this most sophisticated and civilised of beverages so that they can turn wine into a weapon against a people innocent of its effects.'<sup>104</sup> And secondly, the wine will play an important and symbolical role in Cyrus' death. Thus, following the narrative, while Cyrus sends a message to Tomyris telling her to withdraw her army as promised, the Persians prepare a lavish banquet with plenty of undiluted wine and leave the worst Persian soldiers in the camp. The Massagetae attack, take over the camp and feast on their victory. Once they are drunk and asleep, the Persians attack, kill many of them and take many as hostages, among whom is Tomyris' son, Spargapises. When she finds out what has befallen her army and son, she sends another warning to Cyrus, telling him to release her son and leave her country, otherwise she will come down

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<sup>102</sup> Arieti, 1995, 189. Cf. also Gera, 1997, 190. Quite interestingly, the crossing of rivers of ill-fated Persian kings is a recurrent theme in Herodotus: cf. Hdt., 4.89 and 7.35.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Hdt., 1.133, for the Persians being great wine-drinkers.

<sup>104</sup> Romm, 1998, 107. Authors trace the trick of wine against unused primitive people back to Odysseus and the Cyclops: cf. for instance, Redfield, 1985, 112; Romm, 1992, 57; Rossellini and Said, 1978, 968-969. Yet, there are cases that the trick is used against more sophisticated people, as well: cf. for instance, Hdt., 2.121; Charon, *FgrH*, 262 F 17; Nicolaus of Damascus, *FgrH*, 90 F 66.27-28. Cf. also Gera, 1997, 196.

harshly upon him. Yet, Tomyris' son, once sober again, commits suicide as soon as he realises what has happened.<sup>105</sup>

Two things are noteworthy in Croesus' advice. The first concerns the issue of wine-trickery used to conquer the Massagetae. In other words, they were caught and slaughtered while they were drunk and, thus, unable to defend themselves. Secondly, the shame involved in yielding to a woman should not escape our notice. This notion is echoed in Cyrus' insult to the Gyndes river, who threatened to make the river so weak that even a woman would be able to cross it without wetting her knees.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, this is one more implication of how women are represented in the context of war. To fear them or yield to them would be an act of cowardice. Yet, Tomyris, the rude savage, appears to be more civilised and manlier than her male enemies as she never resorts to guile to defeat her foes but she has the bravery to face them as a 'man' in battle.<sup>107</sup> And the irony in the whole story lies in the fact that the man who offers this dishonourable and ill-fated advice to Cyrus is Croesus, who not only lost his kingdom but also turned his former subjects into 'women'.<sup>108</sup>

It must also be noted that in 1.212 Herodotus does not only present us with Tomyris in her role as a queen, but also in that of a mother who will go to any extent to save her son's life. Moreover, and despite Cyrus' guile, we cannot but observe her calmness and the fact that, despite being a woman, she is capable of being the master of the game and of not losing control of the situation, even if her son is a captive. Yet, it seems as if her patience has its limits, especially with her son in the enemy's hands, so much so as to utter: 'ἡ μὲν σε ἐγὼ καὶ ἀπληστον ἔοντα αἵματος κορέσω' ('for as you are so insatiable for blood, I will fill you with it') and, thus, reveal herself as a woman capable of violence should she be forced to use it.<sup>109</sup> Indeed, as Justin notes, 'she soothes her feelings by a quest for blood, not with tears'.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Hdt., 1.207, 211-213. Cf. Valerius Maximus, 9.10; Justin, 1.8.8; Orosius, *Histories*, 2.7.3, who record that Spargapises is killed by the Persian king.

<sup>106</sup> Hdt., 1.189. Cf. Arieti, 1995, 191-192.

<sup>107</sup> Later sources assign a counter-devious plan to Tomyris, probably in an attempt to diminish her: cf. Justin, 1.8.9; Strabo, 11.8.5; Orosius, *Histories*, 2.7.4.

<sup>108</sup> Hdt. 1.155. Cf. Dewald, 1981, 109; Redfield, 1985, 113.

<sup>109</sup> Hdt., 1.212.

### 3. *Tomyris' vengeance and Cyrus' death*

According to Herodotus, as soon as Tomyris finds out about her son's death, she confronts Cyrus and his army in battle. The Massagetae manage to gain mastery in the war and Cyrus is killed fighting. When Tomyris finds his body, she puts his head in a skin filled with human blood and in this way she fulfils her last threat to him.

That was how Cyrus died, according to Herodotus' version.<sup>111</sup> Yet, he is careful enough to say that there are more stories related to Cyrus' death.<sup>112</sup> According to Ctesias, Cyrus, wounded by an Indian, was transferred by his people to the camp where he died three days later. Onesicritus said that he died of a broken heart when he heard of his son's Cambyses misdeeds, and Xenophon wrote that Cyrus died in his bed surrounded by his sons, friends and officials.<sup>113</sup> Two more stories record that Cyrus died by the hand of a woman. The first one is reported by Diodorus Siculus who said that Cyrus was imprisoned and crucified by the queen of the Scythians. The second one is given by Polyaeus who, like Herodotus, reports that Cyrus was killed by Tomyris.<sup>114</sup> However, in his version of the story Tomyris employs the very trick that Cyrus used in Herodotus' story and thus she kills him by guile.

When Tomyris found the dead body of her enemy, she is reported by Herodotus to have said the following: σὺ μὲν ἐμὲ ζῶσάν τε καὶ νικῶσάν σε μάχῃ ἀπώλεσας παῖδα τὸν ἐμὸν ἐλὼν δόλω. σὲ δ' ἐγώ, κατὰ περ ἠπειλήσα, αἵματος κορέσω ('Although I live and I have conquered you, you have destroyed me, killing my son by guile; but as I threatened you, I will fill you with blood').<sup>115</sup> These words are the queen's answer to

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<sup>110</sup> Justin, 1.8.9.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Redfield, 1985, 113, who commented about Cyrus and his prosperity that 'any Greek would recognise him as ripe for destruction'. The fact that a woman is responsible for his death makes it more appropriate.

<sup>112</sup> Hdt., 1.214.

<sup>113</sup> Ctesias, *FgrH*, 688 F 9; Onesicritus, *FgrH*, 134 F 36; Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 8.7.

<sup>114</sup> Diodorus Siculus, 2.44; Polyaeus, 8.28. Cf. Gera, 1997, 188 n.5, for Tomyris hiding behind the unnamed queen who reportedly killed Cyrus in Diodorus Siculus. Cf. also Lucian, *Charon*, 13, who specifically reports that Cyrus died by the hand of Tomyris.

<sup>115</sup> Hdt., 1.214. Cf. Konstan, 1983, 9-10, who sees Cyrus as 'a cannibal, albeit posthumously, when Tomyris submerges his head in the bucket of blood'. Cf. also

the banquet organised by Cyrus. Yet, this time human blood is served instead of wine. Cyrus received 'poetic justice for his *hybris*, being symbolically forced to drink his fill of blood to atone for the drink he so treacherously served the Massagetae.'<sup>116</sup> As Hartog has observed, 'in Tomyris' eyes, Cyrus the drinker of wine is in truth a drinker of blood, so he will be served blood just as if it were undiluted wine.'<sup>117</sup> It is obvious that her wrath against Cyrus for her son's death by guile was her single most important incentive to fight and win the battle. On the one hand, the decapitation of Cyrus as well as her words to his corpse reveal the wild and uncontrollable nature of this woman. Gould has argued that it is perhaps significant of what female power means to Herodotus in that Tomyris outdoes the Persians in violence and bloodthirstiness.<sup>118</sup> Yet, on the other hand, it could be said that her very deeds reveal her bitterness and sadness for her son's death rather than her bloodthirstiness. After all, she is more than justified -- even if she does kill many men --, for she resorted to violence only when she was given no other choice. This latter attitude underpins Herodotus' representation of Tomyris, something that makes the historian's admiration for that woman obvious - - although some may still feel that revulsion predominates.<sup>119</sup>

## b. Pheretima of Cyrene

Pheretima, like Tomyris, is another example of a Herodotean woman who surpasses her gender. Yet, this one is not praised for doing so, but she is scolded for her unwomanly behaviour. Herodotus tells us of her ruling Cyrene on her son's behalf during his absence, her escape to Egypt at her son's death and her desperate attempts to acquire an army to avenge her son, which she is finally granted by the Persian

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Flory, 1987, 42-43, who notes the similarity between Tomyris' and Candaules' wife's revenge in Hdt., 1.10-13.

<sup>116</sup> Romm, 1998, 108.

<sup>117</sup> Hartog, 1988, 167.

<sup>118</sup> Gould, 1989, 131. Cf. Gera, 1997, 188-189, who quite rightly observes that 'Tomyris represents in her dealings with Cyrus a peculiar combination of moderation and bloodthirstiness, wisdom and savagery'.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Diodorus Siculus, 2.44, his praise of the women of Scythia and their valour, who were so great that one of them, Tomyris, even challenged, beat and killed Cyrus. He also seems to share Herodotus' admiration for this woman.

satrap of Egypt. She is portrayed as a woman of many abilities but also as one capable of monstrous deeds.<sup>120</sup>

### 1. *A determined woman*

The reader comes across Pheretime for the first time in the Euelthon episode. According to Herodotus, when Pheretime's son was banished to Samos by the Cyreneans, his mother fled to Salamis in Cyprus. Once there, she asked the ruler of Salamis, Euelthon, to grant her an army that would bring her and her son to Cyrene. At her repeated request, Euelthon sent not an army but a golden spindle, a distaff and wool telling her: *τοιούτοισι γυναικάς δωρέεσθαι ἀλλ' οὐ στρατιῇ* ('such things are the gifts for women and not an army').<sup>121</sup>

The anecdote must have drawn Herodotus' interest because of the unusual warlike spirit of the woman and the effective reply. The narrations of Artemisia as well as the mention of Eryxo, who killed her husband's brother and murderer, disclose his interest in such women.<sup>122</sup> In the Euelthon episode, the domineering and arrogant personality of Pheretime is revealed. On the other hand, the way in which she is told to keep quiet reveals the sarcastic and negative attitude of the male.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, Euelthon's gift and his reply to Pheretime underline the male idea of a woman's position and interests. As Lateiner has observed, 'Euelthon of Salamis well expresses the conventional, condescending male attitude towards women when he grants ferocious Pheretime not

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<sup>120</sup> For Pheretime, cf. also Polyaeus, 8.47; *De Mulieribus*, 10.

<sup>121</sup> Hdt., 4.162. Cf. *De Mulieribus*, 13, and Polyaeus, 8.53, where it is recorded that Xerxes presented Artemisia with panoply and the Phoenician commanders with distaffs and spindles. The story resembles that of Pheretime and Euelthon but it is missing from Herodotus' narrative of the Halicarnassian queen. Still, both tales convey the same meaning, namely the man-woman position. For a discussion of the Artemisia episode, cf. Gera, 1997, 211-216. For excellence in battle and bearing of weapons being a male prerogative, cf. Thucydides, 4.40.

<sup>122</sup> Hdt., 7.99, 8.88, 4.160. Herodotus mentions Eryxo and her deception to murder her husband's assassin in passing reference in 4.160. Eryxo bears some similarity to her daughter in law, Pheretime, in that they both avenge the death of a Battiad. For Eryxo, cf. Nicolaus of Damascus, *FgrH*, 90 F 50; Plutarch, *Moralia*, 260d-261e; Polyaeus, 8.41. Cf. also Gera, 1997, 175-176.

<sup>123</sup> Corcella and Medaglia, 1993, at 4.162.

the army that she wants but a golden spindle, a distaff and some wool'.<sup>124</sup> However, the gifts could also serve as a warning, for, as Gould has noted, symbolical gifts in Herodotus denote 'a figurative statement of limitation'.<sup>125</sup> And if we are to judge by Pheretime's end, he may well be right.

One other aspect we witness of Pheretime's personality in Herodotus is her ability as a ruler. While her son was at Barce, we learn that she held his prerogative at Cyrene, where she administered all his business and sat with others in council.<sup>126</sup> Here, the active and powerful figure of Pheretime emerges.<sup>127</sup>

## **2. Pheretime's cruel vengeance**

In the rest of the passages in the *Histories* in which Pheretime appears she is no longer a domineering and arrogant woman but, as Gould has described her, 'a sinister and vindictive' monster.<sup>128</sup> After her son's death at Barce, she flees to Egypt where she asks Aryandes, the Persian satrap, to give her an army so as to take her revenge on the Barcaeans for her son's death, which she gets this time. Yet, Aryandes' motives should not be misinterpreted because he had ulterior motives, for Herodotus himself reports that he wanted to subdue Libya anyway. Moreover, Herodotus also tells us that an army was a thoroughly Persian present, as Xerxes offered one to a girl he liked.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Lateiner, 1989, 136. For the male idea of a woman's position, cf. Homer, *Iliad*, 6.490-493; Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 518-520.

<sup>125</sup> Gould, 1989, 57. Cf. also Hdt., 3.21-22, for the symbolical gifts by the Scythian tribes to Darius.

<sup>126</sup> Hdt., 4.165.

<sup>127</sup> For an explanation of Pheretime's sitting in council being connected with her being of the royal house, cf. Hdt., 4.205, where she is referred to by Herodotus as Φερετιμη ἡ Βάττου. As she is already married to Battus, the historian must have referred to her using her husband's name, who was also her uncle, (Hdt., 4.164) instead of a patronymic. For women being introduced by their husbands' name, cf. Aristophanes, *Hippis*, 449; *Ecclesiazousae*, 46, 49, 51; *Lysistrata*, 270; Virgil, *Aeneid*, 3.319. For the subject of Pheretime's sitting in council, cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 4.205; Corcella and Medaglia, 1993, at 4.205; Gera, 1997, 165-166.

<sup>128</sup> Gould, 1989, 131.

<sup>129</sup> Hdt., 4.165, 167, and 9.109. Cf. Cook, 1983, 64, who argues that in Herodotus we are given the impression that Aryandes gave Pheretime the army she asked for without first consulting Darius, and he interprets this move as an indication of his later rebellious ways.

Once Pheretime was granted the army she wished, she displayed an unwomanly behaviour underlined by cruelty beyond human limits. She is reported by the historian to have impaled the ones who were guilty of her son's death and to have cut off the breasts of their women and planted them around the wall of the city. She let the Persians take the rest of the Barcaeans as booty, except for the ones of the house of Battus, to whom she gave the governance of the city.<sup>130</sup> The impaling is a typical Persian punishment in the *Histories* and the exposure of mutilated parts must have seemed barbaric to the Greeks. Two similar cases of impaling appear in Book 9. In the first, when Leonidas dies at Thermopylae, Mardonius and Xerxes cut off his head and set it on a pole. In the second, Artayctes is also impaled by Xerxes. And one should not forget Amestris' vengeance on the mother of her husband's mistress, who cut off her breasts, nose, ears, lips and tongue.<sup>131</sup> The Herodotean Pheretime takes on in this way plausible features of a 'witch' as a preparation for her sad end.<sup>132</sup> Moreover, she becomes the 'monster' that men thought a woman might become when she has power in her hands.

### 3. *Pheretime's odious end*

Herodotus reports that as soon as Pheretime took her revenge on the Barcaeans and returned to Egypt, she died a foul death: her body became infected and bred worms.<sup>133</sup> Why Pheretime returns immediately to Egypt is not clear at all. The reaction that must have followed the cruel punishment of the Barcaeans probably made Pheretime stay away from the scene, withdrawing from public life among the Persians. But there remains the doubt that it might have been the Cyreneans who made her die away from her homeland in a miserable and exemplary way. Pheretime paid for her excess by virtue of the same principle that, according to Herodotus, determined the fall of Troy.<sup>134</sup> In 2.120, he says: τοῦ δαιμονίου παρασκευάζοντος, ὅπως πανωλεθρῆ ἀπολόμενοι καταφανές τοῦτο τοῖσι ἀνθρώποισι ποιήσωσι, ὡς τῶν μεγάλων

<sup>130</sup> Hdt., 4.202.

<sup>131</sup> Hdt., 9.78, 120 and 112. Cf. Waters, 1985, 135 n.24, who observes that cutting off a woman's breasts corresponds to male castration. Cf. also, Gera, 1997, 169. For impalement in Homer, cf. Homer, *Iliad*, 18.176-177.

<sup>132</sup> Corcella and Medaglia, 1993, at 4.202.

<sup>133</sup> Hdt., 4.205.

<sup>134</sup> Corcella and Medaglia, 1993, at 4.205.

ἀδικημάτων μεγάλοι εἰσι καὶ αἱ τιμωρίαι παρὰ τῶν θεῶν ('the powers above arranged that total destruction should make it clear to all the people that the gods greatly punish the great wrong-doings'). It seems as if Pheretime's death was due to the fact that she defied the gods and, thus, received divine punishment and justice.<sup>135</sup> Indeed, Herodotus appears to think of it as a disgusting death for a negative personality.

### c. Artemisia of Halicarnassus

The female figure that holds the utmost importance in the *Histories* is Artemisia. We first come across her in Book 7, which also opens a rather lengthy chapter devoted to her in the catalogue of the Persian forces.<sup>136</sup> She is portrayed to surpass her gender and she is respected and admired by Herodotus who actually remarks: Ἀρτεμισίης δὲ τῆς μάλιστα θῶμα ποιεῦμαι ἐπὶ τὴν Ελλάδα στρατευσαμένης γυναικός ('Artemisia, who astonishes me for the fact that a woman should war against Greece').<sup>137</sup>

The introductory chapter of her story seems to be a eulogy on her mental and strategic abilities as well as of her powerful personality and manly bravery. As Munson has argued, 'Herodotus must have felt especially inclined to relate interesting information about Halicarnassus and was perhaps even proud of his countrywoman's exploits'.<sup>138</sup> Indeed, Artemisia is a remarkable exception for the following reasons. Firstly, Herodotus informs us that although she held the sovereign power, after her husband's death, and had a young son, ὑπὸ ληματοῦ τε καὶ ἀνδρηίης ἐστρατεύετο οὐδεμιῆς οἰ ἐούσης ἀναγκάης ('she went to war under no stress of necessity but out of bravery and courage'). Herodotus' mention of the word ἀναγκάης (necessity) could very well point to political compulsion. However, as Gera has quite rightly observed, the

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<sup>135</sup> Cf. Gera, 1997, 170; Dewald, 1981, 118 n.24; Flory, 1987, 43; Lateiner, 1989, 138-139; Harrison, 2000a, 102 and 111. Cf. Africa, 1982, 2; Dawson, 1986, 95; Mossman, 1995, 175; and Harrison, 2000a, 111, who argue that Pheretime's end is the appropriate divine punishment for cruel tyrants and enemies of the gods. For others dying of *psoriasis*, cf. Plutarch, *Sulla*, 36. Cf. Africa, 1982, and Dawson, 1986, and their discussion about death by worms.

<sup>136</sup> Hdt., 7.99. For Artemisia, cf. also *De Mulieribus*, 13; Polyaeus, 8.53.1-3; Pausanias, 3.11.3; Justin, 2.12.23; Suidas, s.v. *Artemisia*.

<sup>137</sup> Hdt., 7.99. Cf. Flory, 1987, 82, who calls her 'a Greek wonderwoman'.

<sup>138</sup> Munson, 1988, 92.



historian must have rather meant that, given the fact that Artemisia was a woman, she could have chosen to stay at home and not take active part in a war.<sup>139</sup> Manly courage (it is of significance that this idea of masculinity is built into the word ἀνδρική that Herodotus uses) in a woman and freedom in an ally of Xerxes are paradoxes, which set Artemisia apart as a special case. Herodotus cannot hide the impact this woman's bravery and courage has on him. It is not only because she takes part in a war out of her own free will but also because she is a mother and a woman on the throne. Yet, one cannot but wonder whether this is also partly because, unlike most other ruling queens with the exception of Pheretima, she is of Greek stock, as she was Cretan on her mother's side, and the commander of Greeks. Secondly, although she contributes to the expedition 5 ships out of 1,207 in Xerxes' fleet, she receives, after Mardonius, the most attention and coverage in the narrative of the Persian expedition.

We actually see Artemisia in battle in Book 8.<sup>140</sup> Following Herodotus' narrative, Artemisia, being trapped by an Athenian ship and threatened with destruction, resorts to the sinking of an allied ship that bore men of Calyndus and their king, Damasithymus. The story goes that she had had some quarrel with him and it was not just a ship that happened to cross her path at the time. However, her trick worked to her advantage in three ways. Firstly, the Athenian ship thought Artemisia's ship to be a friendly one and turned aside to deal with others. Secondly, no man of the sunken ship lived to accuse her. Thirdly, she won the admiration of Xerxes who is said to have exclaimed: Ὅτι μὲν ἄνδρες γέγονασί μοι γυναῖκες, αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες ἄνδρες. (My men have become women and my women men).<sup>141</sup>

Munson has commented that 'in the case of Artemisia at Salamis, the intelligence and skill she displays even blatantly deny heroic value'.<sup>142</sup> Indeed, although Herodotus stresses the fact that Artemisia was the only commander in Xerxes' fleet who attended through manliness and not compulsion, unlike Tomiris, 'she saves herself and her ship

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<sup>139</sup> Gera, 1997, 206. Cf. also Munson, 1988, 95; Benardete, 1969, 192-193.

<sup>140</sup> Hdt., 8.87-88.

<sup>141</sup> Hdt., 8.88. Cf. Flory, 1987, 83, who parallels her 'cunning intelligence' revealed by the ramming of the ship to 'the thoroughly masculine eponymous hero of the *Odyssey*'.

<sup>142</sup> Munson, 1988, 103.

by extremely unconventional military behaviour'.<sup>143</sup> Munson goes one step further to say that 'her action is boldly unconventional and it includes betrayal and aggression in particular at the expense of an ally and a close neighbour with whom she may or may not have had a previous argument.'<sup>144</sup> It is true that the mischievous attitude that pervades this incident must be inspired by Herodotus' sympathy for the queen, who manages to attract the attention of Xerxes and his dignitaries with her cunning trick.<sup>145</sup> But how did Xerxes and his officials know that it was Artemisia after all? According to Herodotus, they saw the ἐπίσημον on her ship, which was probably a figure-head at the bow of a ship and not a flag.<sup>146</sup> Yet, according to Polyaeus, she possessed both the flags of the Greeks and the barbarians, which she would change depending upon the enemy ship close by each time.<sup>147</sup> Whether there were flags or not, one cannot deny the fact that she is represented as not only having the nerve to sink a ship of the alliance to save herself but also the calmness to think fast and effectively in that particular moment of danger.<sup>148</sup> In addition, she had all the luck on her side, both because no one lived to blame her and because that particular ship happened to cross her path, as one of her squadron would have more likely been near her.

Xerxes' exclamation at Artemisia's display of courage reveals two things. The first concerns the contrast between Artemisia's behaviour with the inadequacy of the Persians in battle.<sup>149</sup> The second issue regards the usurpation of the male world, so much feared by the men. Here, Herodotus depicts a woman behaving like a 'man' and the men like a 'woman'.<sup>150</sup> As Walcot has commented, Xerxes' words of Artemisia 'were more than a neat antithesis or a clever paradox to the Greeks, since it revealed a world turned on its head with all normal values reversed'. He also argued that

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<sup>143</sup> Dewald, 1981, 109.

<sup>144</sup> Munson, 1988, 102.

<sup>145</sup> Masaracchia, 1990, at 8.87.

<sup>146</sup> Cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 8.88.

<sup>147</sup> Polyaeus, 8.53.

<sup>148</sup> Cf. Gera, 1997, 211, who boldly suggests that her story at Salamis might be the historian's attempt to 'show that the Halicarnassians, although Persian subjects, were, in fact, loyal Greeks and actually fought against the Persians at Salamis'.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. Flory, 1987, 83.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. Gera, 1997, 209, who has observed that 'Xerxes' men-women remark has several echoes in the *Histories*'. Cf. Hdt., 7.209, where he remarks that in the Persian army there are πολλοὶ μὲν ἄνθρωποι ... ὀλίγοι δὲ ἄνδρες ('a lot of people ... but few

Herodotus must have found in the daring exploits of Artemisia intensely dramatic material as a woman who usurped the role allotted to men, exactly as the tragedians did in the case of Clytaemnestra or Antigone.<sup>151</sup> It is true that the Greeks regarded Artemisia's behaviour as highly abnormal. Among them, submissiveness and modesty characterised womanly behaviour. 'Because of the limitations of 'normal' female behaviour, heroines who act outside the stereotypes are said to be 'masculine''.<sup>152</sup> In Munson's words, Artemisia 'appears from the Greek point of view as the embodiment of a world where the women are the men and the men are 'women' and 'slaves', a world threatening to overcome Greece. the place of normality and civilisation'.<sup>153</sup>

Aristophanes characterised Artemisia as an Amazon. Hornblower observes that she was 'a plausible Amazon whose audacity put Xerxes' men to shame'. Gould describes her as ambiguous and Munson as a 'cultured Athena' (the latter phrase is admittedly perspicuous). Lateiner comments that 'women in the *Histories* rarely have Artemisia's insight and historical significance. a place in the record separate from a generalised moral point about inverted or perverted values'.<sup>154</sup> Yet, the sharpest description of her, which also conveys Herodotus' portrayal of the Halicarnassian queen, came from Xerxes' mouth when he exclaimed that his men have become women and his women men.

#### d. Amazons

In Book 4 Herodotus introduces the nation of the Amazons, who are to become the wives of Scythians and thus establish the nation of the Sauromatae.<sup>155</sup> In the world of the *Histories*, the women of the Sauromatae rode horses and handled the bow side by side with the men. Herodotus explains this by tracing their origin to the Amazons and

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men'). Cf. also Hdt., 8.68, where Artemisia says to Xerxes before Salamis that the Greeks are superior to the Persians in the sea, as men are to women.

<sup>151</sup> Walcot, 1978, 143.

<sup>152</sup> Pomeroy, 1975, 98.

<sup>153</sup> Munson, 1988, 93.

<sup>154</sup> Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 671; Hornblower, 1982, 268; Gould, 1989, 131; Munson, 1988, 94; Lateiner, 1989, 139-140.

<sup>155</sup> Hdt., 4.110-117. Cf. Fehling, 1989, 132, who argues that the Herodotean Amazon/Sauromatan story is entirely of Greek fabrication.

their union with the Scythians.<sup>156</sup> Following the narrative, after the Amazons' defeat on the Thermodon, the Greeks capture and put them into ships, but the Amazons attack and slay them. As they do not know how to steer a ship, they drift until they come to the Scythian land, where they steal horses and live by plundering. At first, the Scythians fight them, but as soon as they realise their sex, they send their youngest men to have children born of those women. The men do not provoke or attack them but just follow the Amazons' way of life. Eventually, a Scythian comes across an Amazon alone and they have intercourse. The couple agrees to meet again the following day and to bring a friend and in this way the Scythians 'tame the rest of the Amazons' (actually, Herodotus uses the word ἐκτιλώσαντο, which will be discussed below).<sup>157</sup> After a while, the men wish to go home to their parents and possessions but the Amazons refuse to follow them. They excuse themselves by saying that they would not be able to live the way Scythian women live, that is, secluded. When the men return with their share of their fathers' estates, the Amazons tell them to move away from Scythia on the ground that they are afraid of living near those whose land they have plundered. The men agree and the couples leave Scythia.

### 1. *The androgynous Amazons*

One does not fail to notice that throughout the Amazon/Scythian episode Herodotus introduces the Amazons' androgynous nature, habits and customs. The very first thing that reveals their androgyny concerns their name. In the very beginning of the story, Herodotus attempts to explain why the Scythians call them *Oiorpata*.<sup>158</sup> He says that τὰς δὲ Ἀμαζόνιας καλέουσι οἱ Σκύθαι Οἰόρπατα, δύναται δὲ τὸ οὐνομα τοῦτο κατὰ Ἑλλάδα γλῶσσαν ἀνδροκτόνοι· οἰόρ' γὰρ καλέουσι ἄνδρα, τὸ δὲ 'πατά' κτείνειν ('the Scythians call the Amazons *Oiorpata*, this name meaning in the Greek language 'killers of men'; for they call the man *oior* and *pata* is 'kill)'). How and Wells have pointed out that the first half of the etymology, which is the *oior* meaning 'man', is probably right, but the second half is connected with the Iranian *pataya* or *pati* meaning 'master'. The word then means 'masters of men'. Corcella and Medaglia are

<sup>156</sup> Cf. Shapiro, 1983, 105-114, for Scythian Amazons and their portrayal in art.

<sup>157</sup> Hdt., 4.113.

<sup>158</sup> Hdt., 4.110

of the same opinion.<sup>159</sup> This etymology seems to be more appropriate as the Sauromatae are certainly depicted by Herodotus as if women mastered them. And Ephorus and Diodorus Siculus actually call them γυναικοκρατούμενοι ('ruled by women').<sup>160</sup>

A second matter that reveals their man-woman state is connected with the fact that the Scythians do not realise that their foes are women until they kill some of them. Most probably, because they were women and thus beardless, the Scythians were led to believe that they were 'young men of the same age' (αὐτὰς εἶναι ἄνδρας τὴν αὐτὴν ἡλικίην).<sup>161</sup> As Blok has noticed, it would be 'an unbearable affront to the masculine warrior ethos if the men -- here the Scythians -- knew that behind the armour and clothes of the Amazons, it was women they were fighting'.<sup>162</sup> Indeed, the Herodotean Amazons are women but are more warrior than a woman. Their warrior and rebellious spirit is, after all, quite overt in the very opening of their story when Herodotus narrates how they slew the crew of the Greek ships who had taken them as captives after their defeat at the river Thermodon.

Two more features of the Amazons' androgyny and ambivalence in the *Histories* relate to their weapons and homeland, although Herodotus does not discuss them extensively. Both these features are signs of the Amazons' inferiority to the male, and, more specifically, to the Greek male, as they were indicative of cowardice and softness. Thus, it can be said that they serve firstly as Herodotus' anticipation of Book 9, where Athenian glory and valour are praised, and secondly, to provide a commentary upon the Persians.<sup>163</sup> Accordingly, Herodotus informs us that they ride.

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<sup>159</sup> How and Wells, 1912, at 4.110; Corcella and Medaglia, 1993, at 4.110. Cf. Homer, *Iliad*, 3.189 and 6.186, who calls them *antianeirai* ('hostile to men'); Aeschylus, *Prometheus bound*, 724, and *Suppliant maidens*, 287, who calls them ἀνάνδρους κρεοβόρους ('mateless and flesh devouring'). For the Scythian and Greek etymology, cf. Hartog, 1988, 240-241.

<sup>160</sup> Ephorus, *FgrH*, 70 F 160; Diodorus Siculus, 3.53. For the meaning of the name 'Amazon' connected with the breast, cf. Methodios, *Anecdota Graeca*, 1.80; Hippocrates, *Airs, waters and places*, 17; Hellanicus, *FgrH*, 4 F 107; Diodorus Siculus, 2.45 and 3.53; Apollodorus, 2.5; Strabo, 21.5.

<sup>161</sup> Hdt., 4.111.

<sup>162</sup> Blok, 1995, 436.

<sup>163</sup> Hdt., 9.27.

hunt. shoot with the bow and throw the javelin.<sup>164</sup> Yet. it should be noted that both the bow and the horses reveal, apart from their androgyny, their inferiority to the male, and particularly to the Greeks, as warriors. From Homeric times, the bow was considered a weapon of cowards because one could kill from a safe distance.<sup>165</sup> And it should also be borne in mind that the bow was a feature of the Persian warfare at the battle of Plataea. Thus. it was a weapon that was both beneath a Greek and terrifying him: in other words. the most suitable weapon for an Amazon who exercised similarly contradictory influences. And as far as the horses are concerned, in martial code they could again be symbols of cowardice as they stood for a quick escape.<sup>166</sup> To turn to the Herodotean Amazons' homeland. the historian envisages their home by the river Thermodon.<sup>167</sup> It is noticeable that Herodotus follows the tradition of the Amazons' location being beyond the frontiers of the civilised world. Hence. the nation of the Amazons in the world of the *Histories* exists outside the normal practice of customs and human experience. as they are everything a woman should not be.<sup>168</sup> As their homeland is outside Greece on the frontiers of civilisation. savagery and barbarism. it is a land that strips the men off their manhood and renders its women as men: in other words. it closely resembles the Persians and their land. Aeschylus in his *Agamemnon* and his *Persians* certainly seems to have accepted this connection between barbarism. savagery and effeminacy of men. As Hall has remarked. the *Persians* represents 'the first unmistakable file in the archive of Orientalism. the discourse by which the European imagination has dominated Asia ever since by conceptualising its inhabitants as defeated. luxurious. emotional. cruel. and as always dangerous.'<sup>169</sup> And more importantly. in *Agamemnon*. after ten years in Asia. on the frontiers of civilisation and savagery. Agamemnon is shown to have become soft in the 'battle' for

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<sup>164</sup> Hdt., 4.110 and 114.

<sup>165</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 4.242 and 11.384-395. Cf. the bow as a feature of Persian warfare in the battle of Marathon. Cf. also Hdt., 1.136, on archery, together with truth telling and horseriding. constituting the Persian boys' education.

<sup>166</sup> Cf. Tyrrell, 1984, 50-51. However, the horse is also characteristically aristocratic.

<sup>167</sup> Hdt., 4.110 and 9.27. For Thermodon being the Amazons' homeland. cf. also Ephorus, *FgrH*, 70 F 160; Diodorus Siculus, 3.52; Homer, *Iliad*, 3.188-189; Apollodorus, 2.5. However. they were also reported to dwell in other places. such as Colchis, Libya and the Euxine Sea: cf. Aeschylus, *Prometheus bound*, 410-415; Diodorus Siculus, 3.52; Plutarch, *Theseus*. 26.

<sup>168</sup> Tyrrell, 1984, 56; Walcot, 1984, 42; Larson, 1995, 111.

<sup>169</sup> Hall, 1989, 45.

control, and he is overcome by a woman, Clytaemnestra.<sup>170</sup> And if we are to judge by the Scythian/ Amazon account as portrayed in the *Histories*, this is most certainly the case, as the young Scythians are persuaded by the women to follow their way of life in the end. And it is this last element that implies that the Herodotean Sauromatae were *gynaikokratoumenoi*, which at once leads to the question of matriarchy among them in the *Histories*.

## 2. *Marriage and the customs of the Amazons*

After the Scythians realise that their foes are women and send their youngest men to mate with them and have children by them, the rest of the Amazon account seems to be a game as to who actually gains the upper hand; that is, the Amazon women or the Scythian men.<sup>171</sup> And it seems that it is the Amazons that retain control of the situation all along. At this point, it must also be noted that their story is all about marriage and not war. Yet, it is noteworthy that the customs of Amazon marriage is a mirror image of patriarchal marriage.<sup>172</sup> Once again, it seems that Herodotus' purpose in introducing these customs and the reversal of roles they imply is to stress this nation's inferiority and its inevitable ultimate failure. For, no nation, tribe or *polis* could be regarded as politically enduring or 'healthy' when women were the rulers (One could argue here that this is not the case with Artemisia, but one should not forget that the historian -- as already discussed -- is favourably disposed towards her). And once again, their customs and inferiority serve as an anticipation of Herodotus' praise of Athenian glory when the Athenians defeated the Amazons.

In Herodotus' narrative, it is only at the very beginning that the Scythians take the initiative to pursue the Amazons and even that is moderated by the way they pursue them. The Scythians' aggressive pursuit is actually reversed, as they simply imitate all the Amazons do in order to achieve their aim, that is, to mate with them.<sup>173</sup> Yet, it can be argued that the Amazons also had mating on their minds, if we are to judge by the way they were dispersed, one by one or in pairs. Moreover, it is an Amazon and not a

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<sup>170</sup> Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 914-974.

<sup>171</sup> Hdt., 4.112-117.

<sup>172</sup> Tyrrell, 1984, 42-43.

<sup>173</sup> Brown and Tyrrell, 1985, 299.

Scythian who arranges future encounters between the young women and men, so as to be 'tamed' by the Scythians.<sup>174</sup> What is worthy of attention is that the actual word used by Herodotus to denote this union is ἐκπιλώσαντο. Both Godley and Rawlinson translate it as 'had intercourse' while Liddell and Scott define it as 'got them tamed'.<sup>175</sup> However, in Herodotus' story, the Scythians did not tame the Amazons, for everything suggests the reversal of patriarchal marriage, while the constant use of ἐπείθοντο by Herodotus implies the dominance of the Amazon women in their union with the young men.<sup>176</sup> And without insisting upon a single or specific reason for Herodotus' use of the word ἐκπιλώσαντο, Brown and Tyrrell wondered 'whether it implies an inability on the part of the historian to accept a situation in which the female triumphs over the male and women have power over men.'<sup>177</sup>

The Herodotean narrative continues the reversal of patriarchal marriage, as the Scythian men, like Greek women, are young when they marry. Also, again like Greek women, when the Amazons refuse to follow them to their fathers' homes, the Scythians go back to them with a 'dowry' taken from their share of their fathers' possessions.<sup>178</sup> The Scythian men, like Greek women, leave their homes to go and live with their wives in a place of the latter's choice. And finally the Amazons refuse to follow the way of life that Scythian women live, who, like Greek women, are confined to the wagon houses; in contrast to them, the Amazons control the domain of hunting and war.<sup>179</sup>

Hardwick noted that Herodotus' account is significant for the specific treatment of the contrast between the Amazons and the secluded life of Greek women.<sup>180</sup> Indeed, the Herodotean Amazons occupy the 'outside' in contrast to the 'inside' occupied by

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<sup>174</sup> Hdt., 4.111-113.

<sup>175</sup> Godley, 1920, at 4.113; Rawlinson, 1942, at 4.113. Cf. Rosen, 1987-1997, at 4.113 on ἐκπιλώσαντο meaning 'handle' or 'treat gently'. The verb is connected with a Homeric adjective κίλος meaning 'gentle'.

<sup>176</sup> Hdt., 4.115; Brown and Tyrrell, 1985, 299.

<sup>177</sup> Brown and Tyrrell, 1985, 302.

<sup>178</sup> Hdt., 4.114. Cf. Corcella and Medaglia, 1993, at 4.114, for the Scythian dowry as a reversed situation.

<sup>179</sup> Hdt., 4.115-116. Cf. Hartog, 1988, 220 and 223-224, who has rightly observed that there has been a shift between Scythians and Greeks in the Herodotean Amazon/Sauromatan story.

<sup>180</sup> Hardwick, 1996, 161.



Greek (and Scythian) women. Once again 'they reverse the polarity and become avatars of outdoors', which was the male domain.<sup>181</sup> Thus, the chief difference in the Herodotean world between the Scythians and the Sauromatae was the position of their women, as among the former they were confined to the wagon houses, while among the latter, they rode, hunted, went to war and engaged themselves in activities alongside the men.<sup>182</sup>

The Scythian men's desire to have the Amazons bear their children, assuming that they will convert those warrior-women into legitimate wives and mothers, is quite apparent in the Herodotean world. Yet, it is the young men who enter the Amazons' world and savagery. As Brown and Tyrrell have observed, the Scythian men lose their sexual identity. In Herodotus' portrayal 'they are in fact trapped between male and female -- they are both, they are neither -- joining the Amazons in the latter's sexual as well as spatial liminality.'<sup>183</sup> But does this suggest matriarchy?

Tyrrell has noted that Herodotus' account has been formed by reversing patriarchal customs.<sup>184</sup> Yet, this does not imply that Herodotus thought there existed matriarchy among the Sauromatae or that *gynaecocracy* was matriarchy. Matriarchy is not provable as a historical reality. According to Bamberger, 'it is a social charter, which may be part of social history in providing justification for a present and perhaps permanent reality by giving an inverted 'historical' explanation of how this reality was created'. Aristotle in his *Politics* refers the word *gynaecocracy* -- in connection with Sparta -- not to a political matriarchy but to a case of women getting out of control or breaking the restrictions that the male has built around them.<sup>185</sup> Pembroke and Lefkowitz share the same view stating that the Amazon societies have come down to us only to indicate how bad things could be when women got the upper hand. Lefkowitz, in particular, seems quite frustrated with the attempts of feminists to prove there existed matriarchal societies. She observes that 'graves of armed women from

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<sup>181</sup> Tyrrell, 1984, 46.

<sup>182</sup> Cf. Hippocrates, *Airs, waters and places*, 21, for the Scythian women being in want of exercise.

<sup>183</sup> Brown and Tyrrell, 1985, 301. For the Sauromatan women being originally Amazons, cf. Ephorus, *FgrH* 70 F 160. For the Sauromatan nation being mastered by women, cf. Diodorus Siculus, 3.52-53; Hippocrates, *Airs, waters and places*, 17.

<sup>184</sup> Tyrrell, 1984, 41.

the fourth century which have been found in the Ukraine does not prove that the Sauromatae were matriarchal; only that some women in that society were warriors.<sup>186</sup> Indeed, if we look into the Amazon/Sauromatan account more closely, it is evident that, although women seem to be in charge, there is no implication by Herodotus that they were a matriarchal society. The Amazons are rather conceptualised to be an extremist group who had a preference for working and living outside the house and the usual norms.

### 3. *The Amazons' role in Funeral oration*

In Book 9, Herodotus reports the Athenian answer to the Tegeans in the dispute over who should occupy a wing of the Greek army at the battle of Plataea. The Athenian grounds are based on their glorious past and their previous military records, in a fashion reminiscent of the funeral oration tradition. Their speech can be divided into four parts. Firstly, they speak of their protection of the Heracleidai and the defeat of Eurystheus as well as other rulers of the Peloponnese. Secondly, they cite their recovery of the bodies of the Seven at Thebes and their burial at Eleusis. Third comes their triumph over the Amazons in Attica and last their participation in the Trojan War.<sup>187</sup> What is worthy of attention here is that the mythical glories of Athens are mentioned by the historian in reverse chronological order. One reason for this chronological climax may be to signify that the search into the past for ancient glory is an easy task for the Athenians, who have more than enough, so that they always end up with good results when they look back.<sup>188</sup>

The Amazons are almost always included in funeral orations. As Tyrrell has commented, the Amazon myth in funeral oratory and praise of Athens proved 'the purity of Athenian men from the 'foreign' nature of women (*autochthony*)'.<sup>189</sup> In

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<sup>185</sup> Bamberger, 1974, 267; Aristotle, *Politics*, 1269b 12-23.

<sup>186</sup> Pembroke, 1967; Lefkowitz, 1983, 49.

<sup>187</sup> Hdt., 9.27.

<sup>188</sup> Masaracchia, 1995, at 9.27.

<sup>189</sup> Tyrrell, 1984, 116. Cf. also Dubois, 1979, 49; Slater, 1968, 393; Merck, 1978, 96; Loraux, 1986, 134 and 136; Ziolkowski, 1981, 120-121. For the Amazons' attack and defeat by the Athenians, cf. Hellanicus, *FgrH*, 3 F 16; Herodorus, *FgrH*, 200 F 25a; Plutarch, *Theseus*, 28-29; Pausanias, 1.2; Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, 655 and 688; Diodorus Siculus, 4.28.

addition, it should be noted that the Greeks repeatedly used the Amazons to symbolise the Persians, not only because they both posed a threat to 'normality' but also because they both attempted to invade Greece. To put it more simply, the Amazons serve as a paradigmatic defeat of quasi-Persians.<sup>190</sup> Hence, since they are only mentioned in passing reference in Book 9, it might be the case that Herodotus makes use of the Amazons to give a message about 'others', rather than see them as the subject of the message. Indeed, the historian's representation of the Amazons is not one of misogyny, for there is no passage in the *Histories* that actually reveals such an attitude on the historian's part. I much rather believe, with Blok, that in the Herodotean world, 'these autonomous, sexually free, independent and martial Amazons were not just a target of abuse, for they also aroused feelings of astonishment or even admiration'.<sup>191</sup>

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It seems that the women depicted in the context of war by Herodotus in his *Histories* act to preserve themselves and those in their care. It is true that in the military sphere, they are rarely the principal actors, but, as Dewald has argued, the women who do enter this sphere acquit themselves well.<sup>192</sup> On the whole, it can be said that they reflect the same values as men and that they even possess the same manly spirit and courage as men whenever the circumstances call for it. It is for this latter ability that they seem to have gained Herodotus' respect and, in some cases, admiration. As Gould noted, 'they take their place with men in the historical world; and the range of moral judgment implicit in Herodotus' representation of them is no different from that of which he offers by the same implication of men.'<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Cf. Loraux, 1986, 72 and 120.

<sup>191</sup> Blok, 1995, 68.

<sup>192</sup> Dewald, 1981, 112.

<sup>193</sup> Gould, 1989, 131.

## Chapter Two: Powerful individuals

On the whole, women were thought to be of a low mental capacity, and consequently bereft of qualities that characterised a ruler or leader.<sup>1</sup> However, it seems that Herodotus did not share this view, for there is an abundance of examples in the *Histories* in which individual women are portrayed as holding true power by actually being the rulers of nations or by having the courage to stand up to their men, speak their mind and offer invaluable advice. Moreover, in a more passive role, they are portrayed as the vessels of transmission of power to their husbands or sons. In the historian's world, women not only have the qualifications and qualities to attain power and influential roles but also, in many cases, they prove themselves worthy of their male counterparts and the power vested in them. Accordingly, Herodotus' representation of individual women in association with power can be divided into three categories: I) Powerful queens; II) Wise advisors; III) Women as vehicles of power.

### I. Powerful queens

There are nine queens in the *Histories* to whose feats Herodotus devotes lengthy descriptions, including attention to their power and their importance in political life. We have already discussed the role of Artemisia of Halicarnassus, Pheretima of Cyrene and Tomyris of the Massagetae in Chapter One, owing to the warlike nature and spirit that these women possessed and displayed. Likewise, our discussion here will not include the two Persian queens, Atossa and Amestris, whose treatment falls more naturally in Chapter Five. However, it should be noted that despite the minor differences in the nature of their power, which inevitably reflects upon their treatment, all nine Herodotean queens are shown to have taken political action only under certain conditions and circumstances. With the exception of Candaules' wife, they neither are nor act as usurpers of kings or haters of men. They mainly work through their

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<sup>1</sup> The attitudes towards low mental capacities of women are illustrated by a series of Euripidean figures: cf. *Suppliants*, 293-294; *Orestes*, 1204-1205; *Hippolytus*, 638-644.

husbands and sons or act on behalf of them as avengers of their deaths, as holders of power until their sons come of age, or even as their husbands' reminders of *nomos* and order.<sup>2</sup>

### **a. Candaules' wife**

Herodotus narrates the story of Candaules' wife in the beginning of the first book of his *Histories* and almost immediately after the mythical rapes, which marked the onset of the Greek-Persian enmity. It appears that it is strategically placed there for the following two reasons. Firstly, in a sense, the sexual humiliation of Candaules' wife links on thematically with the rape motif introduced in the opening chapters of his work. However, in this episode, the financial calculations and personal gain hinted at in the mutual rapes are substituted with 'personal and passionate revenge spurred by outraged honour'.<sup>3</sup> And secondly, it is the historian's attempt to introduce real historical kings into the narrative in opposition to the mythical figures of the rapes. However, although the introduction of the Gyges-Candaules-the queen episode is a kind of a proem to the historical narrative of Croesus, we cannot but observe that it is as poetical and artistic as the myths before it.<sup>4</sup> In a nutshell, it is a tale of the obsessive *eros* of a king for his wife with disastrous consequences for the king's person, as the queen proved to be more dangerously 'powerful' than the king and his obsession.

#### **1. The king's obsession**

According to the Herodotean narrative, the Lydian king Candaules developed a passion for his own wife and regarded her as the most beautiful woman in the world. However, the king could not keep this obsession of his to himself, but kept boasting about his wife's beauty to Gyges, who was his favourite among his spearmen. Being ill fated and desiring to prove to Gyges he was right, Candaules invited him to see the queen naked, by hiding behind the door of the royal couple's bedchamber and sliding out of the room undetected as soon as the queen undressed. Gyges was abashed by his

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<sup>2</sup> Lefkowitz, 1983, 49.

<sup>3</sup> Flory, 1987, 31. Cf. also Arieti, 1995, 19; Sealey, 1957, 3; and Latte, 1958, 9, who criticises Herodotus for ascribing historical events to individual impulses.

<sup>4</sup> Lateiner, 1989, 82; Flory, 1987, 25, 29-30, 33.

king's wish and tried in vain to avert this decision, reminding the king of his wife's royal status as well as of the shame that followed a woman after stripping off her clothes. Yet Candaules would not take no for an answer and Gyges was compelled to go along with his plan.<sup>5</sup>

There were other versions of the abnormal succession of Gyges and the breach of the Heraclid line in the Lydian kingship, perhaps the most entertaining one -- next to Herodotus' -- being the story of Gyges' ring that rendered him invisible, so that he was able to enter the queen's chamber, plot with her and kill the king.<sup>6</sup> The two tales share the hiding motif, the overthrow of the king by a subordinate, and the involvement of the king's wife. The only significant difference observable in the Herodotean story is the motif of a husband's excessive love for his wife.<sup>7</sup> It is suggested in the narrative that fate and the gods had also a small share in Candaules' witlessness, but in the end, it was his own passion that blinded him and his moral judgement.<sup>8</sup> After all, although love is never explicitly presented as of divine origin, it nevertheless is capable of upsetting one's hierarchy of values and sense of proportion and Herodotus is only too aware of that. Consequently, it was Paris' desire for a Greek wife that caused the destruction of Troy, while, towards the end of the *Histories*, it is the passion of the Persian king Xerxes first for his brother's wife and then for his brother's daughter and the king's own daughter-in-law that brings disaster upon him.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Hdt., 1.8-9. For the literary evidence on the Gyges-Candaules episode, cf. Smith, 1920, 1-37; Bickel, 1957, 141-152.

<sup>6</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 2.359c-360b. For magic objects allowing seducers to enter bedchambers unnoticed, cf. Plato, *Republic*, 10.612b, for the mantle of Hades. For Gyges' ring and the magic cap as common folk motifs, cf. Thompson, 1957, 1361.15 and 1349.10 respectively. For Gyges, cf. also Nicolaus of Damascus, *FgrH*, 90 F 47.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Evans, 1985, 232; Ogden, 1997, 121. For a parallel to Candaules' story, cf. *Esther*, 1.10-12, where Ahasuerus displays the beauty of his wife Vashti before his court, only that the queen was not naked but in regal costume. For another tale implying Candaules' aesthetic enthusiasm, cf. Pliny, *Natural history*, 35.55, where the king buys a picture by the painter Bularchus for its weight in gold.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Harrison, 2000a, 237, who argues that it was fate that brought Candaules to his end.

<sup>9</sup> Hdt., 1.3; 2.120; 9.108-113. Cf. Harrison, 2000a, 238; Y Gassett, 1957, 51-52, for love as upsetting one's hierarchies with fateful consequences. Cf. Hall, 1989, 208, who argues that in Herodotus 'the transgressive desire denoted by the term *eros* is attributed only to king and tyrants'. Cf. also Benardete, 1969, 137-138. For love leading to disaster, cf. also Euripides, *Hippolytus*, 41-42, 438-442, 538-544; *Rhesus*, 859; *Medea*, 627-630; Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, 365. For love as of divine origin, cf.

Before moving on to the queen's perception of her husband's plan and her subsequent revenge, attention should be drawn to the three mottoes or proverbs present in both Candaules' and Gyges' speeches, as one of them is to be repeated by the queen herself providing her with motivation for her revenge.<sup>10</sup> The first one, ὦτα γὰρ τυγχάνει ἀνθρώποισιν ἔοντα ἀπιστότερα ὀφθαλμῶν ('the ears happen to be more unreliable than the eyes'), is uttered by Candaules in his attempt to persuade Gyges to see the queen naked and admire her beauty. This motto is quite interesting for, it could be argued, as Asheri has suggested, that it reflects Herodotus' own methodological norm of investigation.<sup>11</sup> The other two are included in Gyges' response to his king, a response which is magnificent for its completeness. He reminds the king not only that ἅμα δὲ κιθῶνι ἐκδυομένῳ συνεκδύεται καὶ τὴν αἰδῶ γυνή ('with the stripping off of her tunic, a woman is stripped of her shame (i.e. honour)') but also that σκοπέειν πινὰ τὰ ἑωυτοῦ ('each one should guard his own'). This last proverb crystallises obviously the gnomic character of the story, but it is the one regarding the *aidos* of women that is of primary importance, for the queen's revenge is based on it.<sup>12</sup>

It seems that in the Herodotean narrative, Gyges' phrase ἅμα δὲ κιθῶνι ἐκδυομένῳ συνεκδύεται καὶ τὴν αἰδῶ γυνή explains both his shock at what the king asks of him and his refusal to comply with the king's wishes. The *gnome* generally refers to a woman's shame in the context of sexuality as *aidos* is 'the force that inhibits improper behaviour'.<sup>13</sup> Hence, there is a strong parallel in Gyges' speech between the simultaneous stripping off of the woman's tunic and her *aidos*. It seems as if the tunic is there to conceal what must not be exposed. In terms of respect, the clothed woman resembles very much the veiled woman, for both the clothes and the veil separate the women from strange men. Both the clothed and the veiled woman take off their garments and veils, and consequently their *aidos*, only before their husbands. Any

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Homer, *Iliad*, 3.399-405, 14.197-209; *Odyssey*, 4.260-264; Xenophon, *Symposium*, 8.37.

<sup>10</sup> Arieti, 1995, 22.

<sup>11</sup> Asheri, 1997, at 1.8. Cf. also Polybius, 12.27.1, who attributes it to Heraclitus of Ephesus. Cf. Lucian, *De saltatione*, 78; *De domo*, 19-20, for a parody of the motto.

<sup>12</sup> For the proverb about the connection between a woman's tunic and her *aidos*, cf. Diogenes Laertius, 8.43; Ovid, *Amores*, 3.14.27-28; Plutarch, *Moralia*, 37c-d. 139c.

<sup>13</sup> Cairns, 1996, 78.

other way would disturb the every day system of honour.<sup>14</sup> However, modest as the Lydians may have been concerning their nudity, Herodotus knew that they prostituted their daughters.<sup>15</sup> So, why then does he make such a point of the queen's nudity in his story? Most probably, it provided the motivation for the queen's revenge, for, in the Herodotean narrative Candaules overstepped moral codes and laws and he should be punished for it.

## 2. *The queen's revenge*

Gyges, unable to dissuade Candaules, follows the plan and at bedtime, follows the king into the royal bedchamber and hides behind the door. The queen follows immediately after and while she is laying aside her garments, Gyges is able to see her naked. While he is slipping from the room, the queen is able to perceive his presence and her husband's deed. However, she keeps calm and says nothing, but carefully plans her revenge on the basis that among the Lydians and most of the foreign peoples it is held a great shame even for a man to be seen naked. Hence, the following day, after she has made sure of the loyalty of her people in her household, she summons Gyges, reveals her awareness of his presence in the room and presents him with a choice to either kill the king or himself be killed. Gyges tries in vain to avert this dilemma, but in the end, seeing that the queen is unpersuaded, he chooses his own life and consents to his master's murder, which is to be conducted in the same room where he displayed the queen naked. So, Candaules is murdered according to his queen's plan. Gyges takes over the Lydian sovereignty as well as Candaules' wife, while the Delphic oracle supports this usurpation, nevertheless foretelling the vengeance of the Heraclids upon the fifth generation.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Cairns, 1996, 79-81. For a more general discussion of *aidos*, cf. Cairns, 1993, 1-47. Cf. Williams, 1993, 78, 82, 220-221, for exposure and *aidos*. For the veil worn before strange men, cf. Homer, *Odyssey*, 1.333-334; 16.415-416; 18.209-210; 21.64-65; Nagler, 1974, 44-67. For the veil worn in public, cf. Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 530-531. On the veil and married women, cf. Homer, *Iliad*, 22.468-472; Cunningham, 1984, 9-12; Armstrong and Ratchford, 1985, 1-12; Carson, 1990, 160-164.

<sup>15</sup> Hdt., 1.94. Cf. Asheri, 1997, at 1.10. It could be argued here that the difference between Candaules' wife's nudity and the prostitution of the Lydians' daughters is that the queen is ignorant and has not given her consent. However, as pointed out later on, in pp. 72-74, she is not that ignorant after all.

<sup>16</sup> Hdt., 1.10-13. For the story deriving from Delphic tradition, cf. Smith, 1902, 281; Wells, 1923, 25. Cf. Pedley, 1968, 36, who argues that the story must be Greek, for no



This Herodotean queen is portrayed as a mastermind, for she takes into consideration even the tiniest detail, something which Candaules obviously does not. Not only does she think to take the king's life in the very room he 'took' her *aidos*, but she also is careful to check beforehand the loyalty of her people in case things do not go according to plan.<sup>17</sup> And one wonders: is her carefully laid-out plan something she conceives on the spot or did she plan her husband's murder over a period of time and just waited for the right moment to come so as to supply her with the right motivation? The reasons for suspecting this will become apparent below.

One of the things that strike us as odd is the queen's immediate perception that it was her husband who plotted the whole thing, as soon as she grasps Gyges' presence in the room. Could it not have been that Gyges decided to slip into the room on his own accord? Flory has suggested that this was Herodotus' way of calling our attention to the queen's superior intuition 'by having her guess the truth of the situation without any clue'.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the queen is depicted as not only possessing outward beauty but also intelligence, something which the king fails to understand. However, although Flory has a very good point, it nevertheless could also be as Arieti has argued, namely that Gyges had informed her beforehand.<sup>19</sup> But if she knew, why didn't she try to prevent it? Maybe, she wanted to know for herself whether her husband and king would actually go to such great lengths as to display her naked to one of their subjects, or whether Gyges would go through with it.

Arieti's argument could be further refined on the basis of one small detail in the story. According to Herodotus, ὁ δὲ οὐδὲν δοκεῶν αὐτὴν τῶν πρηχθέντων ἐπίστασθαι ἦλθε καλεόμενος· ἐώθεε γὰρ καὶ πρόσθε, ὅπως ἡ βασιλεία καλέοι, φοιτᾶν ('[Gyges] went to [the queen] at her call without knowing that she had knowledge of what had

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oriental king would display his wife naked to his subject or consult Delphi for a confirmation of his throne. However, the Delphic connection was definitely beyond dispute, if we are to judge by Gyges' gifts to the oracle: cf. Hdt., 1.14; Evans, 1985, 232; Smith, 1902, 262.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Konstan, 1983, 12; Gray, 1995, 203. For the queen's revenge, cf. Tatum, 1989, 171, whose game with visibility and invisibility in the story is quite interesting. Cf. also Paulus Diaconus, *De gestis Langobardorum*, 2. 28, for a striking resemblance of Candaules' wife revenge to Rosamund's upon her husband Alboin, the first king of the Lombards.

<sup>18</sup> Flory, 1987, 36.

happened; for, he had been in the habit of going to see her whenever the queen sent for him'). At least as Herodotus states it, this certainly sounds quite odd and seems to be in contrast with the strict guarding laws and seclusion of the oriental palace.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, although the royal lady seems to imply with the choice she offers to Gyges that his decision is of absolute indifference to her, we cannot ignore the fact that one of her alternatives is quite tempting, for not only does it involve his life but also the throne of Lydia and the queen herself (Κανδαύλην ἀποκτείνοντας ἐμὲ τε καὶ τὴν βασιλῆτην ἔχει τῶν Λυδῶν).<sup>21</sup> Does Herodotus, then, darkly hint at the queen's preference over, or even sexual involvement with Gyges? One more thing that appears to be out of place in the Herodotean story has to do with the fact that Gyges had people to support him after his assassination and usurpation of the Lydian king.<sup>22</sup> If he was truly a victim of a tragic situation and an unwilling agent, how could he have political powers? Is it because his followers weighed the situation and saw in him the future king of Lydia? Or is it that he is not so innocent a victim after all?

Although the royal lady of Lydia remains unnamed throughout the story, her personality dominates the whole episode. It is of importance that although Gyges is not entirely innocent and there are a few details which render him responsible and even hint at a conspiracy, in connection with the queen he is portrayed as a mere object of her power and a puppet in her hands. It is striking how passive he remains at the queen's wishes and in what a cowardly way he opts for his own life over that of the person whom he was supposed to serve and protect. In Herodotus' eyes, Gyges fails to pay the honour due to his king by not performing a brave gesture at the crucial moment, like Arion, Prexaspes and Boges.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Arieti, 1995, 22.

<sup>20</sup> Smith, 1902, 281-282; How and Wells, 1912, at 1.11.

<sup>21</sup> For usurpers marrying their predecessors' wives, cf. Hdt., 3.68; 2 Samuel, 16.21-22. Cf. also How and Wells, 1912, at 1.12.

<sup>22</sup> Stahl, 1975, 2.

<sup>23</sup> For Arion, Prexaspes and Boges, cf. Hdt., 1.23-24; 3.74-75; 7.107, respectively. Cf. also Flory, 1978b, 421; 1987, 37-38; Harrison, 2000a, 237, who refers to Gyges' choice as 'illusory' due to the fact that it was Candaules' fate to die anyway.

Candaules, and so too Xerxes at the end of the *Histories*, are so keen to satisfy their sexual desires that they disregard their queens' honour.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, both queens use their power, patience and intelligence so as to defend their honour and social status. Herodotus does not express a clear judgement upon the queens' revenge. Especially, as far as the Lydian queen is concerned, there are hints that although he does not denounce the reasons for her cruelty, he nevertheless implies a negative attitude towards her personality in the following two ways. Firstly, towards the end of his narrative, he remarks that Gyges is mentioned in the iambic verses of Archilochus. At first sight, there seems to be nothing particularly significant in this. However, if we look at these verses, we will discover that the first line reads as follows: οὐ μοι τὰ Γύγεω τοῦ πολυχρύσου μέλει ('I am not interested in the great treasures of Gyges').<sup>25</sup> Could Herodotus' mention of Archilochus' verses be implying that the riches that Gyges inherited alongside the Lydian throne include a very powerful and dangerous wife? Secondly, it appears that the historian's opinion is even more evident in his inclusion of the Delphic response to Croesus after his fall: Κροῖσος δὲ πέμπτου γονέος ἀμαρτάδα ἐξέπλησε, ὃς ἑὼν δορυφόρος Ἡρακλειδέων δόλω γυναικίῳ ἐπισπόμενος ἐφόνευσε τὸν δεσπότεα καὶ ἔσχε τὴν ἐκείνου τιμὴν οὐδὲν οἱ προσήκουσαν. ('Croesus had to pay for the sin of his ancestor of the fifth generation. Being the guard of the Heraclids, he was led by a woman's guile to murder his king and to take his royal place, when he had no right').<sup>26</sup> Here, the Pythian priestess refers to the Lydian queen as a very cunning woman, and to Gyges as a mere puppet in her hands, while she says nothing of Candaules' irrational passion. In the view of Delphi, the blame is wholly placed on the queen, a fact which takes us back to the role of blame in the mutual rapes in the opening of the *Histories*. There Herodotus' Persian informants are reported to have remarked that the women would not have been 'raped' had they not wished it so themselves, placing the blame on the women and not the men.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Dewald, 1981, 105. Cf. also Gray, 1995, 191, 194, 202-203, her discussion of the similarities between Amestris and Candaules' wife. She comments that the historian 'seems to be structuring his stories in ways that focus on the otherness of barbaric royalty rather than of the masculine female'.

<sup>25</sup> Archilochus, fr. 19 (West). Cf. Asheri, 1997, at 1.12.

<sup>26</sup> Hdt., 1.91.

<sup>27</sup> Hdt., 1.4. Cf. Chapter One.

## b. Semiramis

Herodotus informs us that among the Babylonian rulers there were two that were women. The first queen, who lived five generations earlier than the second, was Semiramis and she was the one who built dykes on the plain so as to prevent the river from flooding it.<sup>28</sup>

Scholars identify Semiramis with the Assyrian queen Sammu-ramat, who was a historical figure of great importance, as many military campaigns and irrigation operations were attributed to her.<sup>29</sup> Compatibly, despite the scant information that the historian provides, the Herodotean Semiramis is portrayed as a very competent ruler, fortifying her city against natural disasters. Nonetheless, it is quite puzzling that although Semiramis features as an outstanding female ruler and independent queen in many Greek sources and inscriptions, Herodotus chooses not to mention anything apart from her construction of the dykes.<sup>30</sup> Why? Perhaps, he intended to reveal more about this Babylonian queen's life and achievements in his *Assyrioi logoi*, which, unfortunately, for some unknown reason, are not included in his *Histories*.<sup>31</sup> Or, maybe, the downplaying of this queen is an implicit part of an argument to enhance the significance of another Babylonian queen, namely Nitocris. Or, it could even be that it is less a matter of argument than it is of 'making room for' Nitocris, a technique of exposition that Thucydides would have called *σάφηνεια*.

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<sup>28</sup> Hdt., 1.184. Cf. also the Introduction.

<sup>29</sup> For Semiramis as the real life Sammu-ramat, cf. Asheri, 1997, at 1.184; Baumgartner, 1959, 300 n.1; Burstein, 1978, 34; Pettinato, 1988. Cf. also Schramm, 1972, 513-521.

<sup>30</sup> For Semiramis, cf. Ctesias, *FgrH*, 688 F 1; Nicolaus of Damascus, *FgrH*, 90 F 1; Polyaeus, 8.26; Deinon, *FgrH*, 690 F 7; Justin, 1.1-2; Lucian, *De dea Syria*, 14.33; Suidas, s.v. *Semiramis*; Diodorus Siculus, 2.20.3-5; Plutarch, *Moralia*, 243c; Dio Chrysostom, *Orations*, 64.2; Dio Cassius, 79.23; Julian, *Oration*, 3.127a; *De Mulieribus*, 1. Cf. Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 223.6, 275.7, 243.8, for Semiramis both as a lustful ruler as well as a builder and ruler. Cf. Berossus, *FgrH*, 680 F 5, 8, his criticism on Greek writers for crediting Semiramis with the foundation of Nineveh. For Semiramis and the sources, cf. Gera, 1997, 65-83.

<sup>31</sup> It seems that Herodotus confused the kings of Assyria and Babylon. For Herodotus' unwritten *Assyrioi logoi*, cf. How and Wells, 1912, 379-380; Myres, 1953, 95; Asheri, 1997, at 1.184; Huxley, 1965, 207-212; Drews, 1970, 181-191; McQueen, 1978, 284-291.

### c. Nitocris of Babylon

Nitocris is the second female Babylonian ruler mentioned in the *Histories*. Herodotus seems more fascinated by this queen than Semiramis for the following two reasons. The first concerns his statement at the very beginning of the narration that αὐτὴ δὲ συνειτωτέρη γενομένη τῆς πρότερον ('this woman was more intelligent than the first'). The second reason is in connection with his rather lengthy discussion of the queen's achievements in comparison with that of Semiramis.<sup>32</sup> In reality, no such queen as Nitocris is found in the Babylonian inscriptions and it is impossible to identify her with a real-life person. It is generally believed that she is an imaginary figure bearing the same name as the Egyptian Nitocris described in the second book of the *Histories*. There, Herodotus himself points out their identical name: τῆ δὲ γυναικὶ οὐνομα ἦν, ἥτις ἐβασίλευσε, τό περ τῆ Βαβυλωνίη. Νίτωκρις ('this queen's name was the same as that of the Babylonian queen, Nitocris'). Nitocris is a common name for princesses in Egypt, and it is quite obvious from their stories that the two queens do not share that only, for they are both deceitful and both responsible for changing the course of a river.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, Momigliano has also suggested that Semiramis and Nitocris are one and the same person owing to the close resemblance the two Babylonian queens bear in terms of their public projects.<sup>34</sup> However, as we shall see, in terms of personality, the two Herodotean Babylonian queens are in no way alike. In the historian's representation, Semiramis features as a peaceful ruler interested in agricultural works, whereas Nitocris appears as engaging in great public construction projects, has worries about a looming war and is quite devious. Gera has commented that 'the Herodotean Nitocris is certainly more notable than his briefly described Semiramis'.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, it could be that there were not two Babylonian queens but one, and somehow the Egyptian Nitocris has been incorporated into Babylonian history. Maybe Herodotus differentiated one Babylonian queen into two because of conflicting indications over her personality, or it could be that it is the historian's sources that are responsible.

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<sup>32</sup> Hdt., 1.185. For Nitocris of Babylon, cf. also *De Mulieribus*, 4.

<sup>33</sup> Hdt., 2.100. Cf. McGinnis, 1986, 78-79, for the Babylonian Nitocris as an imaginary figure. For the Egyptian and Babylonian Nitocris, cf. Lloyd, 1988, at 2.100; Dillery, 1992, 30; Gera, 1997, 106.

<sup>34</sup> Momigliano, 1969, 183-186. Cf. also Dillery, 1992, 30-31. Cf. Plutarch, *Moralia*, 173b, who also confuses Nitocris and Semiramis and has Darius plunder Semiramis' tomb. Cf. also Stobaeus, 10.53.

## 1. *Nitocris' building projects*

Herodotus' account of the queen falls naturally into two parts, the first one dealing with her public constructions. Following the historian's narrative, Nitocris altered the course of the straight-flowing river Euphrates so that the people sailing towards Babylon would have to pass the village of Ardericca located outside Babylon thrice.<sup>36</sup> In addition, she excavated and created a huge lake. Both constructions were built on the side of the city facing Media, for the queen feared Median power. Consequently, the purpose of the building projects focused on the protection of the Babylonian people from a possible attack as they delayed one's entrance into Babylon. Nitocris also provided internal protection and convenience, for she constructed a bridge uniting the two parts of the city of Babylon formerly separated by the river Euphrates. She diverted the river once again, had it flow into the reservoir she built outside the city, and while the channel was dry, built the foundation for a bridge in its bed. She then brought the river back to its former course, and on the foundation, she placed planks that enabled access to the city during the day, but which were withdrawn during the night so as to prevent people from stealing from one another.<sup>37</sup>

Herodotus attributes to Nitocris the irrigation and defensive operations of king Nebuchadnezzar, with a lot of detail and measurements.<sup>38</sup> This king was supposed to have built a tank of water of exaggerated proportions, which must have served as a means of irrigation of the land in times of peace and of flooding the area in case of an invasion.<sup>39</sup> It seems that the reservoir that the Herodotean Nitocris constructed must have served the same purpose. In mentioning that, one does not fail to notice that all of the queen's public constructions revolve around the manoeuvring and the changing of the course of a river, and generally water. At first, the historian seems quite interested.

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<sup>35</sup> Gera, 1997, 107.

<sup>36</sup> For Nitocris' purpose in diverting the river so as to make the journey from Assyria to Babylon lengthier, cf. Powell, 1935a, 73-74.

<sup>37</sup> Hdt., 1.185-186. The Ardericca mentioned here is an unknown village and should not be confused with the Ardericca near Susa in 6.119; cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 1.185; Asheri, 1997, at 1.185.

<sup>38</sup> It could be argued that Nebuchadnezzar's name somehow underlies Nitocris. Both begin with N, followed by a C and an R.

enthusiastic even, about Nitocris' projects and it seems that his conceptualisation of the queen and her feats is a positive one.<sup>40</sup> However, as Gould has quite rightly argued. Herodotus seems at times to disapprove of this tampering with nature and he regards such alterations not as feats but offences.<sup>41</sup> Truly enough, there are plenty of examples in the *Histories* which convey this message. When Xerxes digs a canal through Athos in order to leave a memorial behind just like Nitocris, Herodotus attacks him as proud and vain<sup>42</sup>; he also responds in the same way when the king lashes the Hellespont and attempts to build bridges. Furthermore, when Cyrus tries to cut channels and divert the river Euphrates, as the Babylonian queen did, the historian portrays him as deliberately violating the river.<sup>43</sup> Does Herodotus, then, darkly hint that Nitocris' admirable projects are not so admirable after all, but mere transgressions? A point in favour of this argument is the fact that, despite the queen's attempts to protect her city by diverting the river, Cyrus easily enters and conquers Babylon by using the same reservoir that she built.<sup>44</sup> Although Herodotus does not doubt or reject but, on the contrary, quite applauds Nitocris' wit and military attentiveness, he nevertheless implies that tampering with nature, and, more specifically, in this case, with bodies of water, is highly inappropriate. Arieti has suggested that we should compare Pheros, who polluted water with his spear and consequently had to wash his eyes with impure water, i.e. urine: while Xerxes, who lashed the Hellespont, was defeated at sea, at the battle of Salamis.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> For the construction of the reservoir as Nebuchadnezzar's project, cf. Ctesias, *FgrH*, 688 F 1,9; Abydenos, *FgrH*, 685 F 6; Berossus, *FgrH*, 680 F 8. Cf. also How and Wells, 1912, at 1.185; Asheri, 1997, at 1.185; McNeal, 1986, at 1.185.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Hdt., 2.99, 101; 3.60, for similar water works that draw Herodotus' attention and enthusiasm.

<sup>41</sup> Gould, 1989, 106-109. Cf. also Gera, 1997, 110.

<sup>42</sup> However, it should be noted that leaving a memorial behind is not Xerxes' only motive. It is also to provide safe passage for his fleet after the earlier disaster rounding the Athos peninsula, in Hdt., 6.44. This is the motive that Herodotus gives first in 7.22, and only later does he see it as ostentation and the wish to leave a memorial (cf. 7.24). Perhaps, both motives were involved, but it could be argued that the latter is part of the Greek propagandistic portrayal of Xerxes as tampering with nature, turning land into sea and vice-versa.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Hdt., 7.24, 25, 33-37; 1.189.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Hdt., 1.191.

<sup>45</sup> Hdt., 2.111; 8.96. Arieti, 1995, 177. For Pheros, cf. Chapter Four.

Worthy of attention is also the queen's preoccupation with theft, for she did not build a solid bridge, but she placed planks on its foundation so that they could be removed every night in order to prevent theft among the Babylonians. However, as we shall see, clever and preoccupied though she may have been, she nevertheless practically 'invited' Darius to enter and steal from her tomb.<sup>46</sup>

## 2. *Nitocris' provocative inscription and guile*

Nitocris made certain of her own security by having her tomb over a gate at the busiest entrance of the city, engraving also an inscription that no one should open her tomb for the treasure inside except a king of Babylon and in a case of absolute need: 'τῶν τις ἐμεῦ ὕστερον γινομένων Βαβυλῶνος βασιλέων ἦν σπανίση χρημάτων, ἀνοίξας τὸν τάφον λαβέτω, ὅκοσα βούλεται χρήματα· μὴ μέντοι γε μὴ σπανίσας γε ἄλλως ἀνοιξῆ· οὐ γὰρ ἀμεινον' ('If any king of Babylon after me is in need of money, he can open my tomb and take as much money as he desires. But he should not open it, if he does not lack any. For, it will not do him any good'). According to Herodotus, the tomb remained untouched until Darius became king, who never used the gate because the dead body would be over his head every time he passed through. Intrigued by the inscription, he was annoyed that he could not make use of the treasure that lay inside when the very notice invited him to do so and, thus, had it opened. Once in Nitocris' tomb, he found no money but only an inscription that reprimanded him for his greed and for opening the coffins of the dead: 'εἰ μὴ ἀπληστός τε ἕας χρημάτων καὶ αἰσχροκερδής, οὐκ ἂν νεκρῶν θήκας ἀνέωγες.' ('If you were not insatiable for money and covetous, you would not have opened the coffins of the dead').<sup>47</sup>

Asheri has referred to this passage as a typical Greek anecdote revealing hostility towards Darius and his greed.<sup>48</sup> This may very well be the case, for Herodotus informs us of another incident shortly before the plundering of Nitocris' tomb involving once again Darius' greed, according to which the king attempted to remove a huge statue

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<sup>46</sup> Gera, 1997, 111-112.

<sup>47</sup> Hdt., 1.187. For treasures buried with dead, cf. also Josephus, *Jewish antiquities*, 7.392.

<sup>48</sup> Asheri, 1997, at 1.187. Cf. also Dillery, 1992, 30-31; Hart, 1982, 115; Cook, 1983, 76.



from the Babylonian temple of Bel made of solid gold.<sup>49</sup> However, the historian here clearly suggests that it was Nitocris' inscription that actually encouraged the king to do so. Scholars have argued that the Herodotean Nitocris' epitaph is a Greek fabrication in view of the folk motifs it contains.<sup>50</sup> Whether a fabrication or not, it is quite important in the story, for it is obvious that it is not Darius' plunder but the queen's provocative inscription and trickery that draw Herodotus' attention and interest. In fact, this inscription reveals a lot not only about Darius but also about Nitocris in the Herodotean context. As Gera has pointed out, 'it is ironic that Herodotus' Darius should fall victim to an inscription involving a hoax, for in the *Histories* he himself sets up a monument and an inscription commemorating a devious deed.'<sup>51</sup> And yet, a woman manages to overpower and trick him from her grave. However, even Nitocris has her failings as well, for although she manages to deceive Darius, she nevertheless does so at the cost of having her peace and tomb disturbed.<sup>52</sup>

One point that immediately catches the eye in the tale is Darius' attitude towards the gateway, where the body of the queen lay. Although the Persian king has a problem of walking under the gate, and consequently under the corpse, he nevertheless opens the tomb and comes into proximity to it.<sup>53</sup> Pritchett has suggested that this gateway is actually the gate of Semiramis that Herodotus refers to in Book 3, and which is identified with the Ishtar gate.<sup>54</sup> Dillery has characterised Herodotus' tale of Nitocris'

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<sup>49</sup> Hdt., 1.183. However, Darius did not remove it, but it was Xerxes who actually did: cf. Aelian, *Varia historia*, 13.3; Ctesias, *FgrH*, 688 F 13. Cf. Arieti, 1995, 176-177, who has suggested that Darius' plunder of the temple of Bel and Nitocris' tomb was intended to draw a sharp contrast between Cyrus and his successors. Although he too conquered Babylon, he left certain things undisturbed.

<sup>50</sup> Fehling, 1989, 135; How and Wells, 1912, at 1.187; Gera, 1997, 115; West, 1985, 296.

<sup>51</sup> Gera, 1997, 116. Hdt., 3.88.

<sup>52</sup> However, this must not be taken to mean that Nitocris purposefully revenged herself upon Darius, for she could have no knowledge of who the violator of her tomb could be when she put up the inscription. Cf. Dillery, 1992, 30, who refers to the queen's revenge. Cf. also Flory, 1987, 43; Immerwahr, 1966, 92 n.142, who make a mistake when they refer to Cyrus as the queen's victim.

<sup>53</sup> Darius' unwillingness to walk under Nitocris' tomb could stem from his Zoroastrian practices that forbade proximity to a corpse owing to the impurity of the dead body; cf. Dillery, 1992, 35; Boyce, 1982, 112; Gera, 1997, 118. Cf. also Waters, 1985, 145, his rather weak argument, who explains the king's unwillingness by suggesting that the gate was 'a traffic hazard'.

<sup>54</sup> Pritchett, 1993, 172. Hdt., 3.155.

tomb as fictitious, arguing that the historian built the whole inscription and plundering theme around Darius' unwillingness to walk under the gate.<sup>55</sup> He also went further to suggest that Herodotus did not find Darius' discomfort at being near a corpse strange, but he actually shared it, for the plain reason that the Greeks placed a person's remains in the earth and consequently held the placing of a body above the earth a desecration.<sup>56</sup>

The Babylonian queen Nitocris of the *Histories* and the content of her inscriptions remind us of another powerful Herodotean woman, namely the Massagetan queen Tomyris. Like Nitocris, she too scolds another Persian king for his ἀπληστία.<sup>57</sup> Undeniably, both Cyrus and Darius are portrayed as voracious. Cyrus in his greed for power while Darius in his greed for money. Moreover, both queens are represented as 'obstacles' in the kings' ἀπληστία, limiting Persian expansionism and illustrating the flaws of Persian rulers, who can be undermined and overpowered by women.<sup>58</sup> However, if there is one difference between the 'civilised, technological and deceitful' Nitocris and the 'noble savage' Tomyris, it will have to be that the Babylonian queen is 'her own worst enemy: ultimately, her building feats and artful epitaph -- the outstanding products of her intelligence -- do her no good.'<sup>59</sup>

#### d. Nitocris of Egypt

In his description of Egypt in the second book of his *Histories*, Herodotus informs us that in the long list of Egyptian kings recited to him by the priests from a papyrus roll, there also existed a female ruler. Her name was Nitocris and she succeeded her brother to the throne, after he was slain by his subjects. To avenge her brother, she built a spacious underground chamber and, with the pretence of a feast, she invited the people whom she thought to have been involved in her brother's murder. As they were feasting, she let the river into the chamber from a secret channel and thus drowned

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<sup>55</sup> There is evidence of raised tombs among the Zoroastrians called *dakhmas* or 'Towers of silence' on which the dead bodies were exposed to vultures. However, they were not known in Achaemenid Persia. Cf. Moulton, 1911, 76-77.

<sup>56</sup> Dillery, 1992, 37. Cf. Sophocles, *Electra*, 244; Homer, *Iliad*, 24.54.

<sup>57</sup> Hdt., 1.212. Cf. Chapter One.

<sup>58</sup> For the Persian kings' effeminacy and control by women, cf. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 1993; Brosius, 1996, 67, 195-198. Cf. also Chapter Five.

them, while she cast herself into a chamber full of hot ashes in order to escape vengeance.<sup>60</sup>

As in the case of Semiramis, Herodotus' account of the Egyptian queen is not a lengthy one. He only informs us that she ascended the throne after her brother was murdered, but he does not say how or why the king was slain.<sup>61</sup> Although she is mentioned by other ancient authors, their descriptions barely resemble the vengeful queen of Herodotus, whose sole purpose in the story is her devious avenging of her brother's assassination.<sup>62</sup> Her name and guile immediately bring to mind the other Nitocris. However, as far as the name is concerned, it is not Babylonian but a quite common Egyptian one, born by many priestesses and princesses; it means 'Neith is excellent'.<sup>63</sup> Apart from their homonymy, the two queens resemble each other in their building projects, their diversion of a river, as well as in that they both feature in the *Histories* as deceitful figures. Yet, there are also minor but notable differences between the queens: firstly, the noteworthy construction of the Egyptian Nitocris is not intended for fortification but as a trap for her enemies, and so is the diversion of the river. And secondly, Herodotus seems to put much more emphasis on this queen's cunning by using the word δόλω to denote her 'deadly' invitation to the guilty Egyptians: τούτω τιμωρέουσιν πολλοὺς Αἰγυπτίων δόλω διαφθεῖραι ('she punished with death many Egyptians by guile'). This fatal feast that Nitocris prepares for her victims is a common folk motif found in the *Histories* elsewhere, with the closest

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<sup>59</sup> Gera, 1997, 119-120.

<sup>60</sup> Hdt., 2.100. Cf. also *De Mulieribus*, 3. Cf. Diodorus Siculus, 1.44.4, who also mentions the list of kings, but who says that there existed five Egyptian queens and not one. For the list, cf. also Hdt., 2.142.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Gera, 1997, 103, who has argued that the king was not only Nitocris' brother but also her husband since marriage between siblings was customary in Egyptian royal families. On the subject, cf. Hopkins, 1980, 306-307, 311; Troy, 1986, 104; Tyldesley, 1994, 48-49.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Tyldesley, 1994, 216, who questions Nitocris' reality. But cf. Waddell, 1939, at 2.100; Gardiner, 1961; Lloyd, 1988, at 2.100; How and Well, 1912, at 2.100, who argue that the queen could have actually existed and ruled in a time of confusion and disaster. Indeed, this is a point which Tyldesley, p. 214, accepts. Cf. Newberry, 1943, his discussion about Nitocris as a historical figure. For other sources on Nitocris of Egypt, cf. Manetho, *FgrH*, 609 F 2, F 3a-b; Eratosthenes, *FgrH*, 610 F 1; Dio Cassius, 62.6, 79.23; Julian, *Oration*, 3.127b. Cf. also Chapter Six for Nitocris' identification with the courtesan Rhodopis.

parallel being the banquet that the brother of the Egyptian king Sesostris arranged for the king with the intention of burning him and his family alive.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, notable is Nitocris' death, for she chooses not to die with her enemies but to throw herself into a room full of hot ashes.<sup>65</sup> Gera has suggested a contrast intended by the historian here, between the death of the Egyptians by water and the queen's death by the opposite element of fire, while Lateiner has seen in her end Herodotus' censuring of the queen and her savage behaviour.<sup>66</sup> Nonetheless, if we compare the historian's reaction to and remarks on Pheretima's death, whom he regards beyond doubt as a negative personality, then, we can only reach the conclusion that he remains quite neutral here.

On the whole, even though this Herodotean Egyptian queen holds the supreme power of Egypt as its ruler, she nevertheless is not interested in power, since vengeance is her dictating force and chief concern. It is this small detail that sets her apart from the rest of the queens discussed in this chapter, who are represented as not only holding power but also desiring and pursuing power.

## II. Wise advisors

As Lattimore has quite rightly observed, the wise advisor is 'a familiar figure in the pages of Herodotus'.<sup>67</sup> He features throughout the *Histories* under a variety of names and on different occasions, always trying to avert a tragic situation or offering practical advice. This Herodotean figure embraces a philosophy of life, which reflects upon the historian himself.<sup>68</sup> Although it is mostly men who act as wise advisors or tragic warners in the *Histories*, nevertheless, there is also a significant number of

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. Ranke, 1935, 181.27; Lloyd, 1988, at 2.100. Cf. Eratosthenes, *FgrH*, 610 F 1, who translates the name Nitocris as Ἀθηναΐ Νικηφόρος.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Hdt., 2.107, and my discussion on the passage later on. For other fatal feasts, cf. Hdt., 5.18-20; 1.211. Cf. Lloyd, 1988, at 2.100. For the subterranean room that Nitocris built, cf. Powell, 1935a, 75.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Flory, 1987, 43, who characterised her suicide 'a brave gesture that recalls the nobility of Arion and Prexaspes, and thus illustrates the most positive moral side of the 'clever, vengeful woman'.

<sup>66</sup> Gera, 1997, 104. Lateiner, 1989, 138. For punishment and death by hot ashes, cf. Valerius Maximus, 9.2.6; Ovid, *Ibis*, 315-316.

<sup>67</sup> Lattimore, 1939, 24. Cf. Romm, 1998, 70, who argues that Herodotus 'has taken the tragic chorus as a model for the wise advisor'.

<sup>68</sup> Christ, 1994, 168; Bischoff, 1932, 78.

women, who display both intelligence and prudence in warning or advising their men on matters of utmost importance. Their power is represented as embodied in their 'courage' to stand up in a male world, which undervalues female intellect, as well as in the influence that they are able to exercise upon their men.

### a. Artemisia

Bischoff and Lattimore have brilliantly made a distinction between the tragic warner and the practical advisor in the *Histories*, on the basis that 'an impending catastrophe produces a tragic warner, a problem or proposed stratagem, a practical advisor'.<sup>69</sup> However, it is not always easy to distinguish one type from another, something which is evident in Herodotus' account of the Halicarnassian queen Artemisia, who displays both qualities. For, as we shall see, she features as a tragic warner in her attempt to avert Xerxes from a fight at sea at Salamis, and as a practical advisor after the king's defeat at Salamis.<sup>70</sup> In both roles, she -- as all the Herodotean female wise advisors or tragic warners -- is represented as possessing incomparable insight into matters as well as the prudence and wisdom to analyse them and offer the male the best practical advice and solution.

From the moment Herodotus introduces Artemisia into the narrative, he remarks on her exceptional persona, in connection with both the war and politics, as well as that πάντων δὲ τῶν συμμάχων γνώμας ἀρίστας βασιλεῖ ἀπεδέξατο ('of all the allies, she gave the king the best advice').<sup>71</sup> She first gives her opinion and advice -- or rather tragic warning -- just before the battle of Salamis takes place. Although the allies have urged Xerxes to a sea-battle, she is the only one to urge Xerxes against fighting but to hold his position or to advance to the Peloponnese with a view to shattering the Greek confederacy. She is the only one to foresee defeat and advise against a sea battle, saying: οἱ γὰρ ἄνδρες τῶν σῶν ἀνδρῶν κρέσσονες τοσοῦτό εἰσι κατὰ θάλασσαν, ὅσσον ἄνδρες γυναικῶν ('their men are much stronger than yours at sea, as men are

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<sup>69</sup> Lattimore, 1939, 34; Bischoff, 1932, who, although notes the distinction between Warner (i.e. warner) and Berater (i.e. advisor), he deals almost exclusively with the Warner. For Artemisia as a 'warner', cf. also Waters, 1966, 197.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Lattimore, 1939, 26, 28, 29; Gera, 1997, 207.

<sup>71</sup> Hdt. 7.99. For Artemisia as a warlike figure, cf. Chapter One.

stronger than women'). Yet, Xerxes followed the majority's opinion and, consequently, met defeat.<sup>72</sup>

It is precisely Artemisia's 'failure at the stage of deliberations that determines her extraordinary action in the midst of a defeat she had tried to prevent'.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, Artemisia's words on the inadequacy of the Persian navy, in contrast to the Greek, are later to be remembered by Xerxes when he exclaims that his men have become women and his women men.<sup>74</sup> Then, without realising it, he will confirm what Artemisia had said about his forces in the Persian council. One last thing that should be noted is that it takes courage for a woman to stand up against all the men and express her opinion, which also happens to be in contrast with all the rest, even if she has the king's favour on her side. One could argue here that the Halicarnassian queen perhaps enjoys the license of a court-jester as she is a woman, and indeed, she could be such if we are to judge by the king's initial reaction to her advice and his later secret meeting with her. However, Herodotus attributes to her no such role, for she turns out to be the only one with clear insight into military matters.

The second time that Artemisia offers her advice to Xerxes is after the Persian defeat in the battle of Salamis and it is the king who actually seeks it himself and, oddly enough, in private.<sup>75</sup> Perhaps, he is ashamed of being seen to take advice from a woman, despite evidently valuing her advice highly. Nonetheless, Artemisia is shown to offer her practical advice by urging the king to go back to Persia and leave Mardonius to subdue Greece; for, whether he subdues it or not, it will be to the king's advantage. She says that if Mardonius is to subdue Greece, the achievement will be the king's anyway, for Mardonius is his subject; and if he is not to do so, the king would be safe and away.<sup>76</sup> From the narrative, it seems that Mardonius represents, contrary to the wise prudence of Artemisia, blind and stubborn determination. This is something

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<sup>72</sup> Hdt. 8.68-69.

<sup>73</sup> Munson, 1988, 98.

<sup>74</sup> Hdt., 8.88.

<sup>75</sup> This reminds us of another private conversation between Atossa and Darius in their bedroom in 3.134. In both cases, Herodotus had no way of knowing what was actually said. Cf. Waters, 1966, 168, who remarked that it is the historian's way of presenting his 'broadminded views on politics with suitable characters available to serve as mouthpieces for the several schools of thought'.

<sup>76</sup> Hdt., 8.101-103.

that arouses her undisguised animosity and which she expresses with cold, sharp contempt.<sup>77</sup>

On both occasions that she is required to give her advice, the Herodotean Artemisia displays mental ability and strategic skill not only in topics of the battle but also of speech. She seems to be a very clever woman, for although she defies the allies, she is careful enough not to defy the king himself but on the contrary flatter him by reminding that ἐμποδῶ δέ τοι ἴσταται οὐδεὶς ('no man stands in your path'). Moreover, she is also careful not to undermine herself, reminding the king and the allies of her courage and her feats in battle.<sup>78</sup>

The fact that the second time the king seeks Artemisia's advice he does so in private emphasises the king's absolute power. So why would she not fear his judgement and why should the king listen to her? The most probable answer is that her freedom from compulsion (οὐδεμιῆς οἱ ἐούσης ἀναγκαίης) stressed in 7.99 allows her freedom of speech. As Munson has very acutely noted, 'Artemisia's very role as a wise adviser depends on her not being subject to the overbearing pressures that the Persian system imposes upon the other deliberators -- deference to a royal tradition and fear for personal safety. Artemisia is here the unique ally who stands outside the generally accepted master-slave norm and does her best to contribute to an enterprise in which she is a voluntary partner'.<sup>79</sup> She is portrayed as manipulating a very difficult situation successfully and, despite being on the losing side, she is personally victorious in making the right moves at the right time.

## **b. Gorgo**

Another female figure that features in the *Histories* both as a tragic warner as well as a practical advisor is the Spartan Gorgo. The first time that Gorgo appears in Herodotus' narrative is when she offers her advice to her father, king Cleomenes. According to the historian's account, Aristagoras came to Sparta so as to plead with king Cleomenes to help the Ionians revolt against the Persians. When Cleomenes did not consent to his

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<sup>77</sup> Masaracchia, 1990, at 8.102.

<sup>78</sup> Hdt. 8.68.

<sup>79</sup> Munson, 1988, 96-97.

plea, Aristagoras took a suppliant's garb, followed the king to his house, and, once there, attempted to persuade Cleomenes by offering him money, by offering him even more each time the king refused. It so happened that Cleomenes' young daughter, Gorgo, was present at the scene, for her father did not send her away, despite Aristagoras' request. And when the sum offered to the king reached fifty talents, Gorgo cried out to her father to let the stranger leave, if he did not wish to be corrupted by him ('πάτερ, διαφθερέει σε ὁ ξεῖνος, ἦν μὴ ἀποστὰ ἴης'). Thus, king Cleomenes, pleased with his daughter's counsel, had Aristagoras depart Sparta.<sup>80</sup>

This episode, focusing on Cleomenes' incorruptibility, is actually a sort of duplication, for Herodotus has already narrated a previous attempt to corrupt the king in Book 3. There, too, money was brought to Sparta by another Ionian man called Maeandrius, but in that case as well the Spartan king sent him away before he corrupted him or others. It seems as if both episodes are set within a well-known tradition of Spartan poverty and incorruptibility.<sup>81</sup> However, in the second account, Herodotus inserts a wise advisor in the 'guise' of Cleomenes' daughter, who, oddly enough, is about eight or nine years of age! Although Gorgo's presence is depicted by the historian as accidental, it turns out to be decisive. Nenci has suggested that it is typical of Herodotus to emphasise the role of chance in a story, for in this way he lays stress on minor persons, namely women and children, who assume the role of a protagonist.<sup>82</sup> Young Gorgo is portrayed in the Herodotean account not only as a protagonist but also as a figure with an important political role, who foretells a grand future. Despite being nine years old and a girl, she, nevertheless, is represented as able to grasp the essence of the discussion and at the right moment warn her father of the tragic situation he might involve himself, in case he pursues the matter further. For Dover, however, it is not clear whether Herodotus wanted to believe that the girl was really capable of perceiving such things, or whether she reacted in such a way accidentally.<sup>83</sup> Yet, the readiness with which the Herodotean Gorgo not only realises the situation but also

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<sup>80</sup> Hdt., 5.51. Cf. also Plutarch, *Moralia*, 240d, the only difference being the use of vocative when Gorgo addresses her father, which led Nenci, 1994, at 5.51, to suggest that the absence of vocative in the Herodotean passage reveals reservation, respect or embarrassment due to the presence of a stranger. Cf. also Scott, 1905, 33-34.

<sup>81</sup> Hdt., 3.148. Cleomenes' reluctance to undertake a war reminds us of an analogous reluctance of another sovereign Spartan, Archidamus; cf. Thucydides, 1.80-85.

<sup>82</sup> Nenci, 1994, at 5.51.



reacts to it implies that the historian regards it as no accident but a matter of sharp-wittedness, caution and ethics. As Lattimore has observed, 'Gorgo's warning is more than an opinion on policy, for it keeps Cleomenes from being corrupted and misled against his better judgement; it is a question of morals as well as of prudence'.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, Gorgo must have become 'proverbial for her wisdom', as, later on, Plutarch was to attribute quotable witty remarks to her, which reflect upon good stern moral advice.<sup>85</sup>

Gorgo's intelligence has its counterpart in her later wisdom, for according to Herodotus, she was the only one able to find the solution to a trick that puzzled the Spartans. Following the narrative, Demaratus, being an exile among the Medes, wished to warn the Lacedaemonians of Xerxes' imminent attack against Hellas. For fear of detection, he took a double tablet, scraped away the wax from it, and then wrote the king's intent. Once he did this, he melted the wax back again over the message and sent it to the Lacedaemonians. Now, the story goes that none of the Spartans could solve the riddle of the tablet, save only Gorgo, Cleomenes' daughter and Leonidas' wife, who advised them to scrape the wax away. It was in this way that the Spartans read Demaratus' message and sent it to the rest of the Greeks.<sup>86</sup>

Gorgo features in this episode as a practical advisor, as she shows the Lacedaemonians how to read a concealed message. How and Wells argued that this Herodotean account is an interpolation by the historian, for there is no proper transition to the following book of the *Histories*.<sup>87</sup> However, whether an interpolation or not, the passage is quite significant for Gorgo's wit and her traditional representation as being deeply involved with the political life of Sparta. The Herodotean Gorgo is not only portrayed as being

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<sup>83</sup> Dover, 1974, 199.

<sup>84</sup> Lattimore, 1939, 29.

<sup>85</sup> Plutarch, *Moralia*, 240d-e. Cf. also Pomeroy, 1999, 40 and 56.

<sup>86</sup> Hdt., 7.239. For a similar trick, cf. Hdt., 5.35, where Histiaeus, wishing to signify Aristagoras of his revolt, shaved the head of a trusted slave and tattooed his message on it. He then waited until the hair grew again before sending him to Aristagoras.

<sup>87</sup> How and Wells, 1912, at 7.239. For Gorgo as a practical advisor, cf. Lattimore, 1939, 28.

aware of the affairs of the Spartan state, but also as playing an active part in them through her advice and practical aid.<sup>88</sup>

### c. Polycrates' daughter

According to Herodotus, the governor of Sardis, Oroetes, lured Polycrates the tyrant of Samos to him by offering a part of his wealth if Polycrates was to give him shelter from king Cambyses. His daughter warned him time and time again not to go, fearing a dream that she had seen; for, she saw her father aloft in the air, washed by Zeus and anointed by the sun. Even as Polycrates was to embark upon his ship, his daughter prophesied evil for him, while he threatened her that upon a safe return, he would make sure that she remained a virgin for a long time. However, her father's threat did not deter the young woman for she would rather have her father back safe than get married. The tyrant Polycrates ignored his daughter's warnings and met his death at the hands of Oroetes.<sup>89</sup>

It is evident that the anonymous young woman features in this Herodotean episode as a tragic warner, trying to avert a tragedy involving her father's death. And, more significantly, she does that at all costs, for not even long-term virginity will prevent her from issuing her warnings.<sup>90</sup> She is, thus, also represented as clear-sighted, as she is shown to choose very carefully between two difficult courses of action, that of marriage deprivation and her father's well-being. Like the Spartan Gorgo, in her

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<sup>88</sup> Cf. Waters, 1985, 130, who has quite rightly wondered whether Gorgo embodies the historian's 'tribute to female intelligence or a jeer at the Spartan male population, popularly if erroneously supposed to lack the initiative'. For Herodotus' treatment of Sparta as part of his ethnographies, cf. Chapter Four.

<sup>89</sup> Hdt., 3.124-125. For the use of ominous words to check enterprises, cf. also Plutarch, *Crassus*, 16. For the fulfilment of the dream, cf. Ogden, 1997, 123: 'His daughter's vision was fulfilled when Oroetes crucified him, so that he was washed by Zeus when it rained, and he was 'anointed' as the heat of the sun expelled the moisture from his corpse.' Cf. also Thomas, 2000, 51.

<sup>90</sup> For Polycrates' daughter as a tragic warner, cf. Lattimore, 1939, 26. For her anonymity, cf. Lucian, *De saltatione*, 54. For her name being Parthenope based upon a Hellenistic romance that has been partially reconstructed on the basis of papyrus fragments and of a medieval Persian version, cf. Maehler, 1976, 1-20; Hagg, 1985, 92-102. Cf. Asheri and Medaglia, 1997, at 3.124, who argue that the name Parthenope, which means 'virginal', is implied in the Herodotean account in Polycrates' threat.

Herodotean role as a tragic warrior, she is portrayed as a wise defender of her family's well-being.<sup>91</sup>

#### d. Periander's daughter

Periander, the tyrant of Corinth, and his son Lycophron were on hostile terms because the young man turned against his father when he found out that he had murdered his mother, Melissa. Periander, in return, banished Lycophron and made a proclamation that no one should speak to him or offer him hospitality. Finally, when he realised that none of this would bring his son back to his senses, sent him away to Corcyra. However, when Periander reached a very old age, he desired that Lycophron should become the despot of Corinth in his place, for his elder son seemed to be slow-witted. As Lycophron would not even answer to the messenger that his father sent him, Periander resolved to send his daughter and the young man's sister to talk him into returning to Corinth. Once in Corcyra, Lycophron's sister attempted to bring her brother round by advising him the following: ὦ παῖ, βούλειαι τήν τε τυραννίδα ἐς ἄλλους πεσεῖν καὶ τὸν οἶκον τοῦ πατρὸς διαφορηθέντα μᾶλλον ἢ αὐτός σφεα ἀπελθὼν ἔχειν; ... φιλοτιμίη κτήμα σκαιόν· μὴ τῷ κακῷ τὸ κακὸν ἰῶ· πολλοὶ τῶν δικαίων τὰ ἐπιεικέστερα προτιθεῖσι, πολλοὶ δὲ ἤδη τὰ μητρῴα διζήμενοι τὰ πατρῴα ἀπέβαλον ('O child, would you like the tyranny to pass to others and our father's house to be plundered rather than return and have it for your own?... Pride is the possession of fools. Do not cure one ill with another. There are many who place reason before virtue, and many who have lost their fathers' possessions by being eager to protect their mothers' side'). Being thus instructed by her father, Periander's daughter tried to persuade her brother.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Cf. Dewald, 1981, 105. The story of Polycrates' daughter also offers indirect evidence of the general importance of marriage for Herodotus' women. Cf. also Tourraix, 1976, 373, who observed that Polycrates' threat to keep her a virgin denotes his fear that his daughter's future husband might become his rival in power, as she is his heiress and, consequently, a passive vehicle of power.

<sup>92</sup> Hdt., 3.50-53. For Periander's old age, cf. Nicolaus of Damascus, *FgrH*, 90 F 59; Diogenes Laertius, 1.94. For slow-wittedness, cf. Aeschylus, *Prometheus bound*, 62. Cf. also Sourvinou-Inwood, 1991, 244-267, her discussion about the hostility between Periander and Lycophron.

Although the anonymous daughter of Periander receives only a passing reference in the *Histories*, she nevertheless is important because of her role as a practical advisor. The whole paragraph of her speech is composed of five sentences or commonplaces of popular morality, which are more suitable for a father than for a daughter.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, Herodotus does not deny this fact, for he reports that the young woman addressed her brother by her father's teaching.<sup>94</sup> Yet, she is the one who is portrayed in the *Histories* as the advisor and not Periander, perhaps stressing a woman's influence and wisdom on such matters and occasions.<sup>95</sup> After all, the historian states that Periander chose to send his daughter to Lycophron because he thought that he was more likely to obey her, indicating that women exerted particular influence in matters of intra-family relations.

#### e. Sesostris' wife

Following Herodotus' narrative, when the Egyptian king Sesostris was on his way home after a military campaign, he, his sons and his wife were invited to a feast by the king's brother, who was left in charge of Egypt while the king was away. However, once there, Sesostris' brother piled wood round the house and set it on fire. Sesostris sought counsel with his wife, who advised him to lay two of his six sons on the fire and thus make a bridge so that they might pass over the bodies of the two and escape. This Sesostris did, and two of his sons died in such a way, but the rest were saved.<sup>96</sup>

This Herodotean passage has attracted different opinions and reactions from scholars. It has been argued that this bizarre tale was a mere fabrication, perhaps its basis being

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<sup>93</sup> For the motto 'do not to cure one ill with another', cf. Sophocles, *Ajax*, 362-363; Euripides, *Bacchae*, 839; Thucydides, 5.65. The motto 'there are many who place reason before virtue' is well noted in Gorgias' *Epitaphios* and Aristotle's *The Nicomachean ethics*. Here, it most probably refers to Periander's murder of his wife Melissa, which should be judged with great equanimity by Lycophron. Cf. Asheri and Medaglia, 1997, at 3.53.

<sup>94</sup> There were numerous didactics attributed to Periander, for which cf. Diogenes Laertius, 1.97-98. Cf. Asheri and Medaglia, 1997, at 3.53.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Lateiner, 1989, 34, who argues that the story of Periander's daughter is used by the historian as a 'parody of gender or youth'.

<sup>96</sup> Hdt., 2.107. For Sesostris' return to Egypt, cf. Diodorus Siculus, 1.55.10. Cf. Diodorus Siculus, 1.57.6-8, for another version of the story, where the advice of the king's wife is not mentioned. For the story, cf. also Manetho, *FgrH*, 609 F 9.

the statues of king Sesostris, his wife and his four sons set before the temple of Hephaestus.<sup>97</sup> Spiegelberg has suggested that it has to do with the representation of the Egyptian king as a conqueror, who ‘stepped’ over the bodies of his subjects, while Wainwright has seen in the murder attempt a fertility sacrifice.<sup>98</sup> However, Sesostris’ wife has somehow remained unnoticed. Not even Lattimore lists her among his wise advisors, when she clearly is represented as offering a quite practical and wise advice to the king at a very crucial moment, which carries particular weight on what is ultimately a family/dynastic matter.

The story of Sesostris’ wife and her ‘wise’ advice is paralleled by another piece of ‘wise’ advice given to Xerxes by his ship’s steersman. According to Herodotus, in his return to Asia from his march to Athens, Xerxes’s ship encountered strong winds. As there was a great number of Persians on board, the ship was so heavy that the chances of surviving the storm were slim. Hence, when the steersman was asked by Xerxes whether there was any chance of survival, he answered that they had none unless some of the men jumped overboard. Xerxes took his advice and asked his men to prove their courage and loyalty to their king by jumping, which they did. Thus, Xerxes was saved. However, as soon as they disembarked, the king praised the steersman for saving his life by presenting him with a golden crown, but then decapitated him for being the cause of so many Persians’ death.<sup>99</sup> Similarly, one should not take the advice of Sesostris’ wife to mean that she was bereft of feelings. Indeed, some will argue that her consultation is not so ‘wise’, for two of her sons have to die; yet, the rest get to live.

#### **f. Atossa**

Although the Persian queen Atossa is conceptualised in the *Histories* as a powerful figure and is, therefore, treated as such in Chapter Five (pp.165-170), it could be

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<sup>97</sup> For the statues, cf. Hdt., 2.110. There are many folk motifs in Sesostris’ account: for the treacherous brother, which is an echo of the Seth-Osiris myth, cf. Thompson, 1957, K 2211; for the fire motif, cf. H 1199.10, F 848.4, S 12.2.2; for the motif of a son saving his father, cf. R 154.2 and 3, H 1162.2.

<sup>98</sup> Spiegelberg, 1925, 101-102; Wainwright, 1941, 138-139. Cf. Hallo, 1925, 472-475, who dismisses Spiegelberg’s argument, and Lloyd, 1988, at 2.107, who rejects Wainwright’s argument.

argued that she is also portrayed as a wise advisor, offering practical advice to her husband and king Darius.<sup>100</sup> Herodotus portrays Atossa as advising the Persian king to undertake a war expedition against Hellas, reminding him of his duties not only as a king but also as a successor to the Persian throne and power of Cyrus and Cambyses: ‘ὦ βασιλεῦ, ἔχων δύναμιν Πέρσῃσι. οἶκός δ’ ἐστὶ ἀνδρα καὶ νέον καὶ χρημάτων μεγάλων δεσπότην φαίνεσθαί τι ἀποδεικνύμενον, ἵνα καὶ Πέρσαι ἐκμάθωσι, ὅτι ὑπ’ ἀνδρὸς ἄρχονται (‘O king, you hold sovereign power over the Persians. It is fitting for a young and the master of much money to show the Persians that they are ruled by a man’). Once again, the queen offers her advice on what could be seen indirectly as a family matter. The only differentiation between Atossa and the rest of the women who act as wise advisors in the *Histories* is the queen's motivation. She does not advise Darius purely out of concern for her husband's image as a virile king or for Persian expansionism, but because of her promise to the Greek doctor Democedes, who cured her of a breast ailment and who instructed her to act as such.

### III. Women as vehicles of power

It could be argued that a man's failure in life was the lack of male heirs, for female ones, especially when born to powerful men, could prove to be the source of anxieties because of the power they could transfer to their husbands.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, women are represented in the *Histories* as indirect vehicles of power in their capacity as heiresses. Atossa, the daughter of Cyrus, and Pheretime, the daughter of Battus, are two examples of this phenomenon because of their powerful fathers, while the same seems to apply to widowed queens or generally wives of powerful men, judging by Candaules' wife and Tomyris of the Massagetae.<sup>102</sup> The one who gets the heiress often gets the power that comes along with her, whether this involves a throne or an alliance. In addition, this passive but all too important role of women of bestowing power was not limited to their husbands but it also extended to their sons.

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<sup>99</sup> Hdt., 8.118.

<sup>100</sup> Hdt, 3.133-134. Note that Lattimore, 1939, does not include the Persian queen, Periander's daughter or Sesostris' wife in his list of wise advisors, which, I believe, is an omission on his part.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Dewald, 1981, 95.

<sup>102</sup> Hdt., 7.2-3; 4.205; 1.11; 1.205. For Atossa, cf. Chapter Five; for Pheretime and Tomyris, cf. Chapter One.

### **a. Atossa, Artystone and Cambyses' sisters**

It appears that in Herodotus' representation of Achaemenid Persia a new king does not establish his rule unless he is somehow bound to the man he succeeds, either directly by blood relationship or indirectly by marriage to his predecessor's wife or daughter. This 'power' that women hold in their hands is evident in the cases of Atossa and Cambyses' sisters.<sup>103</sup>

The historian informs us that Darius assumed the Persian kingship not by right of birth but by means of revolt. He is portrayed as legitimating his kingship by marrying Cyrus' daughters, Atossa and Artystone, as well as the daughter of Cyrus' son. Thus, he not only 'married' the throne that came with the royal women but he also secured his kingship from their potential future descendants, who would have a claim to the Persian throne, as they would be of the direct line of Cyrus. The Herodotean Cambyses, on the other hand, was king by right of succession. Yet, the historian reports that he married his own sisters, most probably because -- like Darius -- he sought to prevent 'outsiders' from laying claim to the Persian throne.

### **b. Amasis' daughter and Tomyris**

The daughter of the Egyptian king Amasis and the Massagetan Tomyris are two more Herodotean examples of women as vessels of power.<sup>104</sup> Although Tomyris is not portrayed as a mere passive bestower of power, she also features in the *Histories* as such, as can be seen in Cyrus' wedding proposal. As has already been pointed out in Chapter One, the Persian king was not so much after a wife but after the Massagetan kingship to be sealed by marriage to the wife of the deceased Massagetan king. And when Cyrus did not achieve his purpose by taking advantage of this indirect female power, he marched against Tomyris and the Massagetan land. Similarly, when Cambyses asked for king Amasis' daughter, he aimed at the Egyptian throne which would pass to him alongside his Egyptian royal wife. Like Cyrus, when he discovered Amasis' guile and did not achieve his end through marriage, he warred against Egypt.

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<sup>103</sup> Hdt., 3.31 and 88. For a detailed discussion of marriage practices in Persia, cf. Chapter Five.

<sup>104</sup> Hdt., 3.1; 1.205-206.

### c. Candaules' wife

Like Tomyris, Candaules' wife is another Herodotean woman who is not portrayed just as a passive transmitter of power. In fact, she is shown to take the situation into her hands by actually offering the Lydian kingship rather than passively bestowing it to Gyges through her capacity as the king's wife. What is quite striking in the Candaules/Gyges episode is that Herodotus does not even imply that Candaules' wife shared in any way the kingship with her husband. The fact that the historian refers to her as γυναῖκα (wife, woman) and only once as βασίλεια (queen) underlines this notion and the strictly personal character of their marriage.<sup>105</sup> Herodotus reports that after Gyges killed Candaules, he became master both of the king's wife and the sovereign power (βασιλήτην). Indeed, it is as if Herodotus' use of the word βασιλήτην instead of ἀρχή is meant to emphasise the legality of Gyges' rule, also confirmed by the Delphic oracle.<sup>106</sup>

### d. Agariste

Cleisthenes, the tyrant of Sicyon, in his desire to marry his daughter Agariste to the best man in Hellas, made a proclamation bidding every Greek who thought himself worthy to be his son-in-law to arrive in Sicyon within sixty days and spend a year there. Herodotus records the names of Agariste's suitors, who were thirteen in number and quite prominent in their origin, as well as the elaborate year-long hospitality Cleisthenes offered to these young men, as his intention was to monitor their manner of life closely. Among the suitors, he distinguished the two Athenian men, Megacles and Hippocleides, with the latter pleasing him more owing to his manly worth, but above all, his lineage, for he was related to the Cypselids. When the year passed, however, and the night came that Cleisthenes would name his future son-in-law, Hippocleides got drunk and danced on a table in a manner that displeased the Sicyonian tyrant, who informed him that he had danced his marriage away: 'ὦ παῖ Τισάνδρου, ἀπορχήσαιο γε μὲν τὸν γάμον' ('Oh son of Tisander, you have danced your

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<sup>105</sup> Cf. Tourraix, 1976, 370.

<sup>106</sup> As Tourraix, 1976, 371, has observed, we are not so interested in whether the Delphic oracle is authentic, but in the importance that Herodotus attaches to it, for it appears that he thinks of it as a guarantee of religious character.



marriage away'). Thus, Hippocleides lost his suit and Cleisthenes chose his second favourite candidate, Megacles, to become his daughter's husband and his son-in-law.<sup>107</sup>

Agariste is the only recorded child of Cleisthenes in the *Histories* and, consequently, one can only reasonably presume that she is also his heiress, judging by the importance attached to the choice of husband.<sup>108</sup> Most probably, the aristocrats who appeared before Cleisthenes as his daughter's suitors thought that they were competing not only for Agariste's hand but also for the throne of Sicyon and with it Cleisthenes' power. Some scholars have rather concentrated on Agariste's wooing and have assumed that this Herodotean story could only mean that she was the last of the Orthagorid line, and consequently the strain she presented to Cleisthenes was great, for he did not have to give away only a daughter but also the dynasty itself.<sup>109</sup> At first sight, this assumption raises a problem, for Herodotus' account does not imply a competition for succession nor indeed does he record the succession of Megacles to the throne.<sup>110</sup> However, towards the end of the story, the historian is explicit that Cleisthenes betrothed his daughter to Megacles, νόμοισι τοῖσι τῶν Ἀθηναίων ('according to the laws of the Athenians'). Consequently, it is indirectly stated in the Herodotean narrative that the heir-proper is the son sired upon Agariste and not Megacles himself, by analogy to the custom of the Athenian *epikleros*, whose inheritance passed to her

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<sup>107</sup> Hdt., 6.126-130. For Cleisthenes' genealogy, cf. Pausanias, 2.8.1, who supports Herodotus' record. Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1315b14-15; Plutarch, *Moralia*, 553b, who include Orthagoras in the genealogy as the founder of the dynasty, whereas Herodotus does not. Generally, for the subject of the Orthagorid genealogy, cf. Griffin, 1982, 40-41. For Cleisthenes' pro-Athenian feelings, cf. Ogden, 1997, 104; for his pro-Cypselid proclivity, cf. Ure, 1962, 180 n.3. For the dance that cost Hippocleides the marriage, cf. Dewald, 1981, 95; Ogden, 1997, 117; McQueen, 2000, at 6.129. For the marriage between an Athenian citizen and a stranger, cf. Ogden, 1996a, 32-69, esp. 51-52; McQueen, 2000, at 6.130; How and Wells, 1912, at 6.130.

<sup>108</sup> For the wooing of Helen which bears many similarities with that of the Herodotean Agariste, cf. Hesiod, *Catalogue of women*, fr. 196-204; Apollodorus, 3.10.8; Pausanias, 3.20.9; Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 81. Cf. also Euripides, *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, 49-71, where Tyndareus lets Helen choose her husband among the suitors and compare it with another Herodotean tale regarding Callias' daughters in 6.122. Cf. McQueen, 2000, at 6.126.

<sup>109</sup> Skalet, 1928, 160-161; Gernet, 1981, 289-301.

<sup>110</sup> Leahy, 1968, 11; Ogden, 1997, 117.

sons and not her husband.<sup>111</sup> In addition, it should not escape our notice that the suitors' competition and the elaborate hospitality they received could only be a lavish display on the part of Cleisthenes, as Hammond has suggested.<sup>112</sup> Maybe Herodotus' message in this passage has to do with the Sicyonian tyrant's vanity, who, because he thought that there can exist no satisfactory match for him and his power, he organised this competition to illustrate exactly this point. After all, the historian himself records that his proclamation was addressed only to ὄσοι σφίσι τε αὐτοῖσι ἦσαν καὶ πάτρῃ ἐξωγκωμένοι ('those who took pride in themselves and in their countries'), which could very well apply to men of aristocratic birth, but which could also imply men who thought themselves worthy to become Cleisthenes' relatives by marriage to his daughter.<sup>113</sup> This latter fact reminds us also of another story in the *Histories* regarding Callias, who promised his three daughters that they could wed any husband they should choose in all Athens.<sup>114</sup> This passage is actually quite interesting, for usually marriage served as a means of returning favours, sealing alliances, keeping the property inside the family, and ensuring friendships.<sup>115</sup> It was always the men who gained from a marriage and not the brides, who would normally not be consulted and in most cases, would not even see their husband prior to the betrothal. It is not far-fetched then to assume that Callias, like Cleisthenes, opted for an unusual way of marrying off his daughters so as to emphasise his superiority and the lack of a worthy match.

To return to Agariste, whether she was important to the succession or not, she nevertheless features in the *Histories* as the daughter of a powerful man.<sup>116</sup> She might not bestow the power of government to her husband, but she most certainly bestows power through a powerful alliance. After all, tyrants did seek to marry their daughters

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<sup>111</sup> Cf. Sealey, 1990, 30, 92 and 156; Schaps, 1979, 27; Lacey, 1968, 24 and 105; Humphreys, 1983, 25; Just, 1989, 97.

<sup>112</sup> Hammond, 1956, 46.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. McQueen, 2000, at 6.126, who states that the proclamation refers to men of aristocratic birth.

<sup>114</sup> Hdt., 6.122. Cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 6.122; McQueen, 2000, at 6.122; Davies, 1971, 256-258, who argue that this passage is an interpolation, firstly because it contains words and phrases which are un-Herodotean and secondly because Plutarch does not criticise the episode when he mentions Callias. Cf. Plutarch, *Moralia*, 863.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Hdt., 1. 60, 74; 3.137; 6.41; 8.136.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Schol. Aeschines, 2.80, for the indication of Cleisthenes' having male issue.

outside their kin so as to further their political alliances, and if they were not careful enough in their choice, it could prove disastrous.<sup>117</sup>

#### e. Argeia

Herodotus informs us that when the king of Sparta Aristodemus died shortly after his wife Argeia gave birth to twin sons, the Spartans wished to follow their custom and make the older child king, but were unable to do so because they could not distinguish between the two. When they consulted their mother Argeia on the issue, she pretended not to be able to tell the difference between them either, for she desired that both her sons should become kings. The Spartans resolved to take the matter to Delphi, where the Pythian priestess bade them have both twins kings, but respect the older one more. Thus, the Spartans were still faced with their initial problem until a Messenian called Panites advised them to watch the mother and check if she ever tended one of the twins before the other. The Spartans acted upon Panites' recommendation and observed that Argeia indeed consistently took care of the older child first. This child, called Eurysthenes, they recognised as first-born and they raised publicly, while they presumably left his younger brother, Procles, with Argeia at home.<sup>118</sup>

Although this Herodotean tale of Argeia and the foundation of the dual kingship in Sparta raises more questions than it answers, it nevertheless is an excellent example of Herodotus' picture of women's passive but influential role as bestowers of power.<sup>119</sup> Argeia, despite being the queen of Sparta, does not rule on her own after her husband's death, for the historian informs us that it is her brother Theras who has the power until the twins come of age.<sup>120</sup> She only becomes important after the death of her husband and because of her attempt to conceal the identity of her eldest son, thus,

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<sup>117</sup> Cf. Hdt., 3.50; Thucydides, 6.59. Cf. also Leahy, 1968, 11-12; Griffin, 1982, 41.

<sup>118</sup> Hdt., 6.52. For the raising of the king's eldest son publicly, cf. Plutarch, *Agésilas*, 1; McQueen, 2000, at 6.52. For the historical dates of the twin kings, cf. Forrest, 1968, 27.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Vandiner, 1991, 195-196, who does not accept the Herodotean account on the dual kingship. For the problems that the passage of Argeia raises, cf. Gera, 1997, 122.

<sup>120</sup> Hdt., 4.147. For Theras as an example of a powerful mother's brother, cf. Dougherty, 1993, 17; Bremmer, 1983, 173-186.

contributing to the institution of the dual kingship.<sup>121</sup> She is probably not even supposed to be clever, as Gera has suggested, for the following reason. Despite refusing to reveal the first-born, and although she notices that she is being watched by the Spartans, she fails to realise her countrymen's purposes and continues to take care of the eldest child first.<sup>122</sup> In her refusal to comply with the Spartan custom of primogeniture, she reveals the truth by acting in accordance with the very custom she attempts to deny. It is in this context that Argeia is portrayed in the *Histories* as a bestower of power, as well as in her refusal to choose between her children. Gera has suggested that Argeia's reason for the dual kingship might have been based on an attempt to 'avoid the inevitable jealousy and rivalry that would arise', and indeed it seems as if this is the case.<sup>123</sup> Nonetheless, in order to achieve her purpose, she relies on her capacity both as a queen and a mother, knowing that unless she names the successor, she is most likely to somehow circumvent the custom and bequeath the ruling power to both her children. And even though it is the Delphic oracle that actually decides upon both twins to become kings, it is Argeia's silence that ultimately confers the kingship on both.

#### f. Labda

According to the Herodotean narrative, a strictly endogamous aristocracy ruled Corinth. It so happened that Amphion, a member of this Bacchiad aristocracy, had a lame daughter called Labda, whose disability deterred the rest of the Bacchiads, who would not marry her. Thus, her father married her instead to Eetion, a Lapith of the deme Petra. As no children were being born to Eetion either from Labda or any other woman, he decided to enquire into the matter in Delphi, where the Pythian priestess prophesied the birth of a son from Labda, destined to dispose of the monarchic men and rule over Corinth. Herodotus informs us that a similar but (up until then) obscure

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<sup>121</sup> Cf. Pausanias, 3.1.6; Apollodorus, 2.8.2, for Aristodemus' death before the Dorian invasion.

<sup>122</sup> Gera, 1997, 125, also adds that in Herodotus' text we are meant to admire Panites' plan. For Panites, cf. also Christ, 1994, 183-184. Cf. Millender, 1999, 357, who refers to Argeia as a crafty woman.

<sup>123</sup> Gera, 1997, 123-124. However, as Gera herself notes, Argeia's plan failed 'because Herodotus tells us that the twin brothers were always at odds with one another once they grew up'. For rivalry and jealousy between twins and generally brothers, cf. Buxton, 1994, 143-144; Dougherty, 1993, 17.

oracle had been delivered previously to the Bacchiads, who, as soon as they heard the oracle given to Eetion, realised the threat to their rule. So, they resolved to send ten Bacchiad men over to Eetion's house to kill the child, agreeing that the first to receive it should dash it to the floor. Labda, thinking that they came in friendship, gave them the baby, but its smile aroused the pity of its killers, who left the house without completing their appointed task. Labda overheard them outside the gate discussing the true purpose of their visit, and hid her son into a beehive for fear the men might come back. Indeed, the ten Bacchiads did enter the house again, searched for the baby, but, being unable to find it, left and told the rest of the Bacchiads that the baby was dead. The infant was thus saved, for it was fated to be the source of ills, and was named Cypselus because of the beehive he was hidden in.<sup>124</sup>

Like Argeia, Labda is another Herodotean woman who features as a bestower of power to her son. Her story is one which is wholly characterised by lameness, not only in connection with her own physical disability, but also with her 'lame' marriage, her 'lame' son, and the 'lame' power she indirectly bequeaths to Cypselus. To start with her name, Herodotus only mentions that she was lame and leaves it to us to imagine what her actual physical disability was, drawing our attention to the woman's name: Ἀμφίωνι δὲ ἐόντι τούτων τῶν ἀνδρῶν γίνεται θυγάτηρ χωλή, οὐνομα δὲ οἱ ἦν ('Amphion, who was one of these men, had a lame daughter, whose name was Labda'). It seems that Labda (Λάβδα) stood for a graphic symbolism for the woman's legs, which must have been distorted in the shape of the letter la(m)bda of the Greek alphabet.<sup>125</sup> However, it could also be argued that her lameness was symbolic because of her 'lame' marriage.<sup>126</sup> The historian states that the Bacchiad aristocracy was strictly endogamous, most probably so as to maintain the privileges of rule among

<sup>124</sup> Hdt., 5.92. Cf. Nicolaus of Damascus, *FgrH*, 90 F 57, for a rationalised version. For the history of Corinth, the Bacchiads and Cypselus, cf. Dunbabin, 1948, 51-66; Bockisch, 1982, 51-66; Ducat 1961, 418-425; Stahl, 1983, 202-220. For the oracles regarding the birth of Cypselus, cf. Den Boer, 1957; Vernant, 1982, 27-29; Nenci, 1994, at 5.92. Cf. Roux, 1963, for the *kypsele* as a beehive.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 5.92; Oost, 1972, n.29; Ogden, 1997, 65 and 90; Jameson, 1986, 3-4 and 10-11.

<sup>126</sup> For the perception of lameness as symbolic, cf. Vernant, 1982, 20-22; Nenci, 1994, at 5.92. For an example of symbolic lameness, cf. Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 3.3.3, for Agesilaus' lame kingship.



themselves.<sup>127</sup> Yet, Labda married a man outside this circle, and, thus, was thrust out of the line she would have otherwise perpetuated. As Powell has suggested, her position is very similar to that of Euripides' Electra. She is unable to marry a person of her own social position and rank, but she is also not allowed to marry someone of low origin. The only solution is to become the wife of 'a man of ancient nobility reduced to poverty and lowliness.'<sup>128</sup> However, by marrying against the rules, Labda was disqualified from giving birth to a legitimate Bacchiad, thus transferring her metaphorical lameness to her son, who, in this context, could be regarded a bastard.<sup>129</sup> Cypselus, then, transfers this 'lameness' to his rule of Corinth, when he seizes the power from the Bacchiads. This is quite appropriately implied in the second oracle in Herodotus, which reads as follows: πολλῶν δ' ὑπὸ γούνατα λύσει ('he will slacken the knees of many [i.e. Bacchiads]'). As Ogden has observed, 'this is a Homeric formula which means 'kill', i.e. 'make the knees buckle in death'.<sup>130</sup> However, in context, the slackening of the knees also points to lameness of the legs, which interestingly enough parallels Labda's lameness.

Cypselus takes back what is rightfully his from the very beginning, for, after all, he is a descendant of the Bacchiad line through his mother. Moreover, it could be argued that Herodotus' story leaves open the possibility that the right of succession could pass through females in Corinth; why else were the Bacchiad girls expected to

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<sup>127</sup> For the Bacchiads' endogamy and generally for dynastic oligarchies, cf. Whibley, 1896, 121; How and Wells, 1912, at 5.92. Cf. also Broadbent, 1968, 56-57, who questions Herodotus' presentation of Cypselus' parentage as unusual. For endogamy to maintain nobility, cf. Euripides, *Orestes*, 1675-1677.

<sup>128</sup> Powell, 1935b, 159, who adds that Eetion's location in the deme of Petra, a probably outlying locality, further emphasises his connection with a low rank.

<sup>129</sup> Cypselus' bastardy could be further argued in connection with his mock exposure in the beehive; cf. Vernant, 1982, 28. Generally for Cypselus as a bastard, cf. Ogden, 1997, 88-89. For Cypselus' name deriving from the beehive and connected with his bastardy, cf. Ogden, 1997, 89; Vernant, 1982, 36 n.25; Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1988, 220 and 470 n.30. Generally, for Cypselus' name, cf. Ure, 1962, 197-213; Roux, 1963, 279-289; Ogden, 1997, 89-90; Oost, 1972, 17-18. For Cypselus being hidden in a chest and not a beehive, cf. Pausanias, 5.17.5. Cf. also McGlew, 1993, 61.

<sup>130</sup> Ogden, 1997, 90. Cf. Homer, *Iliad*, 15.91.

intermarry?<sup>131</sup> Whatever the case is, the bottom line is that Labda features in the *Histories* as another woman of a powerful family transmitting that power to her son.

### g. Mandane

The story of Astyages in Book 1 of the *Histories* serves as an introduction to Cyrus' birth and upbringing, his successful rebellion against his grandfather Astyages, and his legitimate succession to the Lydian throne. According to Herodotus, Astyages had two dreams warning him of Cyrus' birth and his succession. At first, he dreams that enough water flows from his daughter Mandane to fill his city and overflow Asia. Having had the dream interpreted by the Magi and fearing its meaning, he decides to wed his daughter Mandane to the Persian Cambyses, whom Astyages holds to be lower than a Mede of middle estate. But in the first year of Mandane's marriage to Cambyses, and while the woman was pregnant, Astyages has another dream. This time he sees a vine grow from his daughter, which covers the whole of Asia. Fearing the vision once again, he sends for his daughter and as soon as she gives birth, he takes away the child, aiming to kill it. However, his plans fall through. Cyrus survives and rebels against his grandfather Astyages, claiming what was legitimately his, that is, the Median throne.<sup>132</sup>

In the Herodotean narrative, there is a remarkable resemblance between Mandane and Labda. Like the Corinthian Labda, Mandane, the daughter of the Lydian king Astyages, was married against the rules and to a lesser man, owing to the ominous dream that her father had concerning her future child.<sup>133</sup> Like Cypselus -- if we are to believe that he underwent a mock exposure by his placement in the beehive -- the baby Cyrus was exposed, and like Cypselus, he escaped death because of divine providence,

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<sup>131</sup> Cf. Broadbent, 1968, 40; Oost, 1972, 13; Nenci, 1994, at 5.92. For the right of succession through females generally in Greece, cf. Gernet, 1955, 131-133; Lacey, 1968, 202, 209, 210, 212-213 and 230.

<sup>132</sup> Hdt., 1.107-113. Cf. also Justin, 1.4; Charon, *FgrH*, 687b F 2. For Astyages' dreams, cf. Pelling, 1996, 68-77. Generally, for dreams in Herodotus, cf. Missiou, 1993.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. Hdt., 1.91, where, although it is not mentioned that Cambyses was a king, his low status is indicated by his being under the rule of the Medians. For Cyrus' father, cf. Ctesias, *FgrH*, 688 F 9; Nicolaus of Damascus, *FgrH*, 90 F 66; Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 1.2.1.

as he was destined to be the source of great ills.<sup>134</sup> The Lydian Mandane, just like Labda, indirectly passes her power of birth and everything this entails to her infant Cyrus, who ultimately returns to claim what was rightfully his and becomes the ruler, as he should have been in the first place.

## h. Phronime

Another Herodotean tale that bears close resemblance to that of Labda and Cypselus involves Phronime and her son Battus. According to the historian, Phronime was the daughter of Etearchus, the ruler of Oaxus in Crete. When the girl's stepmother accused her of unchastity, her father tricked a Theran trader called Themison into swearing to throw her into the sea. Yet, Themison freed himself from the oath by briefly dipping Phronime into the sea, having bound her first with ropes. As soon as they reached Thera, Phronime became the concubine of the notable Theran Polymnestus, and after a while she bore a weak son of stammering speech, whom she named Battus. Although the Therans and Cyreneans agree that this was the boy's original name, Herodotus does not. According to him, Βάττος δὲ μετωνομάσθη, ἐπεῖτε ἐς Λιβύην ἀπῖκετο, ἀπὸ τοῦ χρηστηρίου τοῦ γενομένου ἐν Δελφοῖσι αὐτῷ καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς τιμῆς, τὴν ἔσχε, τὴν ἐπωνυμίην ποιούμενος· Λίβυες γὰρ βασιλέα βάττον καλέουσι. καὶ τούτου εἵνεκα δοκέω θεσπίζουσιν τὴν Πυθίην καλέσαι μιν Λιβυκῆ γλώσση εἰδυῖαν, ὡς βασιλεὺς ἔσται ἐν Λιβύῃ. ('He changed his name to Battus when he went to Libya, taking this new name after the oracle given to him at Delphi and because of the rank he received. For, the Libyans call the king 'Battus', and this, I think, is why the Pythia called him so, using a Libyan name, because she knew that he was to become king in Libya').<sup>135</sup>

Once again, as in the case of Labda, Phronime's story is characterised by lameness. Only this time the physical disability is not hers but her son's.<sup>136</sup> Furthermore, her 'lame' relationship with Etearchus is of importance, for not only is she an alien, if we take it into consideration that she is Cretan while he is Theran, but also that she is not

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<sup>134</sup> Cf. Ogden, 1997, 89.

<sup>135</sup> Hdt., 4.154-155. For Battus' real name supposedly being Aristoteles, cf. Pindar, *Pythian Odes*, 5.87.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. Ogden, 1997, 58, who observes that 'just as Cypselus' mother, Labda, is associated with him in his deformity, so Battus' mother, Phronime, is associated with him in his expulsion of water'. Cf. also Jameson, 1986, 9.



Etearchus' wife but his concubine. Consequently, Battus is a bastard, and, thus, socially 'lame'. However, the transmission of power from mother to child is not as clear in this Herodotean tale as in Labda's or Mandane's. It is rather implied in the Libyan etymology of Battus' name, if we are to believe Herodotus' version, and his later rule of Cyrene.<sup>137</sup> As Tourraix has observed, Battus was destined to rule over the kingdom that his Libyan name gave him, owing to his mother's royal birth.<sup>138</sup>

#### i. The wife of the Macedonian king and Perdicas

According to Herodotus, after three Argive brothers named Gauanes, Aeropus and Perdicas were banished from their homeland, they came to Lebaea in Macedonia where they worked in the king's household, one tending horses, another oxen, and Perdicas, who was the youngest, the lesser flocks. Because in old times not only the common people but also the ruling houses lacked in wealth, it was the Macedonian king's wife that cooked food for the three brothers. It so happened that every time she baked bread, the loaf intended for Perdicas 'grew double in size' (διπλήσιος ἐγίνετο), and so she told her husband, who thought it was a portent signifying a great matter.<sup>139</sup>

The connection between the anonymous Macedonian king's wife and the power she bestows to Perdicas is not explicit in this Herodotean tale. Nevertheless it is implied in the bread that she bakes for him -- thus representing the 'mother' who caters after her children's needs -- which ever grows double in size; in Ogden's words, 'a kingly double portion'.<sup>140</sup> The double portion features as an omen of kingship in other

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<sup>137</sup> For Battus as a title which became a Greek name, cf. Thucydides, 4.43. Cf. also How and Wells, 1912, at 4.155; Corcella and Medaglia, 1993, at 4.155. However, there are sources that hold the view that the name of Battus derived from the Greek verb *battarizo* meaning 'stutter', which denoted his stuttering speech. For the subject, cf. Hesychius, s.v. *Battos*; Suidas, s.v. *Battos* and *battarizein*. Cf. Ogden, 1997, 54-56; Masson, 1976, 92; Holland, 1926; 176-177. Cf. also Masson, 1976, 84-88, who has shown Herodotus' etymology of Battus' name to be false.

<sup>138</sup> Tourraix, 1976, 373.

<sup>139</sup> Hdt., 8.137. Cf. Thucydides, 2.99-100 and 5.80, who agrees with Herodotus as to the tracing of the Macedonian kings' descent from Argos. Cf. Theopompus, *FgrH*, 115 F 393, for the line of the Macedonian kings. For the names of the three brothers, cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 8.137; Masaracchia, 1990, at 8.137.

<sup>140</sup> Ogden, 1997, 121. For the double portion of the Spartan kings, cf. Hdt., 6.57 and 7.103. Cf. also Ogden, 1997, 22; How and Wells, 1912, at 8.137. For members of ruling houses doing household chores, cf. Homer, *Iliad*, 6.424; *Odyssey*, 6.85-98.

passages in the *Histories*, and here the swollen loaf signifies Perdiccas' supremacy in the family; he is destined to subdue Macedonia and become the founder of a line of Macedonian kings.<sup>141</sup> As Dubois has commented, 'his political power is represented phallically here, by the size of his loaf.'<sup>142</sup>

#### j. Pisistratus' wife and Phye

The transmission of power through females is overt in the Herodotean story of Pisistratus. Following the narrative, Pisistratus lost the tyranny of Athens when the factions of Megacles and Lycurgus turned against him and drove him away. However, as the two factions were in dispute, Megacles sent a message to Pisistratus offering his daughter in marriage as well as the Athenian sovereign power. Pisistratus accepted the offer and the two men devised a plan for his return to Athens. They took a beautiful and tall Paeonian woman called Phye and, having dressed as the goddess Athena, she escorted Pisistratus back to the city of Athens, thus divinely reinstating his power.<sup>143</sup> As soon as Pisistratus won back the Athenian sovereignty, he married Megacles' daughter. Yet, because of a curse and because he already had sons by his previous wife, he wished to have no more. So, he had 'unconventional intercourse' (ἐμίσητό οὐ κατὰ νόμον) with his new wife. The girl told her mother who told her husband, and Megacles, being angry at Pisistratus, once again united with the other faction and drove Pisistratus out once more.<sup>144</sup>

Pisistratus owes his return to Athens and his sovereign power to a woman, for both Phye and Megacles' daughter are portrayed as the vehicles of this power.<sup>145</sup> Nonetheless, Pisistratus risks the benefits he has gained through his marriage to Megacles' daughter through abnormal consummation. In Herodotus' representation,

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<sup>141</sup> Hdt., 6.57; 7.103. Cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 8.137. Cf. Hdt., 8.138, for Perdiccas winning the sovereign power of Macedonia.

<sup>142</sup> Dubois, 1988, 116. For the double portion of Perdiccas, cf. Aly, 1969, 197.

<sup>143</sup> One could argue that Phye breaks the convention that Athenian women should not be named. However, it seems that her name is symbolic and closely connected with Pisistratus' tyranny as it means 'growth'.

<sup>144</sup> Hdt., 1.60-61. Cf. also Plutarch, *Moralia*, 858c. For the curse on Pisistratus' family, cf. Hdt., 1.59.

<sup>145</sup> For Phye, cf. Chapter Seven.

Pisistratus not only gains but also loses power because of women. In other words, they are shown to be both the vehicles and guarantors of power.<sup>146</sup>

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In general, the ancient Greek society did not offer individual women the opportunity to act outside the context of the family, let alone assume a position of dominance and rule. The reason is well summed up by Aristotle, who states in his *Politics* that ἔτι δὲ τὸ ἄρρεν πρὸς τὸ θῆλυ φύσει τὸ μὲν κρεῖττον τὸ δὲ χειρὸν καὶ τὸ μὲν ἄρχον τὸ δ' ὑποχόμενον ('the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior, the male ruler and the female subject').<sup>147</sup> However, in the Herodotean narrative, women do acquire power both in its literal sense by becoming rulers of states (although it should be noted that they are rulers of non-Greek states), as well as in a more indirect form as powerful wise advisors of male rulers, and vehicles of power. We should not take that to mean that this was Herodotus' way of projecting his revolutionary for the time ideas about women, power and rule; after all, he was a Greek, and above all a male. We should rather focus on his neutral, or perhaps even favourable, representation of women in connection with power, which conceptualises them not as usurpers but as equally capable as men to take courageous action and wise decisions, indeed, to rule with the same morals and valour as their male counterparts would.

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<sup>146</sup> Tourraix, 1976, 371-372.

<sup>147</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, 1254b 13-15.

## Chapter Three: The female sex in charge

Ὁὐ μὲν γάρ τι γυναικὸς ἀνὴρ λήϊζεντ' ἀμεινον τῆς ἀγαθῆς, τῆς δ' αὖτε κακῆς οὐ βίγιον ἄλλο. ('A man gains as his prize no better thing than a good wife and nothing to chill him to the bone like a bad one').<sup>1</sup> Nothing is more revealing about a woman's twofold -- for the Greeks -- nature than these two lines recorded of Hesiod. She is capable of both great good and great evil. She is a creature that poses a threat to the family and consequently to society. She is 'a force which needs direction and control' so as not to overstep the thin line between civilisation and chaos and upset the balance of society.<sup>2</sup> Generally speaking, she embodies everything that the male fears as he dreads to think that there might be a time or a situation when the woman will be in charge.

In the *Histories*, we do come across women, or rather groups of women, who take over control from the male. However, Herodotus does not conceptualise them as chaotic or spiteful usurpers. On the contrary, they are almost always shown to take charge whenever the men are in no position to do so themselves, which emphasises their positive and protective social role. In order to expound Herodotus' treatment of women in topsy-turvy societies, they may be divided into three categories, which are closely linked. In fact, it could be said that, in most cases, they are inter-dependent: I) Women and reversed worlds; II) Women and colonisation; III) Women and preservation of culture.

### I. Women and reversed worlds

#### a. Women consorting with slaves

Greek society was marked by a double exclusion, that of women and that of slaves. The exclusion of women made it a 'men's club' while the exclusion of the slaves

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<sup>1</sup> Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 702-703.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur, 1973, 25.

made it a 'citizen's club.'<sup>3</sup> Aristotle compared the dangers which would arise should the women and slaves be treated with intemperance.<sup>4</sup> The conclusion drawn by this comparison is that in each case, there is a political threat involved in the most direct sense. And if the women were to join forces with the slaves, or, even worse, if there was to exist a sexual union between them, the result would be catastrophic as it would stand for a complete reversal of the normal order. Indeed, the union between women and slaves is a recurring theme in ancient Greek literature.<sup>5</sup> Herodotus himself records two such stories in which the women consort with their slaves and have children by them while their husbands are away on campaigns. However, as we shall see, they are not represented as usurpers, for their motives are purely protective.

### 1. *The Scythian women*

According to Herodotus, while the Scythian men were away from their homes during the Median War for twenty-eight years, their women consorted with the slaves. As a result of this union, a new race was created, whom the Scythians had to confront and fight upon their return. At first, the Scythians could gain no advantage over the youths. At last one of them stood up and counselled them to encounter the youths in battle carrying whips instead of weapons of war, for after all they were still their slaves. The Scythians consented and acted as such and thus their enemies, amazed by what they saw, had no more thought of fighting, but fled.<sup>6</sup>

One would expect that the main theme of the episode would be the usurpation of roles by the women but, surprisingly enough, the story mainly revolves around a 'slave-like' ideology on the part of both the Scythian 'masters' and the new race of 'slave-free'

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<sup>3</sup> Vidal-Naquet, 1981, 188. He also remarks, and quite justly, that it was almost 'a threefold exclusion, since also foreigners were kept out; but the treatment of slaves is no doubt merely the extreme case of the treatment of foreigners.'

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, 1269b.

<sup>5</sup> For the Partheniai of Tarentum, cf. Antiochus, *FgrH*, 555 F 13; Justin, 3.4; Ephorus, *FgrH*, 70 F 216; Strabo, 3.278-279; Dionysius Halicarnassus, 19.1-2. Cf. Polybius, 12.5-8 for the Epizephyrian Locri. Cf. Ammianus Marcellinus, 22.8.41, for another servile war.

<sup>6</sup> Hdt., 4.3-4. Cf. Justin, 2.5.1-7, who also records this story, the only difference being that he goes on to report the punishment by crucifixion of the slaves and the suicide out of a guilty conscience of the women. Cf. also Domitius Callistratus, *FgrH*, 433 F 4, for the Scythian episode.

youths. The first have never forgotten that they are the masters whereas the latter have never forgotten that they are slaves if we are to judge by their flight on sight of the whips.<sup>7</sup> It is this consideration that has led many scholars to argue that the whole episode is just a Greek fiction intended to illustrate the proper way of controlling slaves.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, whether we are to believe Herodotus' story or not, we are nevertheless obliged to believe that it reflects the historian's attitude of mind as far as slaves are concerned. That is, as Finley has observed, that 'slaves as a class were inferior beings, inferior in their psychology, by their nature.'<sup>9</sup>

To turn now to the Scythian women, what they do involves without doubt a reversal of roles. Being no longer under the supervision and control of their husbands, they take full initiative and consummate marriages with their slaves. One could argue that they patiently lie in wait for the right moment to gain the upper hand. But why with their slaves? Does the episode reveal Herodotus' view of female nature as being promiscuous and guided by passion and the thirst for power? Or is it indicative of the historian's sympathy for the Scythian women? The answer is quite simple and stressed at the very beginning of the story. They consorted with the slaves because no one else was available: τοὺς δὲ Σκυθᾶς ἀποδημήσαντας ὀκτῶ καὶ εἴκοσι ἔτεα καὶ διὰ χρόνον τοσούτου κατιόντας ἐς τὴν σφετέρην ἐδεδέξατο οὐκ ἐλάσσων πόνος τοῦ Μηδικοῦ, εὖρον γὰρ ἀντιουμένην σφι στρατιὴν οὐκ ὀλίγην· αἱ γὰρ τῶν Σκυθέων γυναῖκες, ὡς σφι οἱ ἄνδρες ἀπῆσαν χρόνον πολλόν, ἐφοίτων παρὰ τοὺς δούλους ('But when the Scythians, being away from their homes for twenty-eight years, returned to their country after such a long time, they faced a task that was no easier than the Median War; for, they were encountered by a great army. Their Scythian wives had been consorting with the slaves, as their husbands were away for a long time'). When Herodotus mentions that the men were away on campaign, the emphasis is laid on their twenty-eight-year absence! Herodotus' attitude towards the Scythian women is that their acts are justified, for they are not motivated by promiscuity and wickedness

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Myron of Priene, *FgrH*, 106 F 2, -- if we can believe him -- for the fights inflicted upon the Spartan helots from time to time because they never forgot that they were slaves.

<sup>8</sup> How and Wells, 1912, at 4.4; Finley 1980, 118-119; Corcella and Medaglia, 1993, at 4.1.

<sup>9</sup> Finley, 1980, 119.

but by conservatism.<sup>10</sup> Twenty-eight years are too many to be endured alone, growing old and without ensuring the continuation of their race and culture.<sup>11</sup> For, twenty-eight years are, significantly, about the full extent of an individual woman's fertile period.

## 2. *The women of Argos*

The second story involving a union between women and slaves appears in Book 6 of the *Histories*, which is traditionally referred to as the 'Servile Interregnum'.<sup>12</sup> Following the narrative, after the Spartan king Cleomenes massacred the Argive army at Sepeia, the city of Argos was wholly bereft of its men. The result was a union between the women and the slaves, who took control and governed the city until the sons of the slain Argive citizens came of age, thrust out the slaves and regained the administration of Argos. The story goes that the slaves seized Tiryns and that, at first, they were at peace with the Argives. But then a prophet called Cleander came to them and urged them to fight their masters. As a consequence, a war broke out between them, which was eventually won by the Argives.

Conditions after Sepeia were certainly topsy-turvy and this immediate consequence of Argos' widowhood becomes apparent when Herodotus states that οἱ δοῦλοι αὐτῶν ἔσχον πάντα τὰ πρήγματα ἀρχοντες τε καὶ διέποντες ('their slaves took possession of everything and ruled and governed'). Actually, Herodotus prefaced this reversal of order with a Delphic oracle predicting that ἀλλ' ὅταν ἡ θήλεια τὸν ἀρσενα νικήσασα ἐξελάσῃ καὶ κῦδος ἐν Ἀργείοισιν ἀρηται ('when the female will beat and drive out the male and win glory among the Argives'). Vidal Naquet has observed that this oracle represents a proverbial idea for topsy-turvy conditions.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the oracle is proved right, for the city of Argos is represented by the historian as an upside-down

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Dewald, 1981, 97.

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that the same thing could be argued about the Herodotean Amazons who mate with the Scythians for the continuation of their race and culture. For women's loneliness in time of war, cf. Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 589-593.

<sup>12</sup> Hdt., 6.83.

<sup>13</sup> Hdt., 6.77. Cf. Vidal-Naquet, 1981, 502. Cf. also Sourvinou-Inwood, 1974, 193, n. 9.

world with the women and the slaves being in power.<sup>14</sup> However, as will be made apparent below, the difference observable between the Herodotean Scythian and Argive women is that the first take an active initiative to mate and repopulate their city while the latter are rather portrayed to do so in passivity.

Herodotus simply does not seem to be interested in the identification of the slaves, which is indeed problematic as he just refers to them as *douloi*, or in whether the marriages between free women and non-free men are probable.<sup>15</sup> His interest is rather focused upon the abnormal circumstances after the massacre of the Argive army at Sepeia, which called for extreme and immediate measures. The slaves are shown to take over the administration of the city and the estates, and they marry the women. Is Herodotus after all implying that despite the whole situation appearing as a usurpation, it was in fact an exception and a measure for the common good of the city of Argos? Perhaps Willetts' observation that 'the relationships between Argive women and Argive serfs were perhaps only exceptional in that they were exceptionally prevalent in special circumstances' could also apply in the Herodotean narrative.<sup>16</sup> The historian does not clearly report that there were marital unions between the women and the slaves. It is certainly implied but, nevertheless, it seems as if it was forced upon the women rather than them being the 'masterminds' behind this consummation. To put it more clearly, Herodotus does not say that Argos, and consequently the women,

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Plutarch, *Moralia*, 245 and Pausanias, 2.20.8-10, who see the fulfilment in the Argive Telesilla, who led the women and the slaves and drove the Spartans out of Argos. Cf. McQueen, 2000, at 6.77, who has argued that 'Herodotus' silence' of the Telesilla story 'guarantees its falsity'.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Plutarch, *Moralia*, 245f, who states that the Argive women were married to *perioikoi*. Cf. McQueen, 2000, at 6.83, for Plutarch borrowing his statement from Aristotle, *Politics*, 1303a6-8, and because he misunderstood the term, he thought of them as equivalent to the Spartan helots. However, cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1272a, who compares them with Cretan serfs. Cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 6.83 and Willetts, 1959, 496-497, for the slaves in Herodotus being serfs. Cf. generally Willetts, 1959, for the reasons why the Argive *douloi* are serfs and not chattel slaves or *perioikoi*. Cf. Pollux, 3.83, for the Argive serfs resembling the Spartan helots. Cf. also the discussion by Forrest, 1960, 221-241 and Tomlinson, 1972, 96-100. For possible marriages between serfs and free women, cf. *Gortyn Lawcode*, 3.40-44 and 5.25-28. Cf. also Willetts, 1959, 498.

<sup>16</sup> Willetts, 1959, 501. Cf. also Tomlinson, 1972, 99, who has argued that some Dorian slaves of Argos had 'tenure of land' and, consequently, 'after the slaughter of the 'landlord' class at Sepeia' the only solution was the marriage of the slaves to the



'rectified the *oligandria* by admitting slaves as citizens. His assertion is that Argos had to submit to an unwelcome slave-domination of which she rid herself as soon as she was able.'<sup>17</sup> Hence, in his representation, the women, once again, are not hateful usurpers. They are rather forced to 'rule' in a reversed world situation so as to ensure the return of 'normality'. As Sourvinou-Inwood has observed, 'the Servile Interregnum bridged the time between catastrophe and resumption of normality.'<sup>18</sup>

## **b. Topsy-turvy customs**

In the first four books of the *Histories*, Herodotus inserts into his narrative descriptions of the customs of the peoples that come into contact with the Persian army. What is of interest is his recording of any custom or habit which is odd to a Greek. And by 'odd' is meant anything that stands in complete contrast and reversal to the Greek habits. However, it should be stressed that in his representation of the peoples' topsy-turvy customs, women do not appear as monstrous rulers of men. They are rather represented as simple women, who act in accordance with their society's traditions and rules.<sup>19</sup>

### **1. Egypt**

In Book 2, Herodotus presents a lengthy list comprising all the peculiarities connected with Egypt and habits.<sup>20</sup> According to this, everything is portrayed as upside down (compared, he says, 'with the rest of the world', but he is thinking mainly of Greece), with the women dealing with the daily transactions, such as buying and selling, while the men stay indoors and weave. (And as it happens, even weaving is done the other way round, for the Egyptians push the woof downwards whereas all the rest push it upwards.) It is the women who carry burdens on their shoulders while men carry them

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Argive wives of the deceased landowners in order for the children of the union to inherit the land.

<sup>17</sup> Seymour, 1922, 25.

<sup>18</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood, 1974, 193.

<sup>19</sup> For a more detailed discussion about Herodotus' view of peoples' habits, cf. Chapter Four.

<sup>20</sup> Hdt., 2.35-36.

on the head. It is the women who urinate standing while the men do so sitting.<sup>21</sup> It is the men who are dedicated to all deities and not women. It is the daughters who are compelled by law to support their parents and not the sons.<sup>22</sup> Finally, it is the men who wear two garments while women wear only one.

The Egyptian customs must have drawn Herodotus' attention more than any other nation's customs, so much so that in the beginning of this lengthy catalogue of abnormalities he states that Αἰγύπτιοι ἄμα τῷ οὐρανῷ τῷ κατὰ σφέας εἰσὶν ἑτεροίω καὶ τῷ ποταμῷ φύσιν ἀλλοίην παρεχομένω ἢ οἱ ἄλλοι ποταμοὶ τὰ πολλὰ πάντα ἐμπαλιν τοῖσι ἄλλοισι ἀνθρώποισιν ἐστήσαντο ἥθεά τε καὶ νόμους ('as the Egyptians have a different climate and as the nature of their river is different to that of other rivers, in almost all cases they established customs and laws opposite to those of the rest of mankind').<sup>23</sup> The same point has been made by other ancient authors. The anonymous author of the *Dissoi Logoi* also referred to the Egyptian topsyturvydom, and Diodorus Siculus was to refer to the Egyptian abnormality regarding incestuous marriages. Nymphodorus repeated Herodotus regarding the Egyptian anomaly to the rest of mankind, adding that it was the Egyptian king Sesostris that was actually responsible for Egypt's topsyturvydom, for he wished to make his people effeminate so as to prevent them from demanding their freedom.<sup>24</sup> As has been pointed out, Herodotus himself ascribed the Egyptian polarity to the peculiarity of two things: The first is their environment. This aligns with the Hippocratic argument that the

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 727, for men urinating sitting. Hence, it was not a technique unknown in Greece. Cf. Lloyd, 1976, at 2.35.

<sup>22</sup> Female property descended in the female line and, thus, Herodotus could be right in stating that they had to cater for the parents: cf. Watterson, 1991, 23; Robins, 1993, 129 and 132. This is, however, in sharp contrast with the Solonian law, according to which negligence of parents on the sons' behalf was punishable: cf. Diogenes Laertius, 1.55; Aeschines, *Against Timarchus*, 28-30. Cf. also Harrison, 1971, 171; Lacey, 1968, 116-117.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, 335-345, where Oedipus draws a sharp contrast between his daughters and sons stating that they conform to the Egyptian customs. Although there are no verbal similarities between the passages, there is a possibility that Herodotus borrowed this reversal paradox from Sophocles. Cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 2.35.

<sup>24</sup> *Dissoi Logoi*, 2.3-5 and 17; Diodorus Siculus, 1.27.1-2; Nymphodorus, *FHG*, II 380. Compare Croesus' advice to Cyrus on how to make the Lydians effeminate, in *Hdt.*, 1.155-156.

characteristics and manners of inhabitants are assimilated to the nature of their land.<sup>25</sup> Secondly, and most importantly, the topsyturvydom of Egyptian customs was seen as akin to the topsyturvydom of the Nile. For, unlike the European or Near Eastern rivers that the Greeks had knowledge of, the Nile flooded during summer, which was opposite to the 'normal' ones.<sup>26</sup>

If we are to examine each of Herodotus' statements about the life of the Egyptians separately, we will discover that they contain a lot of mistakes, or, more likely, misrepresentations.<sup>27</sup> In his account, the place of women is more than privileged when placed in contrast with that of their Greek counterparts. And there is no doubt that he used this life of privileges to 'demonstrate a thesis, Egyptian polarity to the rest of mankind, especially to the Greeks', so much so that he forgets to notice that most of the abnormalities are only occasional in Egypt.<sup>28</sup> However, there are instances where he contradicts himself and, thus, it is implied that in many cases, he *does* actually know what goes on in Egypt; and yet, he seems to favour the topsy-turvy conditions. Two questions arise here. The first concerns the reason why Herodotus chooses to portray topsyturvydom as the norm in Egypt. And secondly, are the Egyptian women in his representation in charge?

There are two cases in which the historian contradicts himself. According to his account, it is the women who buy and sell in Egypt and generally frequent the outside world, whereas the men stay inside and weave. At first sight, the conditions signify a reversal of order, at least in the Greek eyes. However, as far as female trading is concerned, what is mentioned by Herodotus seem to be the exceptions, and he must have been fully aware of it, for later on in Book 2, he himself reports on male traders, who actually form an entire class.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, one wonders why female trading

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<sup>25</sup> Hdt., 2.35.1; Hippocrates, *Airs, waters and places*, 24 and 12. Cf. Lloyd, 1976, at 2.35; Gould, 1989, 97.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Gould, 1989, 8-9; Waters, 1985, 120; Thomas, 2000, 112; Redfield, 1985, 106; Lateiner, 1989, 158.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Hdt., 2.36-37, for his misstatement about the Egyptians using only brazen cups and no wheat flour. Cf. Lloyd, 1976, at 2.36-37; How and Wells, 1912, at 2.37.

<sup>28</sup> Lateiner, 1989, 148. Cf. also Thomas, 2000, 130-131.

<sup>29</sup> Hdt., 2.141 and 164. Cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 2.35; Waddell, 1939, at 2.35. For men practising weaving as a profession, cf. Lucretius, 5.1354-1356. Cf. also Watterson, 1991, 27

should be worthy of attention and amazement, even with an ironic attitude, since women traders were not uncommon in Greece, and are specifically well attested in Athens.<sup>30</sup> The second case is when he mentions that no priestesses can be found in Egyptian temples but that it is rather the men who are dedicated to the gods. Yet, there are three occasions where he very specifically reports on the presence of Egyptian priestesses, and thus implies that he did indeed know of their existence.<sup>31</sup> However, Lloyd has suggested that the misunderstanding is not on Herodotus' part but on our own, for what he means is that 'no woman in Egypt performed the divine cult of any deity or occupied the pre-eminent role in worship which would make her equivalent to what he could call an *ὑπετή* in Greece.'<sup>32</sup>

There is no doubt that the situation in Egypt is one of an upside-down world, where even the female fish lead the males on their trip upstream.<sup>33</sup> What is also of no doubt is that the historian had to rely on local interpreters or fellow Greek merchants for much of his information, as he did not speak the language, and that he most probably never came in contact with higher classes. As Watterson has argued, 'he seems to have taken no notes on the spot', something which led Diodorus Siculus to remark on 'all the casual inventions of Herodotus', a thesis that is keenly supported today by Fehling.<sup>34</sup> However, we should also take into consideration the possibility that he may have been misinformed, that he may have misunderstood his informants -- mainly due to language problems --, or that his notes may have been inaccurate. Lastly, something that characterises Herodotus' representation of Egyptian customs, and, indeed, all his ethnographies, is his ethnocentricity. Herodotus seems to have used the Egyptian peculiarities to his advantage in order to demonstrate the Greek polarity with Egypt. But does this point of view include women? It appears that in the *Histories*, the women in Egypt *are* in charge but they are not seen as having provoked this situation themselves. At no point does Herodotus state that this reversed situation was actually

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<sup>30</sup> For women traders in Athens, cf. Aristophanes, *Plutos*, 427-428 and 1120; *Lysistrata*, 456-459 and 564; *Wasps*, 238 and 497; *Thesmophoriazousai*, 387; *Frogs*, 858; Pollux, 7.198. Cf. also Herfst, 1922; Brock, 1994, 336-346.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Hdt., 1.182; 2.54 and 56.

<sup>32</sup> Lloyd, 1976, at 2.35. Cf. also Waddell, 1939, at 2.35, who is of the same opinion.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Hdt., 2.93.

<sup>34</sup> Watterson, 1991, xi-xii; Diodorus Siculus, 1.69. Cf. also Brown, 1965, 60-61. For Herodotus and the use of interpreters or fellow Greeks, cf. Hdt., 2.125. Cf. also Hartog, 1988, 239.

caused or incited by the women. In his representation, Egyptian women act in accordance with their country's customs and culture. Consequently, it is only fair to say that Herodotus' irony and amazement is not directed against the Egyptian women but against the peculiarity of their customs. And yet, one could argue that even this is not the case, for, as we have already seen, he attributed it to the peculiarity of their river and their environment.

## 2. *Amazons (again)*

In Book 4 Herodotus introduces his story of the Amazons and the Scythians. Of particular importance are the customs of the Amazon women, which they preserve even when they leave with their Scythian husbands the Scythian land to found a new nation, that of the Sauromatae. According to the story, the Amazons refused to dwell in Scythia, for their way of life was completely different. They claimed that ἡμεῖς μὲν τοξεύομεν τε καὶ ἀκοντίζομεν καὶ ἵππαζόμεθα, ἔργα δὲ γυναικῆα οὐκ ἐμάθομεν· αἱ δὲ ὑμέτεραι γυναῖκες τούτων μὲν οὐδέν, τῶν ἡμεῖς κατελέξαμεν, ποιέουσι, ἔργα δὲ γυναικῆα ἐργάζονται μένουσαι ἐν τῆσι ἀμάξεισι οὐτ' ἐπὶ θήρην ἰοῦσαι οὔτε ἄλλη οὐδαμῆ. ('We shoot the bow and throw the javelin and ride, but we have not learnt the crafts of women. Your women do none of the things we have mentioned, but they stay in the wagons, working on women's crafts, and they neither go hunting nor do anything else.')<sup>35</sup>

Everything about the Amazons and their account in the *Histories* points to a reversal of order and women's rule. Not only do they occupy the 'outside' and involve themselves with another exclusively male domain, that of war, but they also seem to dominate their Scythian husbands. In Herodotus' account, it is the Scythian youths who leave their land and houses to live with the Amazons and it is also the Scythian youths who receive a dowry from their fathers before they go. These two facts alone spell usurpation, for they stand for a reversal of the patriarchal order. However, although the Sauromatan tale reveals once again Herodotus' ethnocentricity, it must be

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<sup>35</sup> Hdt., 4.110-117. For a detailed discussion of the Amazons, cf. Chapters One and Four. Although the life of Scythian women is portrayed as one of confinement to their wagons, they are nevertheless shown by the historian to take care of themselves and their hygiene: cf. Hdt., 4.75.

stressed that, despite the reversal indicated, there is no actual rule of women over the men. Indeed, the whole story is pervaded with mutual concessions by both parties, with the Scythian men giving up their fatherland and homes while the Amazons their warlike nature and freedom. By the end of the Scythian/Amazon story, the emphasis is laid on the equality of sexes rather than on the rule of either of them.<sup>36</sup>

### c. Women 'on top'?

#### 1. *The Lemnian crime*

Herodotus tells us of the notorious crime on the island of Lemnos in the sixth book of his *Histories*. According to the legend, the Lemnian women did not honour Aphrodite, who inflicted them with a noisome smell as a punishment. Their husbands, not being able to stand the smell, took captive women from Thrace as their wives and scorned their former ones. Therefore, the dishonoured Lemnian women saw fit to avenge their disgrace by killing every male on the island. Only Hypsipyle saved her father, king Thoas, by sending him away but once she was discovered, the rest of the women killed Thoas and sold Hypsipyle into slavery. The island of Lemnos was repopulated with men when the Argonauts arrived and mated with the women.<sup>37</sup>

As Martin has argued, this is 'the closest parallel for a group of warlike husband-killing women in myth' to the warlike society of the Amazons.<sup>38</sup> Undeniably, the myth lays stress on the battle between the sexes, with the women gaining the upper hand after resorting to a most hateful crime. Yet, Herodotus does not give any particular weight to this story of the Lemnian crime, although he does not dismiss it. In his *Histories*, he simply refers to it as τοῦ προτέρου ('the earlier one') and inserts a second

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Dewald, 1981, 101.

<sup>37</sup> Apollodorus, 1.9.17 and 3.6.4; Apollonius Rhodius, 1.608-626. Cf. also Ovid, *Heroides*, 6.135, for Hypsipyle sparing her father's life. Cf. Burkert, 2000, 227-249, for the ritual of the New Fire at Lemnos, the roots of which are found in the myth of the Lemnian crime.

<sup>38</sup> Martin, 1987, 85. For the Lemnian women being dressed in armour to meet the Argonauts, cf. Aeschylus, *Hypsipyle*, fr. 40, Mette; Sophocles, *Lemniai*, fr. 384-389, Radt. Cf. Aeschylus, *Libation bearers*, 599-601 and 631-636, for Clytaemnestra's crime paralleled with the Lemnian. Cf. Vidal-Naquet, 1981, 190-191.

story, which actually justifies the women involved in it and attributes half the blame to the men.

According to Herodotus' account, when the Pelasgians were expelled from Attica, an expulsion perfectly justified by the Athenians, who claimed that the Pelasgians used violence against their daughters when they went to draw water, they settled on the island of Lemnos. Desiring revenge on the Athenians and knowing the time of their festivals well, they lay in ambush and carried off many of their women when they were celebrating the festival of Artemis at Brauron. These women they brought to Lemnos to be their concubines. But, as the Athenian women gave birth to more and more children, they taught their sons the Attic speech and customs. These boys did not consort with the sons of the Pelasgian women, but they used to stick together forming a powerful group of their own. This fact caught the Pelasgians' attention who, fearing that the boys might rule their legitimate sons once they grew up, killed the sons of the Attic women and their mothers. According to Herodotus, ἀπὸ τούτου δὲ τοῦ ἔργου καὶ τοῦ προτέρου τούτων, τὸ ἐργάσαντο αἱ γυναῖκες τοὺς ἄμα Θόαντι ἄνδρας σφετέρους ἀποκτεῖναι, νενόμισται ἀνά τὴν Ἑλλάδα τὰ σχέτλια ἔργα πάντα Ἰήμνια καλέεσθαι. ('From this deed as well as the former one, which was committed by the women that murdered their husbands, who were Thoas' men, all the abominable crimes in Greece are referred to as a "Lemnian crime"').<sup>39</sup>

How and Wells argued that Herodotus is not differing from the original account of the Lemnian crime but that he is simply summarising it. And, as far as the second tale he provides is concerned, they contended that it was a legend invented 'to justify Athenian dominion over Lemnos' and thus 'treats these Attic boys as its natural lords and masters.'<sup>40</sup> Yet, the fact that the historian devotes more space to the second crime, that of the Pelasgians, implies that he considers the original story of a minor importance. Is it because he actually desires to emphasise the Athenian dominion over Lemnos? Or does this summarising of his of the original legend disclose important information about his point of view as far as women and the Lemnian crime is concerned? It appears that the answer is a combination of the two. And as for his

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<sup>39</sup> Hdt., 6.138.

<sup>40</sup> How and Wells, 1912, at 6.138. Cf. Hdt., 1.114, for a similar episode with Cyrus, where he is treated as a natural lord and king by his playmates.

representation of the women in the tale he records, by only quickly referring to the original story, he partly absolves them of the guilt for the notorious proverb 'a Lemnian crime'.

Moreover, it should be noted that there is a notion of female power and women being in charge not only in the original Lemnian crime but also in the second one recorded by the historian, although of a different nature. Whereas in the original story the women acquire power through an abominable crime and, thus, are hated for it, in the Pelasgian tale the Athenian women take the situation into their own hands and, since they cannot break free from their lot, they certainly make sure that their sons will be able to do something about it. They teach them the Attic speech and ways of life so that they should not forget who they really are. In this account, the women are stripped of responsibility for their 'power', for not only were they raped but they were also made the Pelasgians' concubines; they were not even 'honoured' by a marital union. Consequently, they used the only powerful weapon they possessed, that of their ability and responsibility to transmit and preserve culture. We may detect a similar kind of justification for the Lemnian women in the original crime too, for they were not the ones who dishonoured their husbands and marriages by taking strangers to their beds. Yet, it seems that Herodotus rather preferred the Pelasgian account. One could argue, as How and Wells did, that the reason behind this preference could be the justification of Athenian dominion over Lemnos. But we should bear in mind that in the historian's world, it is the men who are the killing monsters and not the women.

## **2. *The wives of the Minyae***

The Minyae were the descendants of the Argonauts and the Lemnian women that had killed their husbands. When they were expelled from Lemnos by those Pelasgians who carried off the Athenian women from Brauron, they sailed away to Lacedaemon, where they encamped on Taygetus. Once there, and calling upon their relationship to the Tyndaridae, Castor and Polydeukes, who were members of the crew of the Argo, they asked the Spartans to dwell in Lacedaemon and allot them land, for it was also the land of their fathers. The Spartans consented to their request, their chief reason



being their relation to the Tyndaridae.<sup>41</sup> And apart from land, they also gave them Spartan wives and they received the women that the Minyae had brought from Lemnos in return.<sup>42</sup> However, not long after, the Minyae became proud, demanded an equal right in kingship and did many impious things. Thus, the Spartans had them thrown into prison with a death sentence, but they were saved by their Spartan wives, who visited them in prison the night before their execution and tricked the guards by changing clothes with their husbands.<sup>43</sup>

Although the story of the Herodotean Minyae is principally a foundation myth, as will be discussed later on, it also involves the issue of role reversal with the female being in charge. Accordingly, when the Minyae were thrown into prison with a death sentence, their wives saved them the very night of their execution by exchanging their clothes with them.<sup>44</sup> The Minyae escaped and won their freedom as women, while their wives took their place in prison both literally and metaphorically. There are numerous examples of stratagem based on disguise in ancient times. Herodotus in Book 5 informs us that Alexander, son of Amyntas, dressed his Macedonians as women to punish the Persians for being disrespectful to their women and customs, while two more similar stories are recorded by Pausanias and Plutarch.<sup>45</sup> Although all these tales share the element of male disguised as female, none of them involves the women taking the place and guise of the men, as the Minyan story. The exchange of

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<sup>41</sup> For the twin Tyndaridae occupying a central place in Spartan religion, cf. Malkin, 1994, 25; Carlier, 1984, 256; Parker, 1989, 147.

<sup>42</sup> For Spartan exclusiveness, cf. Hdt., 9.33-35; Aristotle, *Politics*, 1274a. Ephorus, *FgrH*, 70 F 117, attributes it to the Spartan kings, who granted admission to a great number of strangers. Cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 4.145; and Corcella and Medaglia, 1993, at 4.145, who see it as an etiological legend for the Spartan supremacy over Thera.

<sup>43</sup> Hdt., 4.145-146. For the Minyan story, cf. also Valerius Maximus, 4.6, ext. 3; Pindar, *Pythian Odes*, 4.88; Plutarch, *Moralia*, 247a-c; Polyaeus, 7.49 and 8.71. Cf. Hdt., 1.146, for the Minyae being a Boeotian population. For the identification of the Minyae with the Argonauts, cf. Stesichorus, fr. 238, Davies; Apollonius Rhodius, 1.228-233; Homer, *Iliad*, 7.467-469. Cf. also, Stier, 1932, 2017-2020; Hiller von Gartringen, 1969, 1345; Corcella and Medaglia, 1993, at 4.145.

<sup>44</sup> Herodotus brings a contemporary Spartan custom into his narrative, as all executions in Sparta took place at night. Cf. Corcella and Medaglia, 1993, at 4.146, who have argued that the procedure is likely to have been inspired by a superstitious consciousness of secrecy related to the execution of Agis, which took place late in the evening. Cf. Plutarch, *Agis*, 19. Cf. McDowell, 1986, 146.

<sup>45</sup> Hdt., 5.18-20; Pausanias, 4.4.2-3; Plutarch, *Solon*, 8.5-6. Cf. Nenci, 1994, at 5.20.

clothes was actually a Spartan rite of passage.<sup>46</sup> Yet, it does not seem as if we are dealing with a rite here, but with a usurpation of roles and normal social order, as it is a story about deception.<sup>47</sup> However, in the historian's representation, the women's protective motive and their love for their husbands comes to their defence, for, after all, the clever trick they played so as to save them from death and destruction was on their own Spartan fathers and brothers.<sup>48</sup>

## II. Women and colonisation

The fundamental causes of Greek colonisation may have included the sudden discovery of unexplored regions, financial, agricultural or commercial gain, population outgrowth of the already existing land, or even the need to find extra women and to be able to produce citizen children from them. However, the range of motives that initiate the colonial need in the Greek foundation legends available to us seem to 'downplay the positive or lucrative aspects of colonisation' and 'emphasise the negative factors that encouraged the colonists to leave mainland Greece.'<sup>49</sup> Accordingly, colonisation in the Herodotean foundation legends comes as a response to disaster or crisis, which, in most cases, is triggered off by women and usurped worlds.<sup>50</sup>

### a. Reversed worlds, colonisation and refoundation of cities

Four of the tales in the *Histories*, in which the issue of women and reversal features prominently, serve as foundation legends as they eventually lead to colonisation or refoundation of cities. As we have already seen, in Herodotus' representation, the women are not to be blamed for their acquisition of a male role, as their motives are shown to be purely protective. With regard to their role in colonisation, it reflects the development from chaos and usurpation to normality and order.

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. Harrison, 1912, 506-507, and Willetts, 1959, 502-503; Cartledge, 1981, 101.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Pembroke, 1970, 1266, who regards this myth as the etiology of a Spartan ritual with a procession and disguise.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Dewald, 1981, 97.

<sup>49</sup> Dougherty, 1993, 18. Cf. Gwynn, 1918, 88-123, for the real causes of Greek colonisation behind the foundation legends.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Ogden, 1997, 51.

## 1. *Minyae (again)*

As soon as the Minyae escape from prison with the help of their wives and dressed as women, they once again encamp on Taygetus, but only for a while, for, according to the tale, a few of them follow Theras to the island Calliste, which, after their arrival, changes its name to Thera after its colonist. As for the rest of the Minyae, Herodotus tells us that they made their way to the lands of Paroreatae and Caucones, where they divided themselves into six groups and founded the cities of Lepreum, Macistus, Phrixae, Pyrgus, Epium and Nudium.<sup>51</sup>

It is noteworthy that the issue of reversed worlds in the Spartan/Minyan tale is not only connected with the cross-dressing of the Spartan women, when they save their husbands from prison and execution. As Ogden has suggested, it is also evident in the very name of the Minyae, which is apparently readable as 'small men' or 'diminished men'.<sup>52</sup> Despite the role-reversal and the inferior group's marriage to Spartan citizen women, which is suggestive of gynaeocracy and women's rule, in Herodotus' representation -- as in the legend itself -- the outcome is one of normality, as it leads to colonisation and consequently to order.<sup>53</sup> If it had not been for the women to save their Minyan husbands, none of this would have taken place.

## 2. *The refoundation of Argos*

As has previously been discussed, the Herodotean episode of the 'Servile Interregnum' at Argos conforms to a reversed world scheme. However, it is also a tale that is

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<sup>51</sup> Hdt., 4.148. Cf. Plutarch, *Moralia*, 296b, and Polyaeus, 7.49 and 8.71, who speak of Pelasgians and Tyrreneans (not Minyae) colonising Crete and Melos.

<sup>52</sup> Ogden, 1997, 79-80. But cf. Malkin, 1994, 87-88, who argues that the Minyae derived their name rather from the river Minyeios in Triphyllia. Cf. Ogden, 1997, 201, n. 52, for the reason why he finds Malkin's statement implausible. For the relevant stories of Tarentum and Locri to the Minyan tale, in which inadequate groups become the founders of new colonies, cf. Strabo, 3.278-279; Antiochus of Syracuse, *FgrH*, 555 F 13; Ephorus, *FgrH*, 70 F 216; Justin, 3.4; Polybius, 12.6; and Dionysius Halicarnassus, 19.1-2 (Tarentum). For Locri, cf. Polybius, 12.5-8; cf. also Sourvinou-Inwood, 1974.

<sup>53</sup> The turning point role of the 'irregular' Minyae and their Spartan wives was essential for the genealogy of Battus: cf. Hdt., 4.150, where it is mentioned that he is a descendant of the Minyan clan. Cf. Corcella and Medaglia, 1993, at 4.148.

particularly useful to explain the refoundation of a city. The Argive refoundation legend shares features with the Minyan tale, for, apart from reversed worlds, in both stories we witness an inferior group being married to citizen women. However, in the case of Argos, the situation is even more extreme, for this inferior group consists of slaves, and, thus, they belong to the margin of the Greek polis and society. Yet, the conclusion that we derive from Herodotus' accounts is that the historian uses them in his *Histories* for the very reason that they were 'invented', namely, as foundation legends. The element of 'women being in charge' is there only to explain or justify the foundation. To put it more simply, as foundation legends referred not to historical events but 'to the mythopoeic imagination of the Greek mind and its themes', the development from chaos (the reversed world) to normality (colonisation or refoundation) fitted better the narrative.<sup>54</sup>

### **3. *Amazons and the Sauromatan foundation account***

The same conclusions may be drawn from the Amazon/Scythian account. Owing to the fullness of detail that it includes, the foundation account of the Sauromatae clearly reveals the historian's point of view about the foundation legends and, thus, it can be used 'as a model that sets out Herodotus' ideas of how societies begin and are able to endure over time.'<sup>55</sup> According to Herodotus' narrative, the Scythian youths leave their fatherland at the Amazons' request to found the nation of the Sauromatae. Once again, abnormality and reversed worlds represented by the Amazons and their customs develop into a situation of normality and order in the foundation of a new nation.

#### **b. Rape and colonisation**

Almost all the foundation legends available to us, both in Herodotus and other ancient authors, involve usurpation and women's rule. However, there are two accounts in the *Histories*, where 'rape' is the cause of colonisation, while the issue of 'women being in charge' comes as an immediate consequence to rape.

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<sup>54</sup> Sourvinou –Inwood, 1974, 192.

## 1. *Carian women*

In the first book of the *Histories*, Herodotus informs us that there were twelve divisions of the Ionians that were driven out by the Achaeans and, thus, were forced to colonise other places. According to the narrative, the division which consisted of the Ionians that came out of the town hall of Athens did not bring wives with them to their settlements but married Carian women whose parents, husbands and sons they had put to death. These women bound themselves by oath and made a custom, which they passed on to their daughters, that none would dine with her husband nor call him by his name, seeking revenge upon their Ionian husbands in this way.<sup>56</sup>

Herodotus mentions this story in the course of explaining that the Ionians made twelve cities because there were twelve divisions of them. Undoubtedly, one of the reasons he mentions the tale has to do with Ionian pride of birth. Thus, the historian does not refrain from pointing out that the Ionians of Caria regard themselves as γενναϊότατοι εἶναι τῶν Ἰώνων ('the best born of the Ionians'). However, he also makes sure to clarify that the supposedly purest of blood Ionians of Caria are in fact 'half-breeds and their nobility is undermined by the atrocity by which they became Carians.'<sup>57</sup> Although 'rape' is not actually mentioned, it is certainly implied. Indeed, in the Herodotean narrative it is often hinted that the expulsion or the massacre of the native males and the rape of women were not rare in colonisation. We have only to think of the Minyae's expulsion or the Pelasgians' rape of Athenian women. In addition, Herodotus makes mention of colonists that were young or bachelors, a point which enhances the implication that peaceful cohabitation was not always achievable.<sup>58</sup>

The Carian account is quite interesting, for it signifies that in Herodotus' imagination, colonisation did not only spring from chaos and usurpation generated by women. It shows that enduring new societies could also find their origin in monstrous and chaotic behaviour by men.

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<sup>55</sup> Dewald, 1981, 99-100.

<sup>56</sup> Hdt., 1.145-146. Cf. also Pausanias, 7.2.5-6.

<sup>57</sup> Arieti, 1995, 149. Cf. also, How and Wells, 1912, at 1.146; Dewald, 1981, 98-99.

For Herodotus' argument about the Carians being half-breeds, cf. Hdt., 1.147.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Hdt., 4.153, for the colonists being young and bachelor. But cf. also Hdt., 1.164, for the migration of whole families.

## 2. *Pelasgians and Lemnos (again)*

Exactly the same thing applies to the Pelasgians. As we have seen, the Pelasgians were driven out of Athens because they tried to rape the daughters of the Athenians who went to draw water. The result of the Pelasgians being thrust out was their colonisation of the island of Lemnos and their 'rape' of Athenian women, whom they brought to Lemnos to be their concubines.<sup>59</sup>

What can be observed in the 'rape and colonisation' tales that appear in Herodotus' *Histories*, and is especially clear in the account of the Carian women, is, as Dougherty has observed, that 'Greek colonial discourse makes the substitution of erotics for politics. The prominence of marriage imagery and tales of rape in colonial discourse betray much more than the fact of Greco-native marriage. It suggests a strategy for representing colonisation as its moment of contact, and often conflict, with indigenous populations.'<sup>60</sup>

### c. *Heracles and the serpent-woman: the establishment of a nation*

According to Herodotus' narrative, when Heracles came to the land now called Scythia, he encountered wintry weather and thus he decided to rest until the storm let up. But while he was sleeping, his mares and his chariot miraculously vanished. Heracles searched every part of the country looking for them until he came to the land called Hylae (the Woodland) and there in a cave he found a creature of double form, half woman and half serpent, who told him that she had his mares and promised to give them back to him only if he had intercourse with her. Heracles did as the serpent-woman bid him in hope of the restoration of his mares, but the creature delayed restoring them so as to have Heracles as long as she could. At last, the day came when she gave them back, also telling him that she was pregnant with sons by him and asked him what to do when they would grow up. Heracles gave her one of the bows he carried (for, as Herodotus informs us, up until then he had always carried two) and advised her the following: She was to let the son who could bend the bow and gird

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<sup>59</sup> Hdt., 6.137. Cf. also Hecataeus, *FgrH*, 1 F 127. Cf. Philochorus, *FgrH*, 100 F 1, for a rationalised version.

<sup>60</sup> Dougherty, 1993, 76.

himself in the same fashion as Heracles dwell in the land where the serpent-woman was queen, but to send the one or ones who failed to achieve the tasks out of the country. And then, he departed. Three sons were born of this union, and they were called Agathyrus, Gelonus and Scythes. When they grew up, the serpent-woman remembered Heracles' words and put her sons to the test. Only Scythes accomplished the tasks and so remained in the land, from whom the whole line of the kings of Scythia comes, as Herodotus tells us. As for the other two sons, Gelonus and Agathyrus, they were cast out by their mother.<sup>61</sup>

There are actually three versions in the *Histories* of the origin of the Scythians with the story involving Heracles being the second version and told 'by the Greeks'.<sup>62</sup> What is immediately obvious is that most of the elements of this tale are of epic origin. More specifically, some knowledge of Hesiod and his work may be assumed, for the Herodotean serpent-woman and her whereabouts bear many similarities to the viper-maiden Echidna that appears in Hesiod.<sup>63</sup> Firstly, they are both half-women half-snakes. Secondly, the location of both serpent-women is outside the borders of civilisation. Moreover, the cave that they dwell in shares the same characteristics and, thus, it is quite apparent that Herodotus was influenced by the *Theogony* account. Fehling has also seen a further connection, although far-fetched, between the two creatures, that of Heracles himself. For, in Hesiod's *Theogony* Echidna appears as the mother of Geryon's hound, and 'as such she is specifically connected with Heracles' labour of fetching Geryon's oxen.'<sup>64</sup>

How and Wells suggested that the Greeks 'introduced their mythology into the country where they settled' as 'such fictions could give ground for future claims'.<sup>65</sup> Of course, there are also native features in the tale as well, such as the mares and the chariot, which are undoubtedly used to give it a more Scythian touch, as they are not generally

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<sup>61</sup> Hdt., 4.8-10.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Hdt., 4.5-13. Cf. also Diodorus Siculus, 2.43, who recorded the 'Scythian' version of the tale, according to which after the snake-girl united with *Zeus* she gave birth to Scythes, who was not the founder of the Scythian people, as they already existed, but who did become their king and gave them his name.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Hesiod, *Theogony*, 295-332.

<sup>64</sup> Fehling, 1989, 45-46.

<sup>65</sup> How and Wells, 1912, at 4.8-10. Cf. Hdt., 5.43, for mythology serving as ground for future claim.

a part of Heracles' legend.<sup>66</sup> The Scythians did indeed have a serpent-woman. She seems to have been a form of the grand goddess of fertility and nature. She has various representations in the Scythian area, but she is always depicted with 'two snake-like or snake shaped legs curving outwards'.<sup>67</sup> However, the parallel of this goddess is not an exact one with the Herodotean serpent-woman, for in the *Histories* she is described as woman above and a *single* snake below, a significant difference, which led Fehling to conclude that there cannot be a connection between Herodotus' serpent-woman and this Scythian goddess. He rather thinks that 'there was an original story, which Herodotus himself considerably remodelled in line with Hesiod', and he may well be right, since the two stories bear many similarities.<sup>68</sup> Yet, one could argue that the Herodotean tale does not share elements only with Hesiod's *Theogony* but also with the story of Theseus. The test that Heracles' sons must take, once grown up, in order to prove themselves worthy of their father, reminds of Theseus, who, once grown up, takes into his possession the sword and the sandals that were left for him on purpose by his father Aegeus. The only difference is that Theseus leaves his father whereas Scythes remains behind as the ruler of his land.<sup>69</sup>

But what is the significance of the serpent-woman in the *Histories* of Herodotus? And what about her appearance? For, she resembles neither mortal men nor immortal gods, as she is half human half animal. Is this intermediary status of hers associated with the depiction of women and their nature or with the 'otherness' of the Scythians? A creature of double form as their mother would fit perfectly the distantness of both their location and culture as well as their way of life, as they are first and foremost nomads.<sup>70</sup> Yet the question that arises here is why a hero, famous for fighting and killing monsters and thus for his quest for civilisation, should mate with a hybrid being and become the father of nomads. The answer is quite simple if we consider that Heracles is himself a traveller, who on the one hand 'explores and marks out the limits of the earth' while, on the other, is the defender of humanity and civilisation, who

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<sup>66</sup> Corcella and Medaglia, 1993, at 4.8; How and Wells, 1912, at 4.8. Cf. Aly, 1969, 120, who argues that it is a Scythian tale.

<sup>67</sup> Fehling, 1989, 46. Cf. also Corcella and Medaglia, 1993, at 4.9.

<sup>68</sup> Fehling, 1989, 46.

<sup>69</sup> Plutarch, *Theseus*, 3-4.4.

<sup>70</sup> Hartog, 1988, 25.



'purges the earth of its monsters'.<sup>71</sup> Thus, although 'as a founder of cities and dispenser of civilised life, he is diametrically opposed to nomadism', he is also not always so civilised or a 'civilising hero', for he constantly has to journey over the world.<sup>72</sup> It is quite evident, then, that the ambiguity that Heracles' character displays resembles the ambiguity of nature of the serpent-woman. So, the Greeks must have considered him the father of the Scythians because his ambiguity fulfilled the requirements of the legend. But we should always bear in mind that there might be hidden reasons behind the legend, namely 'future claims', as has already been suggested.

To turn to the nature of women, the serpent-woman is certainly represented as 'a woman in charge', for she is the one who 'forces' a relationship upon Heracles and keeps him until she has achieved her purpose. Consequently, one could argue that she represents the powerful twofold nature of women, so feared by the Greeks, only that in the *Histories*, she is not portrayed as being fearsome or terrible in any way. Her motives for keeping Heracles by delaying the restoration of his mares do not suggest monstrosity but loneliness, echoing Calypso's motives for hanging onto Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*. However, although her motivation is not one of rule over men, her role in this episode in the *Histories* is also one of foundation. Because of her, not one but three nations are established: the Scythians, out of the young Scythes, and the Agathyrsoi and Gelonoi, out of the two sons that are cast out and who represent the tribes to the northwest and northeast respectively of Scythia proper.<sup>73</sup> Once again, abnormality (represented by the serpent-woman) is brought to normality and civilisation (represented by Heracles and the foundation of nations.)

### III. Women and preservation of culture

Without doubt, the one thing that women are truly in charge of is culture. Although they are not considered to create culture themselves, they are certainly portrayed as its

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<sup>71</sup> Pindar, *Nemean*, 1.26 and 60-66.

<sup>72</sup> Hartog, 1988, 25-26. Cf. Euripides, *Alcestis*, 747-759; and Aristophanes, *Wasps*, 60 and *Peace*, 741, where Heracles is represented as greedy.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Hdt., 4.104 and 5.108, for Agathyrsus and Gelonus. Cf. Corcella and Medaglia, 1993, at 4.10; How and Wells, 1912, at 4.10.

representatives, as they reflect its values and are responsible for its transmission to their children even when there is male opposition.

#### a. Carian women and Athenian women in Lemnos (again)

When the Ionian men abducted Carian women, after killing their men, Herodotus tells us that the women made a *nomos*, which they observed under oath and transmitted to their daughters, never to dine with their husbands or call them by their names.<sup>74</sup> Asheri has suggested that in this tale Herodotus rationalises the origins of a widespread custom of the separation of table companions.<sup>75</sup> In any case, what is of greater importance in this account is the preservation and transmission of custom by the Carian women.<sup>76</sup>

To turn to the story of the abducted Athenian women taken to Lemnos by the Pelasgians, we have already seen that, as they could not break free from their captors, they raised their children in the Athenian manner and taught them the Attic language. The outcome was that the Pelasgians feared so much this 'power' of the women and their influence on their boys that they decided to kill both the mothers and the children in order to avoid the threat that the Attic children posed to their own culture.<sup>77</sup>

In both the Carian and the Lemnian abduction accounts, it is quite important that the women remain loyal to the culture they were raised and, more importantly, they are able to preserve and pass this culture on to their children, despite being in a foreign land. We may tentatively compare a passage in Book 3, where Herodotus perhaps

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<sup>74</sup> Hdt., 1.146.

<sup>75</sup> Asheri, 1997, at 1.146; How and Wells, 1912, at 1.146. Cf. Hdt., 5.18, for the absence of respectable women in Macedonian banquets. But cf. Hdt., 1.172, for the Caunians being the only exception, who banqueted with their women and children. Cf. also Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 4.28-6.24, where the myth of Cupid and Psyche preserves in a curious form this primitive separation of husband and wife.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Pomeroy, 1984, 123-124, for the notion that in colonial environment, the men of the races involved in the colony are attracted towards Greekness, while women towards nativeness.

<sup>77</sup> Hdt., 6.138.

implies that the Babylonians 'kill' their culture by killing their women, in their quest for independence from the Persians.<sup>78</sup>

## **b. Scyles' mother**

According to the Herodotean narrative, Scyles, the Scythian king, was inclined to Greek customs. Being one of the sons of the Scythian king Ariapithes and a Greek woman from the city of Istria, he was taught Greek language and letters by his mother.<sup>79</sup>

Although the theme of abduction is not clear in this Herodotean account as is the case in the previous two, we can assume that Scyles' mother was a Greek captive. Like the women in the Carian and Lemnian episodes, she is portrayed as preserving culture by teaching her son Greek ways. Yet, the Scyles episode is important for one more reason: it contains cultural information not found elsewhere involving the literacy of Greek women. Whether the woman's literacy is an invention on Herodotus' part or not, the fact remains that the story reflects 'the culture of the author than the society of the subject. At least, Herodotus does not find it unusual for a Greek woman to know the alphabet.'<sup>80</sup>

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If women are to transcend the domestic limits that the men have imposed on them because of the threat they represent to society, and enter the men's world, they immediately become monstrous rulers of men and usurpers of civilisation. However, in Herodotus' eyes, their motives are well justified, should they find themselves in the position where they must take the situation into their own hands. Hence, they are conceptualised as being in charge only when the men are in no position to be so themselves and only until the men are capable of resuming their role and place in society, that is in transitional circumstances. In the Herodotean narrative, every time

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<sup>78</sup> Hdt., 3.159.

<sup>79</sup> Hdt., 4.78. For the city of Istria, cf. Hdt., 2.33-34.

<sup>80</sup> Cole, 1981, 227. Cf. generally Cole's discussion of the literacy of Greek women. Cf. also Hartog, 1988, 279.

the male is in no condition to take care of himself or society, the women are there to take over or remind the male of the conventions of their culture. Then, they return to the 'inside' and their anonymity until their intervention is needed again.

## Chapter Four: Women in ethnographies

Herodotus devotes quite a lot of space to the description of peoples' customs and habits located within as well as outside the limits of Greece. Redfield has argued that the *Histories* 'is a Greek book for Greeks about Greeks and others', and that Herodotus as a historian-ethnographer becomes 'a collector' of *nomoi*.<sup>1</sup> Hence, as the Greeks 'cultivated some strange ideas about the mating habits of other societies', it could be argued that the historian's interest, especially in connection with women, is mainly focused on the garish and the curious.<sup>2</sup> However, the women in the Herodotean ethnographies are there because they are, above all, an inseparable part of his description of the Persian Empire and his narrative of the Greek-Persian Wars. Interestingly enough, he may not approve of all their practices, but he does not condemn them, either. In fact, he respects them for what they are in the context of their society and culture.

Accordingly, the portrayal of the women who appear in an ethnographical context in the *Histories* can be analysed under three categories: I) Marriage, sex, promiscuity and prostitution; II) Equality between sexes or rule of women?; III) Sparta: a case of 'otherness'.

### I. Marriage, sex, promiscuity and prostitution

#### a. The Babylonian custom of marriage

In the course of his narrative on the city of Babylon and its customs, Herodotus mentions a marital custom in Babylon, also practised in Illyria, which in his judgement was ὁ σοφώτατος ('the wisest') of their *nomoi*. Following the Herodotean narrative, once a year, all the maidens of marriageable age were summoned into a public place. They were then auctioned in order of beauty and attractiveness and not of social status or wealth. The wealthy men received beautiful wives as they could afford to outbid each other, whereas the rest received the ugly or the crippled ones in return for dowry.

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<sup>1</sup> Redfield, 1985, 99 and 102.

gathered by the selling of the attractive maidens. Thus, all the girls, irrespective of their appearance or financial situation, could get married. The parents retained the right to turn down the 'purchaser'-husband of their daughter or demand security that he would indeed make the girl his wife. We are also told that men from other villages could bid for a wife in Babylon.<sup>3</sup>

Many modern scholars hold the view that the story appears to be a Greek 'fantasy' and that the other ancient authors who make mention of it copy Herodotus loosely.<sup>4</sup> It is the introduction of the 'auctioneer' -- or 'the third party' as McNeal puts it -- that leads them to conclude that Herodotus 'is giving us not Babylon at any period of its history but the typical Greek *polis*, jealously eager to control the private life of its citizens.'<sup>5</sup> Indeed, it seems as if Herodotus contradicts himself. In Book 1 of his *Histories*, we are told that when Cyrus received a message from the Spartans declaring that he was not to harm any Greek city, he uttered the following: οὐκ ἔδεισά κω ἀνδρας τοιούτους, τοῖσι ἔστι χῶρος ἐν μέσῃ τῇ πόλι ἀποδεδεγμένως, ἐς τὸν συλλεγόμενοι ἀλλήλους ὀμιλοῦντες ἐξαπατῶσι ('I have never yet feared men who have a set place in the middle of the city, where they gather and deceive each other').<sup>6</sup> In the same passage, he also adds that the Persians did not have such a thing as an *agora*, a market place: αὐτοὶ γὰρ οἱ Πέρσαι ἀγορῆσι οὐδεν ἑωθασι χρῆσθαι ('the Persians never customarily used a market place'). Excavations have shown that this applied to both Persia and Babylon. So, if there were no market places, but the Babylonian custom took place in a market place, then 'on his own showing, the institutions needed to make the practice feasible were Greek.'<sup>7</sup> However, it could be argued, contrary to scholarly belief, that the issue of the Babylonian *agora* is not a real problem, if we come to think that wherever the Babylonian marriage ceremony was conducted will have *become* a market-place, i.e. an *agora*.

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<sup>2</sup> Keuls, 1984, 321.

<sup>3</sup> Hdt., 1.196. Cf. also Aelian, *Varia Historia*, 4.1; Strabo, 16.1.20; Nicolaus of Damascus, *FgrH*, 90 F 103w.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 1.196; McNeal, 1988, 54.

<sup>5</sup> McNeal, 1988, 57. For the Herodotean Babylonian custom as being fictional, and the rather private character of the Babylonian marriage, cf. McGinnis, 1986; McNeal, 1988; Driver and Miles, 1956.

<sup>6</sup> Hdt., 1.153.

The readers of this passage are faced with a further question, namely, why Herodotus records the Babylonian practice as ὁ σοφώτατος τῶν νόμων ('the wisest of their customs'). A possible answer could be that he found the idea of equality between beautiful and ugly as well as rich and poor women quite appealing. Every girl was provided with a dowry and no girl remained unmarried. Yet, the use of the word σοφώτατος is interestingly vague. For, it could be taken to reveal the principle of social justice that is expressed through the custom, but it could also mean something like 'most ingenious' as in 'cunning', hinting at the historian's ironic attitude towards the custom.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, two things are striking in the whole story. Firstly, because the Herodotean Babylonian custom is a 'too good to be true' utopia, the levelling of various ranks of men escapes notice. And there is not only a levelling of ranks as far as financial status is concerned. There is also one that concerns appearance. As Arieti has commented, 'those who are wealthy find good looking wives; those who accept ugly wives find compensation in money.'<sup>9</sup> Indeed, even in this utopia represented in the *Histories*, it seems as if the primary quality of a wife is her beauty and nothing more.<sup>10</sup>

The unmistakable ranking of the girls' beauty by the auctioneer and the silence of the parents as well as of the girls cannot but reveal Herodotus' actual mockery of the Babylon law of marriage. Yet, his intentions and mockery are not directed against women, for they serve as counterparts for slaves. His mockery is rather directed against the men who created and continued the custom. It appears that the very word σοφώτατος may be the key to Herodotus' view of the Babylonian custom and of the women's representation because of it and in it. For as Arieti has remarked, 'he ranks the customs of Babylon, and in the ranking one perhaps learns something about the historian himself.'<sup>11</sup> And one wonders: if this is their best custom, how horrible must the rest be?

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<sup>7</sup> Pembroke, 1967, 5. Cf. Dandamayev, 1985, 97, for the absence of market places in Persia, for, as the Persepolis Elamite tablets inform us, 'the commodity-money relations were poorly developed in Persia.'

<sup>8</sup> For the utopian distribution of dowries expressed by Phaleas of Calchedon, cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1266 b3. Cf. McNeal, 1988, 65, who concludes that Phaleas 'simply regularised some social pattern which he knew from his own Greek world'.

<sup>9</sup> Arieti, 1995, 183-184.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Homer, *Iliad*, 1.113-115, where Agamemnon liberally claims for Briseis' both beauty and skill.

<sup>11</sup> Arieti, 1995, 183.

The answer to this question is given by Herodotus himself. And not surprisingly, their most horrible custom has to do with sexuality, namely, prostitution.<sup>12</sup> It should be said that the Babylonian ritual of female prostitution is the only occasion when Herodotus actually condemns a custom of peoples. In Book 1, just after the presentation of the Babylonian custom of marriage, Herodotus reports that ὁ δὲ αἰσχιστος τῶν νόμων ἐστὶ τοῖσι Βαβυλωνίοισι ὅδε· δεῖ πάσαν γυναῖκα ἐπιχωρίην ἰζομένην ἐς Ἴρον Ἀφροδίτης ἄπαξ ἐν τῇ ζῳῇ μιχθῆναι ἀνδρὶ ξείνῳ ('the basest custom among the Babylonians is the following. Every woman of the land must once in her life sit in the temple of Aphrodite and have sex with a stranger'). There is no fixed amount for the services the women provide, for, whether large or small, it is dedicated to the goddess. The beautiful women depart from the temple relatively quickly, whereas the uglier ones have to stay there for years waiting.<sup>13</sup>

Two aspects of this discussion are worthy of comment here. First, once again beauty is projected as the women's primary quality. Both best and worst of the Babylonian customs hold the beauty of a woman important. In the first custom, beauty is essential so as to attain a pretty sum and a rich husband, whereas in the latter one, so as to fulfil the obligation quickly.<sup>14</sup> The second aspect is sexuality, which, not surprisingly, is connected with the basest of customs.<sup>15</sup> It is quite evident, though, that his intentions once again are not to reprove women, for they only obey the cultural laws. It seems that Herodotus' purpose is to show that sexual customs reveal many things about a people's *ethos*, character and financial situation. Thus, when he says that every woman, and not just those of a particular class, is obliged by law to practise the custom of ritual prostitution in a temple, 'he means that what they call marriage is in fact concubinage'.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Herodotus' fondness of framing the whole of his *Histories* with 'barbarian sexual misconduct' has to do with his desire to identify responsibility and define character. For 'all people, stripped of rank and title, are in

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<sup>12</sup> For prostitution in the *Histories*, cf. Chapter Six.

<sup>13</sup> Hdt., 1.199.

<sup>14</sup> Arieti, 1995, 186.

<sup>15</sup> For similar stories of temple prostitution, cf. Strabo, 16.1.20; Lucian, *De Dea Syria*, 11; Justin, 18.5; Jeremiah, *The apocryphal epistle*, 43. Cf. Macginnis, 1986, 78, who has argued that Jeremiah's report seems to be genuine and not a borrowing from Herodotus.

<sup>16</sup> Pembroke, 1967, 4.



their sexual lives simply people.<sup>17</sup> We have only to remember Alexander the Great who is said to have remarked that there were only two occasions when he felt like a mortal: when sleeping and when having sexual intercourse.<sup>18</sup> Herodotus perhaps intended to show the inferiority of foreign customs to Greek ones and the weakness of the people who practise them, while being particularly careful not to dismiss them completely. However, not once does he denigrate the women involved, for they are never portrayed as enjoying themselves and the practice. He rather sympathises with them and their suffering in such unspeakable religious rites.

## **b. Marital customs: a case of polyandry or wantonness?**

Undeniably, Herodotus' ethnographies pick out things 'that a Greek would find odd and, therefore, repellently interesting' despite the fact that his intentions might not have been such.<sup>19</sup> It seems that since the Greeks were so concerned with the constant supervision of women, they needed groups to stand for 'the other'; that is, groups to help them think about the opposites of their ideals, namely, promiscuity and permissiveness. And some non-Greek peoples, together with their customs, were indeed made to fit this paradigm.<sup>20</sup>

### **1. Copulating in the open**

In Book 1, Herodotus tells us of Massagetan habits and customs. We are told that the people are primitive and that this is demonstrated by their custom of having intercourse in the open: a custom which -- in the real world anyway -- undeniably 'was particularly distasteful to the Greeks.'<sup>21</sup> Yet, this did not exist only among the Massagetae. In the course of Herodotus' narrative of practices amongst the peoples he

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Arieti, 1995, 186.

<sup>18</sup> Plutarch, *Alexander*, 22.

<sup>19</sup> Redfield, 1985, 97. Cf. Baldry, 1965, 21, who observes that Herodotus deliberately made the customs of the peoples he describes opposite to the corresponding Greek customs.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Hartog, 1988, his discussion of barbarian tribes as the parallel to the Greeks and their customs. Cf. also Rossellini and Said, 1978, 955.

<sup>21</sup> Arieti, 1995, 188. Hdt., 1.203. In myth, however, intercourse in the open could be romantic: cf., e.g., the Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite*.

portrays ethnographically: a race of Indians, the Auseans, and the Amazons too are also represented as having intercourse in the open.<sup>22</sup>

Herodotus' attitude towards this copulation in the open is indicative in his observation that μῖξιν δὲ τούτων τῶν ἀνθρώπων εἶναι ἐμφανέα κατὰ περ τοῖσι προβάτοισι ('these people have intercourse in the open like sheep'). As Walcot has remarked, to 'talk of people behaving like animals is to make something 'dirty' of sex and is suggestive of an attitude of mind which is far from being tolerant.'<sup>23</sup> Indeed, for a Greek, such behaviour was beyond the bounds of imagination. We have only to remember Hera's seduction of Zeus, and more specifically Hera's shock at the prospect that she and her husband might be seen by the other gods having intercourse in public view.<sup>24</sup> Most probably Herodotus' inclusion of open copulation is there to differentiate Greek 'normality' from foreign 'bestiality'. Still, it is of importance that he does not condemn the custom.

A few things, however, must be said about the mating between Amazons and Scythians. Following Herodotus' narrative, the Amazons and the young Scythians had intercourse in the open before settling down together; yet, it was always with the same man. Thus, although their copulation could be characterised as bestial, it cannot be argued that promiscuity was a feature of it. Indeed, it could even be seen as a form of marriage.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, one should take it into account that, in the beginning, they had no other choice but to copulate in the open, for they did not share the same roof or camp with the young Scythians. Consequently, it appears that the nation of the Herodotean Sauromatae belongs to a world that is half way between civilisation and bestiality.

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<sup>22</sup> Hdt., 1.216; 3.101; 4.180, 110-117. For copulation in the open in other authors, cf. Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 5.4.33-34; Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, 2.1023-1025; Theopompus, *FgrH*, 115 F 204. Cf. also Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica*, 1.8, for the Mossynoeci, who compares their behaviour to that of the dogs.

<sup>23</sup> Walcot, 1978, 145.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Homer, *Iliad*, 14.294-351.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Dewald, 1981, 101.

## 2. *Marriage and Promiscuity*

According to Herodotus, the Massagetae not only openly indicate their desire to mate but they also share their women. Whenever a man has intercourse with a woman, he indicates it by φαρετρεῶνα ἀποκρεμάσας πρὸ τῆς ἀμάξης ('hanging his quiver before her wagon').<sup>26</sup> Yet, despite this strange mating custom, there does seem to be some system of marriage among the Herodotean Massagetae, seeing that they can only have one wife despite the community of women (γυναῖκα μὲν γαμέει ἕκαστος, ταύτησι δὲ ἐπικοίνα χρέωνται: 'each marries one wife, but they are held in common'). Indeed, the Massagetan sexual system, as is represented in the *Histories*, presupposes marriage but excludes cohabitation with just one woman so as to promote community of women. And owing to this degree of organisation, their practices are distinguished from sexual promiscuity. Hence, strangely enough, in Herodotus' representation they are neither bestial nor civilised, but, like the Sauromatae, somewhere between the two.

Herodotus reports that the Nasamones have a similar custom. During intercourse, they plant a staff before the woman's dwelling (ἐπεὶ σκίπτωνα προστήσονται, μίσγονται). However, the Nasamones are indeed both promiscuous and polygamous (γυναῖκας δὲ νομίζοντες πολλὰς ἔχειν ἕκαστος ἐπικοινων αὐτέων τὴν μίξιν ποιεῦνται: 'it is their custom that each many has many wives, but their intercourse with them is promiscuous').<sup>27</sup> The similarity of the custom of the Nasamones with that of the Massagetae consists of the community of women and of the practice of signifying the will to copulate by leaving an object, a quiver or a staff, in front of the woman's dwelling.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Hdt., 1.216. Cf. Strabo, 11.6, for the same custom. Cf. also Polybius, 12.6b and Strabo, 16.4.25, for other ancient examples of limited promiscuity. Cf. Rossellini and Said, 1978, 967, who argue that the Massagetan promiscuity does not obliterate the distinction between the private and public, as the intercourse takes place inside the wagon, i.e. the house.

<sup>27</sup> Hdt., 4.172.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Corcella and Medaglia, 1993, at 4.172, who observe that the system suggests a typical group marriage of the nomads. Cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 4.172, who have also suggested that it 'was a curious form of group marriage'. For other tribes exercising promiscuity in marriage, cf. Strabo, 16.4.25; Diodorus Siculus, 5.18; and Pomponius Mela, *De Chorographia*, 1.45.

The marriage practices of the races of the Auseans, the Agathyrsoi and the Paeoneans bear a close resemblance to those among the Massagetae and Nasamones in that they too share their women.<sup>29</sup> Herodotus reports that, like the Nasamones, they are polygamous and promiscuous tribes. According to the *Histories*, when an Ausean woman conceives a child, they wait until it is born and grown before they decide on who the father is, judging by the child's appearance.<sup>30</sup> And so far as the Agathyrsoi are concerned, they are quite unique, for although Herodotus speaks of community of wives elsewhere, the reason given here is also unique, 'and is clearly a sophisticated, moralising justification for a practice rather than a motive for a practice.'<sup>31</sup> For, in the Herodotean narrative, ἐπικοινωνοῦν δὲ τῶν γυναικῶν τὴν μίξιν ποιεῦνται, ἵνα κασίγνητοὶ τε ἀλλήλων ἔωσι καὶ οἰκῆται ἔοντες πάντες μήτε φθόνῳ μήτε ἐχθραὶ χρέωνται ἐς ἀλλήλους ('they practise community of women so that they may all be brothers and relatives and so that they do not envy or hate each other'). Indeed, the joint ownership of women could be thought utopian, and it was at times idealised. Plato argues for a similar advantage in the system, since men will assist each other because they will regard τοὺς μὲν ὡς υἱεῖς, τοὺς δὲ ὡς ἀδελφοὺς, τοὺς δὲ ὡς πατέρας ('the ones as their sons, and the others as their brothers or as their fathers').<sup>32</sup>

The women of the Gindanes are reported by the historian to put on an anklet for every man they have had intercourse with. The one who wears the most is held in high esteem, for she has been loved by many men.<sup>33</sup> Aelian reports on the same custom as practised in Lydia and according to him, there the women behaved correctly once married.<sup>34</sup> This is something that reminds us of the Thracian marital custom in the *Histories*. Herodotus states that they took no care of their maiden girls and granted

<sup>29</sup> Hdt., 4.104 and 180: 5.16.

<sup>30</sup> For the decision of fatherhood based on the child's appearance, cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 2.1262a 13 for the Libyans; Pomponius Mela, *De Chorographia*, 1.45 and Pliny, *Natural History*, 5.45, for the Garamanti; Nicolaus of Damascus, *FgrH*, 90 F 103d, for the Liburni.

<sup>31</sup> Hadas, 1935, 120-121. Cf. Nicolaus of Damascus, *FgrH*, 90 F 104, who reported that it was the Galactophagoi and not the Agathyrsoi who called everyone their kindred.

<sup>32</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 5.465b. Cf. also Ephorus, *FgrH*, 70 F 42. However, cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 2.1, who is against Plato's idea.

<sup>33</sup> Hdt., 4.176. Herodotus uses the word *polyanor* to refer to the women of the Gindanes, an epithet attributed also to Helen by Aeschylus; cf. Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 62.

them absolute permissiveness while they strictly safeguarded their wives, whom they bought for a great price from their parents.<sup>35</sup> In the case of the Thracians, the sequence of customs is chosen with a constant antithesis to the Greek practices: the selling of the male children, the sexual liberty of the daughters, the selling of the daughters. One could say that among the Thracians, Herodotus wanted to see all the aspects of a primitive society, which the Greeks had long left behind, but which could not also be considered as savage.<sup>36</sup> Another case of indifference to juvenile chastity appears among the race of the Herodotean Adyrmachidae, who show all the virgins due to be wed to the king and who, in his turn, could take the virginity of whomever he liked (*droit de seigneur*).<sup>37</sup>

Nenci has commented that Herodotus many times mentions the sexual liberty of women outside Greece.<sup>38</sup> At times, it seems that the mating customs represented in the *Histories* suggest excessive and uncontrollable wantonness among the peoples treated ethnographically. Yet, underneath the negative connotation, a situation of polyandry or a system of a relationship in which the bride of an individual is at the same time the wife of the whole group is implied. Indeed, the only social situation in which the Herodotean cases tend to make sense is one where men outnumber women.<sup>39</sup>

### c. Polygamy and death

In Book 5, Herodotus records one more case of polygamy. The only difference observable in this story when compared to the aforementioned is that the element of promiscuity is missing. It appears that the historian is much more interested in the peculiar funerary custom entailed in this story. According to Herodotus, the peoples who live above the Crestonaeans in Thrace (the historian does not name them) practise polygamy and, on the death of a husband, there is great rivalry among his wives and testimonies are given by friends, as to who was best loved by the deceased husband. The appointed one is praised by all and is then slain and buried with him. As for the

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<sup>34</sup> Aelian, *Varia Historia*, 4.1.

<sup>35</sup> Hdt., 5.6. For the Thracian purchase of women, cf. Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 7.2.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Nenci, 1994, at 5.6.

<sup>37</sup> Hdt., 4.168.

<sup>38</sup> Nenci, 1994, at 5.6.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Pembroke, 1967, 11; How and Wells, 1912, at 1.216.

rest of the wives, they take it to heart as they are deeply dishonoured.<sup>40</sup> The burial of the most beloved wife at the death of the husband is a ritual that reminds us of the funeral of the supreme Scythians in the *Histories*, whose custom was based on the belief that the soul requires the same things in both the world of the living and the dead.<sup>41</sup> Yet, in the case of the Scythian burial ritual, it is not one of the wives of the deceased that is buried with him but one of his concubines. Moreover, it seems that the concubine did not follow her master on her own accord, but that she was rather strangled and buried together with his wine-bearer, his cook, his groom, his squire, his messenger, horses, fruit and golden cups.

#### d. Egyptian marriage practices

Although the second book of the *Histories* is almost entirely devoted to Egyptian history and customs, Herodotus contents himself with reporting only two things about Egyptian marriage practices. Firstly, with regard to Egyptian swineherds he states that οὐδὲ σφι ἐκδίδοσθαι θυγατέρα ἐθέλει οὐδ' ἄγεσθαι ἐξ αὐτέων, ἀλλ' ἐκδίδονται τε οἱ συβῶται καὶ ἄγονται ἐξ ἀλλήλων ('no [Egyptian] will give his daughter in marriage to swineherds or take a wife from their women, but swineherds intermarry among themselves'). And secondly, he informs us that καὶ γυναικὶ μιῇ ἕκαστος αὐτῶν συνοικεῖ, κατὰ περ Ἑλληνας ('each man has one wife, as happens among the Greeks').<sup>42</sup>

In the light of the information he provides on the unique Egyptian topsyturvydom, which is present both in their environment, especially their river, as well as in the exceptional social roles of the two sexes, one would probably expect to hear about uniquely reversed marital customs and mating habits. At least, one would expect to find the promiscuity that characterises the marriage practices of the rest of his ethnographic accounts.<sup>43</sup> Yet, what the historian presents us with here is a 'normal'

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<sup>40</sup> Hdt., 5.5 Cf. Rossellini and Said, 1978, 987, who have quite rightly argued that what is indeed portrayed in this passage of the *Histories* as a funerary sacrifice on the tomb of the deceased bears certain traits that are close to a wedding. This is revealed by Herodotus' use of the word *συνθάπτεται* instead of *συνοικεῖν*.

<sup>41</sup> Nenci, 1994, at 5.5; How and Wells, 1912, at 5.5; Hdt., 4.70.

<sup>42</sup> Hdt., 2.47 and 92.

<sup>43</sup> For Egyptian topsyturvydom, cf. Hdt., 2.35-36. Cf. also Chapter Three.

picture of a nation, which, oddly enough, is not Greek. Thus, in his representation, the fact that swineherds intermarry reflects the notion that the choice of spouse is within the same family circle and occupation.<sup>44</sup> As far as Egyptian monogamy is concerned, most scholars agree that although polygamy was rare in actual Egyptian practice, there was no prohibition against multiple marriages, which must have taken place among the Pharaohs for political reasons and most probably among men who could afford to have more than one wife.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, the fact remains that monogamy is the norm of the Egyptians in the *Histories*, and a line is drawn between them and the promiscuous marital customs of the peoples of Herodotus' other ethnographic accounts. One cannot but wonder whether the historian's representation actually hints at the fact that the Egyptian marital practices mentioned are the only thing that is seemingly 'normal' and not 'reversed' in an otherwise topsy-turvy society.

#### e. Adultery in Egypt

According to the Herodotean narrative, the Egyptian king Pheros was afflicted with blindness owing to his sacrilegious act of hurling a spear into the middle of the river Nile's current as a punishment for flooding the fields. Having been blind for ten years, an oracle was delivered to him which stated that his punishment was drawing to an end and that he would recover his eyesight if he bathed his eyes in the urine of a woman who had never lain with another man except her husband. Pheros tried this first with his own wife but, as he was not cured, then tried it with all the women, one after another, until he eventually recovered his sight. This woman he married, but the rest he gathered into a town called Red Earth and burnt them together with the town itself.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. Lloyd, 1976, at 2.47; Pestman, 1961, 4. Cf. Dewald, 1981, 102, who argues that 'a prohibition against marrying one's daughter to a swineherd is set in the context of a society that abominates pigs'. Dewald has a point in that swineherds were thought of as impure in Egypt, but Herodotus does not explicitly mention this marital custom to stress this impurity; nevertheless, we cannot reject that he is implying it.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 2.92; Lloyd, 1976, at 2.92; Watterson, 1991, 57 and 67; Simpson, 1974, 100-105; Robins, 1993, 64; Tyldesley, 1994, 49. Cf. also Diodorus Siculus, 1.80, who, in contrast to Herodotus, reports that with the exception of the priests who had one wife, the rest could take as many as they determined.

<sup>46</sup> Hdt., 2.111. Cf. Diodorus Siculus, 1.59, for the woman that restores Pheros' eyesight being a gardener. For the name Pheros simply deriving from the title 'Pharaoh', cf. Manetho, *FgrH*, 609 F 5. Cf. also How and Wells, 1912, at 2.111;

There are two elements that catch our attention in this bizarre tale of Herodotus. the first one perhaps being the recurrent theme of a king's or queen's tampering with a natural body of water, already discussed in the case of the Babylonian Nitocris in Chapter Two. As Arieti has quite rightly suggested, in the Herodotean account 'the punishments of crimes against water are uncannily appropriate'.<sup>47</sup> Hence, Pheros' pollution of the Nile with his spear results in a blindness that can be only cured by bathing his eyes with 'polluted' water; that is. with urine.<sup>48</sup> The second eye-catching element in Herodotus' tale is the Egyptian women's infidelity, for the king has to try the urine of a considerable number of women before he can regain his sight. Despite the fact that the tale is reported in connection with Egyptian women, it is generally assumed to be anomalous within Herodotus' otherwise neutral, if not actually favourable, representation of women in general. since here 'he registers no surprise or doubt' when it comes to their sexual purity.<sup>49</sup>

It is difficult to take the Pheros account in the *Histories* as typical of the historian's attitude to women in general or to Egyptian women. It is quite evident that not all women are labelled as 'impure' or 'unchaste'. since the Egyptian king's eyesight is after all eventually restored. Consequently. one cannot but wonder whether this 'adventure' that Pheros was forced to undergo. namely the washing of his eyes again and again with the urine of different women. was not primarily intended by the

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Lloyd. 1975, 107. and 1988. at 2.111. For the town called Red Earth being associated with blood and playing an etiological role for the evolution of this tale, thus implying an Egyptian origin of the story. cf. also Lloyd. 1988. at 2.111.

<sup>47</sup> Arieti. 1995. 177. Cf. Lloyd. 1988. 42. who has argued that the punishment of Pheros owing to his hurling a spear into the Nile expresses 'Greek ideology and value systems'.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Benardete, 1969, 47. Cf. Diodorus Siculus. 1.58, who implies that the Egyptian king could have inherited the blindness from his father. However, blindness and ophthalmic complaints were common in Egypt: cf. Hdt., 2.84; Lloyd, 1988. at 2.111; Sigerist, 1951, 217-356. especially 224, 274, 334 and 343. For the spear motif. cf. *Exodus*, 8.16-18. Cf. also Aly, 1969, 66; Thompson, 1957, index s.v. *spear*. For urine as magical agent. cf. Thompson, 1957. index s.v. *urine*.

<sup>49</sup> Walcot, 1978, 141. Cf. How and Wells. 1912. at 2.111. Cf. also Watterson, 1991, 69, who reports only on Herodotus' representation of Egyptian women and not women in general. For the chastity motif and the idea that a pure maiden can become the wife of a king, cf. Thompson, 1957, index, s.v. *chastity*. For the adulteress motif. cf. Thompson, 1957, index s.v. *adulteress*; K 778; U 66.1. For adultery and punishment in Egypt. cf. Eyre, 1984, 92-105; Robins, 1993, 67-72; Tyldesley, 1994, 61.



historian to emphasise women's infidelity but the punishment imposed by divine beings, should they be offended. In addition, the story could have been told in an attitude of wry, jokey irony -- which may have originated in Herodotus' source -- without hinting anything in particular at women and their chastity. Unfortunately, there seems to be no easy answer to this.

## II. Equality between sexes or rule of women?

The majority of Greeks -- especially Athenians -- thought of foreign women as exercising an inappropriate degree of power over their men. Thus, they conjured up images of the men of foreign tribes as being effeminate, owing to their inability to control their women. However, Herodotus does not seem to share the same opinion, for in no instance does he use the peculiarity of foreign customs to suggest that women seize the power or fight with men over the distribution of power. On the contrary, women in Herodotus' ethnographies never pose a threat to the men of their own society.

### a. Lycians: a case of matriarchy?

Although Herodotus discusses the Lycians only in a short passage and hardly mentions them again, it is one that has offered food for thought and a great many controversies over the years in the formation of modern anthropology. Following the narrative, the most remarkable custom among the Lycians was that καλέουσι ἀπὸ τῶν μητέρων ἑαυτούς καὶ οὐκὶ ἀπὸ τῶν πατέρων· εἰρομένου δὲ ἑτέρου τὸν πλησίον, τίς εἴη, καταλέξει ἑαυτὸν μητροθεν καὶ τῆς μητρὸς ἀνανεμεῖται τὰς μητέρας· καὶ ἦν μὲν γε γυνὴ ἀστὴ δούλῳ συνοικήσῃ, γενναῖα τὰ τέκνα νενόμισται· ἦν δὲ ἀνὴρ ἀστός, καὶ ὁ πρῶτος αὐτῶν, γυναῖκα ξείνην ἢ παλλακὴν ἔχῃ, ἄτιμα τὰ τέκνα γίνεται. ('They take their names from their mothers and not from their fathers. When one is asked by the next man who he is, he says that he is of such a mother and he recounts the mothers of his mother. And if a citizen woman marries a slave, their children are regarded as pure

born. But if a citizen man, even if he is the first in the land, marries a stranger or a concubine, the children are dishonoured').<sup>50</sup>

Indeed, Lycian customs are in complete contrast with those of the Greeks. Their matrilineal descent certainly reveals a usurpation of roles in the Greek eyes. In addition, in Greek society, only the children of a mother that was married according to the norms were regarded as legitimate offspring.<sup>51</sup> However, it is of importance that the Herodotean passage on the Lycians does not argue for promiscuity, or uncertain paternity. Kinship through the female line might be based on various ideas. It could be connected with primitive polygamy or with the fact that 'paternity is a matter of inference' while 'maternity of observation'.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, one observes that, despite the use of the precise terminology ἀσπτή, ἀτιμῶν, the Herodotean passage does not concern the laws of citizenship, but the personal legitimacy on which membership of the *ethnos* depends. Hence, in the world of the *Histories*, the Lycian naming pattern and the determination of citizenship through the female line do not point to the existence of matriarchy among them, for at no time does it indicate an usurpation of roles between the sexes. It is rather a peculiarity of their custom to which Herodotus gives a humorous touch when he does not mention Sarpedon's father.<sup>53</sup>

## b. Amazons

According to Herodotus, the Amazons refuse to live in Scythia on the grounds that they are not used to the secluded life of Scythian women, or to the female crafts they practise. Thus, it is their Scythian husbands who follow them to a new land where they found the nation of the Sauromatae.<sup>54</sup> What is of importance in the Sauromatan account of Herodotus is that although the women retain the initiative, at no time are their Scythian husbands shown to be reduced to the role of the 'wife'. Indeed, as

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<sup>50</sup> Hdt., 1.173. It is worthy of attention that the historian reports that the original inhabitants of Lycia were the Solymni. Cf. Homer, *Iliad*, 6.152-190, for the association of the Solymni with the female monstrosities of the Chimaera and the Amazons.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Pollux, 3.21.

<sup>52</sup> Westermarck, 1901, 36.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Harrison, 2000a, 88, for Herodotus' reluctance to assign immortal parents to mortal men.

<sup>54</sup> Hdt., 4.110-117. Cf. Chapters One and Three.

Hartog has observed, 'the text does not rest on mechanical inversion of roles'. It is true that the women 'reject *erga gynaikeia* but these do not devolve upon the men'.<sup>55</sup> In the historian's representation, they rather occupy an equal position with men.

### c. Issedonean and Zaukean women

When Herodotus shows us women taking part in the public and political sphere of societies other than those of Greece, their behaviour parallels that of their men.<sup>56</sup> Yet, he never implies that they used this position of equivalence to their advantage so as to become rulers of men. This was the case in the Sauromatan account and it is likewise the case among the Zaukes and the Issedones.<sup>57</sup> According to the *Histories*, the Issedonian women have equal power with men; in Herodotus words: ἰσοκρατέες δὲ ὁμοίως αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖσι ἀνδράσι ('the women possess equal rights with their men'). Nothing indicates that the women prevail over their male counterparts or that the passage constructs some system of primitive matriarchy. The very word ἰσοκρατέες makes the point. And despite How and Wells' argument that the word here might just describe a society where men and women alike have to hunt, Herodotus does not indicate that it just applies to hunting and not to the relationship between the two sexes as a whole.<sup>58</sup>

The women of the Herodotean Zaukes participate in warfare by driving their husbands' chariots. Although the passage denotes a special position held by the women, which is certainly not rule over men, two questions can be posed here. Are they portrayed to drive the chariots to war because they were regarded as equal to men and they possessed the same manly, free and warlike spirit with the Amazons? Or could it be that because there were not many men the Zaukes made use of their women in war? Unfortunately, we cannot answer the questions for certain. However, it is important to remember that there is some evidence for chariot-drivers being regarded as inferior to fighters in the Greek world.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Hartog, 1988, 224. For the Sauromatan equality between the sexes, cf. Pomeroy, 1984, 7; David, 1976, 151-152.

<sup>56</sup> Dewald, 1981, 103.

<sup>57</sup> Hdt., 4.26 and 193.

<sup>58</sup> How and Wells, 1912, at 4.26.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Ogden, 1996b, 114-115.

### III. Sparta: a case of 'otherness'

It could be argued that Sparta does not fit in with the ethnographic accounts of Herodotus, since it is a Greek state. However, as Cartledge has well observed, 'it is a little noticed or appreciated fact that Sparta is the only Greek state that Herodotus treats in an ethnographic manner, describing some of the Spartans' customs as if they might be as unfamiliar and outlandish to his audience as those of the Nasamones'.<sup>60</sup> This should not appear peculiar for the simple reason that Spartan women were in any case regarded as the 'Other' compared to their Athenian counterparts, owing to their alleged financial and personal independence as well as their sexual license.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, Spartan women must have intrigued the historian. Although the *Histories* are full of lengthy descriptions of barbarian women, whether these are powerful queens or merely daughters, mothers and sisters, Herodotus provides scant information on Greek women.<sup>62</sup> There is no complicated reason for the historian's exclusion of Greek women -- especially Athenians -- for, as it has already been observed in the Introduction, it was insulting to a woman to mention her, or at any rate her name, in public. Where women are mentioned in public, they are not referred to by name but as 'the wife of X', 'the daughter of X', and so on. The women of Sparta are the only women of Hellas who feature in the *Histories* quite frequently and in detail, and in this regard they take their place next to their barbarian counterparts.

#### a. The Spartan royal funeral and ethnographic 'otherness'

According to Herodotus, the funeral of Spartan kings resembles in many respects that of the Asians. When a Spartan king dies, horsemen proclaim his death in all parts of Laconia, while women beat upon cauldrons to summon the people to mourn. Once this is done, one free man and woman from each house defile themselves. The funeral is attended not only by Spartans but also by a number of their subject neighbours and helots, who, upon gathering at the appointed place, intermingle with the women, and,

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<sup>60</sup> Cartledge, 1993, 80. Cf. also Hodkinson, 2000, 19.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Fantham, 1994, 63; Kunstler, 1987, 31; Cartledge, 1981.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Millender, 1999, 356

all together strike their foreheads and make long and loud lamentations, calling the dead king the best of all their kings.<sup>63</sup>

The first thing that catches the eye in this Spartan royal burial ceremony is Herodotus' allusion to its resemblance with the Asian one. A little later, the historian will make a comparison to the Persian custom of the new king cancelling debts, while, immediately after the Spartan funerary rites, he will speak of the similarities that Spartans share with Egyptians.<sup>64</sup> It is quite understandable, then, that apart from such information as we may derive from it on Spartan burial customs, the significance of this passage also lies in the fact that it illustrates Herodotus' opinion and representation of Sparta's ethnographic 'otherness'. However, this is not the only element that points to this direction. The beating of cauldrons by women to summon the people to mourn, which vividly reminds us of the Egyptian custom of men and women clapping hands on their way to Bubastis, with its implication of female sexual freedom is another thing that greatly contributes to this conclusion.<sup>65</sup> As far as the latter is concerned, Herodotus' use of *σύμμιγα* (*πολλὰι χιλιάδες σύμμιγα τῆσι γυναιξί*) with regards to the mixing of male and female mourners gives a note of impropriety to the ceremony and, as Millender has suggested, 'semantically associates the intermingling of the mourners with sexual promiscuity'.<sup>66</sup> Undeniably, the historian's usage of this word is quite striking, for, as has already been pointed out in this chapter, female sexual promiscuity is generally associated with barbarian societies, and more importantly, it features in the *Histories* as a characteristic of the women in Herodotus' ethnographic accounts. It goes without saying, then, that by attaching a barbarian overtone to both the Spartan rites and the Spartan women,

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<sup>63</sup> Hdt., 6.58. For the restriction of extravagant mourning for private persons in Sparta, cf. Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 27; *Moralia*, 238d. In Athens, cf. Plutarch, *Solon*, 12.5. For the honours dead kings received in Sparta as if they were demigods, cf. Xenophon, *Lacanian republic*, 15.9 and *Hellenica*, 3.3.1. Cf. Hartog, 1988, 156, who sees a change in the image of the king in Sparta.

<sup>64</sup> Hdt., 6.59-60.

<sup>65</sup> Hdt., 2.60. Cf. Hartog, 1988, 154, where, beyond arguing for the similarity between the Spartan beating of cauldrons and the Egyptian clapping, he observes that a further connection between Sparta and a barbarian country, namely Persia, can be found in the lamentation. According to Hartog, *σὺμωγή* 'is a word more generally associated with tragedy, but Herodotus applies it only to the Persians': cf. Hdt., 3.66; 8.99; 9.24.

<sup>66</sup> Millender, 1999, 357 and 379 n.7. Cf. also Hartog, 1988, 153.

Herodotus insinuates not only the 'otherness' of Sparta but also the sexual license enjoyed by its women.

### **b. Female initiative: Gorgo, Argeia and the wives of the Minyae**

Gorgo, Argeia and the Minyae each receive dedicated treatments in other chapters, but attention is drawn here to the intelligence, craftiness, political interference and initiative they display in the *Histories*. All of them are portrayed in the Herodotean narrative as outsmarting their Spartan compatriots and leaders, in one way or another. It is in the cases of these women that Herodotus comes closest to an intimation of female power in Sparta.

Accordingly, in the Herodotean account of the Minyae's imprisonment and death sentence, we witness the initiative and craftiness of their Spartan wives, who exchange clothing with them and achieve their escape. In the historian's representation, the Spartan women not only deceive their Spartan compatriots and leaders but they also temporarily assume control and reverse the order. A portrait of a similarly crafty Spartan woman is found in Herodotus' Argeia, the wife of the Spartan king Aristodemus. Her desire to see both her twin sons made kings results in the institution of dual kingship and the foundation of the two royal houses in Sparta. The other Spartan woman who caught the attention of Herodotus is Gorgo. She is mentioned twice in the *Histories*. In the first passage, when she was only a young girl, she warns and deters her father, king Cleomenes, from possible corruption. In the second passage, now as the wife of Leonidas, she outwits all the Lacedaemonians by being the only one to discover the secret of the exiled Spartan king Demaratus' tablet. In both cases her political involvement, her initiative and cleverness are not only striking but also suggestive of a certain degree of Spartan female power and influence.<sup>67</sup>

### **c. Herodotus on Spartan marital customs**

Herodotus provides information about Spartan marital customs, especially in connection with the two royal houses. Unlike Xenophon, Plutarch and Polybius, he

does not record the extra-marital arrangements sanctioned in Sparta, a fact which in itself is remarkable since his general treatment of Sparta and its women is ethnographic.<sup>68</sup> However, one could argue that these arrangements are certainly hinted at in the easiness that pervaded the Spartans' divorces and marriages to other women, with a view to procreation, when their existing wives prove barren, as we shall see. It should be noted, though, that despite the historian's implications of Spartan female power and sexual promiscuity, the details that he supplies with regard to marital practices evidently suggest that, in his eyes, Spartan women displayed the same passivity when it came to the choice of a spouse as did their Athenian counterparts.<sup>69</sup>

### 1. *Marriage by betrothal or capture?*

As we shall see, the Herodotean narrative suggests that there were two alternative methods in connection with marriage: there was either marriage by betrothal, where the father gives his daughter to a husband, or by seizure, where the husband simply snatches his bride. Consequently, in Herodotus' portrayal, formal betrothal was not always the norm in Sparta.<sup>70</sup>

#### *The Spartan patrouchos*

Herodotus informs us that it is the king who judges 'who is the appropriate man to have an unwedded heiress, if her father had not betrothed her before he died' (πατρούχου τε παρθένου περί, ἐξ τὸν ἰκνέεται ἔχειν, ἢν μὴ περ ὁ πατήρ αὐτὴν ἐγγυήσῃ).<sup>71</sup>

The first point that requires our attention here concerns the word that Herodotus uses to refer to the Spartan heiresses, that is, *patrouchos*. However, it should be noted that the word does not actually constitute an act of representation on the historian's part, as he rather uses what is thought to be the actual Spartan technical term. Nonetheless, *patrouchos* is the Spartan equivalent of the Athenian *epikleros*, or in other words, a

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<sup>67</sup> For the Minyae, cf. Hdt., 4.146; Chapter Three. For Argeia, cf. 6.52; Chapter Two. For Gorgo, cf. Hdt., 5.51 and 7.239; Chapter Three.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Xenophon, *Laconian constitution*, 1.9; Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 15.

<sup>69</sup> Millender, 1999, 363.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. McDowell, 1986, 81; Ogden, 1996a, 225.

<sup>71</sup> Hdt., 6.57.

daughter who has no brothers. and who is thus the only heir to her father's property.<sup>72</sup> The term comprises *patroa* and *echein*, meaning 'the holder of the patrimony', and obviously corresponds to the term *patroiokos* used in the law of Gortyn.<sup>73</sup> The term itself alludes to the financial power that accompanied Spartan heiresses. Moreover, we know from other sources that Spartan women indeed enjoyed some financial independence, and it was this fact that led Aristotle to speak of Spartan gynaecocracy.<sup>74</sup> However, in Herodotus' account, we have nothing but the term *patrouchos* to suggest that Spartan women exercised legal rights of ownership. The historian does not actually assert or even suggest that an heiress in Sparta legally controlled this patrimony of hers.<sup>75</sup>

To turn to the issue of marriage, the Herodotean account is indicative of Spartan women's betrothal by their fathers.<sup>76</sup> Only in the event of their fathers dying without having promised their hand was royal supervision required. The emphasis here should indeed be placed on 'royal supervision', for, in Herodotus' narrative, the kings do not have a completely free hand in appointing a husband for the unwedded heiress. The verb *ἰκνέεται* denotes that they rather act as judges between already existing suitors than as the allocators of these women.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1270a24 and 27, who refers to Spartan *patrouchos* as *epikleros*. For the Athenian *epikleros*, cf. De Ste Croix, 1970, 273-277; Harrison, 1971, 132-138; Arthur, 1973, 32-34; Schaps, 1979, 25-42; Patterson, 1998, 91-103; Sealy, 1990, 29-30; Lacey, 1968, 24; Just, 1989, 95-96. For *patrouchos*, cf. Schaps, 1979, 43-44; Lacey, 1968, 202-203; Sealey, 1990, 85 and 88.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Schaps, 1979, 127 n.115; McDowell, 1986, 96; Hodkinson, 2000, 94-95; Kunstler, 1987, 41; Sealey, 1990, 85.

<sup>74</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, 1269b32-33. For Spartan women as land owners, cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1270a23-24. Cf. also Hodkinson, 1989, 82; Cartledge, 1993, 81.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Hdt., 7.205, for Gorgo's marriage to Leonidas, where it is suggested that her patrimony passed with her to her husband; actual female control of the patrimony is not implied. Cf. Millender, 1999, 370-373, about Spartan women's control over property.

<sup>76</sup> However, cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1270a26-29, who states that it was the *kleronomos*' right to betroth the heiress and not the kings'. For a discussion of the evidence on Spartan *patrouchos* in both Aristotle and Herodotus, cf. Hodkinson, 2000, 94-98.

<sup>77</sup> McDowell, 1986, 97; Hodkinson, 2000, 95; McQueen, 2000, at 6.57.



### *Lampito*

According to Herodotus, when king Leutychides' son, Zeuxidemus, died, the Spartan king took a second wife by whom he had no male issue but a daughter, named Lampito. This Lampito Leutychides gave in marriage to his grandson Archidemus, Zeuxidemus' son (i.e. to her half-nephew).<sup>78</sup> As is stated in the passage on the *patrouchos*, betrothal by the bride's father seems to be the norm in this case of Herodotean Spartan marriage as well, denoted by the historian's phrase δόντος αὐτῶ Λευτυχίδεω.<sup>79</sup>

### *Perkalos*

Herodotus explains the feud between the two kings of Sparta, Leutychides and Demaratus, in terms of a woman. Accordingly, ἀρμοσαμένου Λευτυχίδεω Πέρκαλον τὴν Χίλωνος τοῦ Δημαρμένου θυγατέρα, ὁ Δημάρητος ἐπιβουλεύσας ἀποστερεεῖ Λευτυχίδεα τοῦ γάμου, φθάσας αὐτὸς τὴν Πέρκαλον ἀρπάσας καὶ σχῶν γυναῖκα. ('Leutychides was betrothed to Perkalos (meaning 'very beautiful'), the daughter of Chilon, the son of Demarmenus. Yet, Demaratus plotted to deprive Leutychides of this marriage, so he snatched Perkalos before the marriage and wed her himself').<sup>80</sup>

Once again, a father betrothes his daughter to a husband of his choosing. However, this is not what draws our attention here, for the historian also inserts a different marriage practice, that of seizure. Bride-snatching was a well-established custom at Sparta, but it was rather a symbolic nuptial ritual than an actual marital arrangement.<sup>81</sup> Scholars have referred to this Herodotean passage as an infamous example of an unorthodox and symbolic marriage by capture, 'which likely occurred after the

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<sup>78</sup> Hdt., 6.71. Cf. Plato, *Alcibiades*, 1.124a; Plutarch, *Agesilaus*, 1.1. For the reason for Leutychidas' marriage to his second wife Eurydame, Perkalos' mother, being financial cf. Hodkinson, 2000, 102. It should also be noted here that since Herodotus explicitly states that monogamy was the norm in Spartan society, we can assume that Leutychidas took a second wife either because his first wife had died or after he divorced her.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. McDowell, 1986, 77; Millender, 1999, 363. For fathers betrothing their daughters, cf. also Euripides, *Andromache*, 987-988; Aristotle, *Politics*, 1270a26-29.

<sup>80</sup> Hdt., 6.65.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 15.3; Athenaeus, 555b-c. Cf. also Cartledge, 1981, 100; McDowell, 1986, 77-81; McQueen, 2000, at 6.65. Generally for Spartan marital customs, cf. Michell, 1952, 53-61.

arrangement of the marriage between the bride's *kyrios* and the bridegroom'.<sup>82</sup> This could very well be true, but there is nothing on Herodotus' part that alludes to it, apart from his more frequent references to marriage by betrothal. Thus, it would not be far fetched to say that in Herodotus' representation, marriage by capture was a fact, for, in his narrative, Demaratus turns a symbolic ritual into reality. Furthermore, what is also of importance in this Herodotean story is the recurrent theme of a king's lust for the wife of another. One has only to remember Xerxes' lust for Artaynte and Candaules' for his own wife. Although in the case of the latter the king's lust is not for another man's woman but for his own, it nevertheless has the same detrimental -- in fact, lethal -- effects as for Xerxes. If there is a difference in the two aforementioned stories and the one involving Perkalos it is that her story does not involve a vengeful queen. Perkalos remains remarkably passive throughout both stages of her marital arrangements. She remains equally compliant both to her father's wishes and her later snatching.

Still, as we shall see, Demaratus is not the only Spartan king who conceives a passion for a woman. Herodotus mentions also the stories of Anaxandrides and Ariston. Thus, it appears as if the historian's Spartan dynastic material is informed by the theme of men losing their head over women. Why should this be? Is it a theme Herodotus designs for his Spartan material, or was it an element of the traditions he took over from Sparta in the first place? Unfortunately, there is no easy answer to that. It could be either, both or none. Yet, what is certain is his portrayal of Sparta as an ethnographic 'Other'. So, it could be that, whether he took his stories over from the Spartan tradition or he designed them himself, he included or retained them in his narrative to signpost and confirm his portrayal of the Spartan kings as weak before their passions like his oriental monarchs.

## **2. Spartan intermarriage**

In the *Histories*, marriages between close kin seem to be quite common in the royal houses of Sparta. In addition to Lampito's marriage to her nephew Archidemus, Herodotus also refers to the marriage of Cleomenes' daughter Gorgo to her uncle

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<sup>82</sup> Millender, 1999, 364. Cf. also Hodkinson, 1989, 91; 2000, 98.

Leonidas and to that of king Anaxandrides to his sister's daughter.<sup>83</sup> Evidently, these marriages were a case of homogamy intended not only to ensure the similar status and wealth of both the bride and the groom but also to retain the woman's property within the family.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, in Lampito's case, a further reason could be detected, namely a strategic attempt to prevent future rivalry within the family.<sup>85</sup> However, marriages between close kin are not the only norm in Herodotus' representation, though they are more frequent for the aforementioned reasons. The historian records two marriages between Spartan kings and women of the non-royal family, namely that of king Anaxandrides to his second wife and that of king Ariston to his best friend's wife.<sup>86</sup>

### 3. *Spartan monogamy or polygamy?*

Despite the existence -- in other sources -- of peculiar marriage arrangements in Sparta, according to which a husband could lend his wife to a childless man for reasons of procreation, the Spartans in the Herodotean *Histories* are monogamous. If a man desires to wed a second wife, he simply divorces the first to marry the other.<sup>87</sup> There is only one exception, but even in this case, the historian makes it clear that it was highly irregular.

#### *Anaxandrides*

According to Herodotus, when there were no offspring born to the Spartan king Anaxandrides by his wife, the ephors insisted that he should divorce her and take a second that could provide him with the necessary heir. Yet, the king declined this suggestion on the ground that his wife had done nothing to offend him so as to deserve such a treatment. Seeing that the king was unpersuaded, the ephors took counsel and authorised a violation of the Spartan law, which permitted Anaxandrides' bigamy.

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<sup>83</sup> Cf. Hdt., 6.71; 7.205; 5.39. Cf. also Ogden, 1996a, 226.

<sup>84</sup> Hodkinson, 1989, 92-93, and 2000, 407-408.

<sup>85</sup> How and Wells, 1912, at 6.71.

<sup>86</sup> Hdt., 5.40 and 6.62 respectively.

<sup>87</sup> McDowell, 1986, 82. For the curious marital arrangements at Sparta, cf. Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 15; Xenophon, *Laconian Republic*, 1.7-8; Polybius, 12.6b. For a close Athenian parallel of a woman's fertilisation by a next of kin, in case her husband was sterile, cf. Plutarch, *Solon*, 20.2-3.

However, the historian stresses that this was ποιέων οὐδαμῶς Σπαρτητικά ('a thing not at all in accordance with Spartan customs').<sup>88</sup>

Anaxandrides' bigamy is presented by Herodotus as exceptional.<sup>89</sup> It is the ephors who suggest and authorise this infringement and only because circumstances and dire necessity called for it, mainly the king's refusal to adopt the more usual Spartan practice of divorce.<sup>90</sup> Thus, it could be argued that in this case, this highly irregular exception of bigamy proved the Herodotean rule of Spartan monogamy.

### *Ariston*

Following the Herodotean narrative, the Spartan king Ariston conceived a passion for the wife of his closest friend, Agetus. Seeing that there was no possible means of getting her for himself other than trickery, since she was already married, he contrived the following plan. He and Agetus swore an oath that each would give the other whatever present they wished from their possessions. Hence, Agetus chose something from Ariston's treasures, but the king asked for his friend's wife. Deceived by Ariston's trick and compelled by his oath, Agetus parted from his wife, whom the Spartan king married after he divorced his second wife.<sup>91</sup>

In contrast to Anaxandrides' story, when the Spartan king Ariston chose to wed a third wife, he divorced the second one first, a fact which greatly underscores Herodotus' emphasis upon Spartan monogamy.

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<sup>88</sup> Hdt., 5.40-41. Cf. also Pausanias, 3.3.9.

<sup>89</sup> Michell, 1952, 59; Hodkinson, 1989, 90; Nenci, 1994, at 5.40. Cf. also Hodkinson, 2000, 101-102, who argues that the chief reason why Anaxandrides did not want to divorce his wife was financial, as 'had he divorced her, she would have taken her property away.'

<sup>90</sup> Cf. McDowell, 1986, 86-87, who quite rightly suggests that Anaxandrides could not make use of the Spartan custom of 'wife-lending' because the Spartan heir's legitimacy was absolutely necessary. Cf. Hdt., 6.61-67 and Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 3.3.1-4, for the question of Demaratus' and Leutychidas' legitimacy. For the ephors' power over the Spartan kings, cf. Ogden, 1996a, 254.

<sup>91</sup> Hdt., 6.62-63. For the feelings concerning a breach of an oath, cf. Hdt., 4.154 and 201; Thucydides, 3.34; Euripides, *Hippolytus*, 612. Cf. Cicero, *De officiis*, 3.24.92-32.115, for circumstances when an oath is not binding.

#### d. Succession and legitimacy

##### 1. *Porphyrogenesis or primogeniture?*

Resuming the Herodotean story of the bigamous king Anaxandrides, the historian reports that, not long after the king's marriage to his second wife, she got pregnant and gave birth to a son, Cleomenes. It so happened, though, that Anaxandrides' first wife, who was up until then barren, also then conceived. When the friends of the second wife learnt of this, they started to claim a mock pregnancy, and alarmed the ephors so much that when the first wife's time drew near, they sat around to watch her give birth. And she bore three sons, Dorieus, Leonidas and Cleombrotus. However, it was Cleomenes, the son of the second wife, who succeeded Anaxandrides to the throne.<sup>92</sup>

Herodotus quite clearly states that in the case of Cleomenes, οἱ Λακεδαιμόνιοι χρεώμενοι τῷ νόμῳ ἐστήσαντο βασιλεῖα τὸν πρεσβυτάτον Κλεομένεα ('the Spartans followed their custom and made Cleomenes king, as he was the eldest').<sup>93</sup> Hence, in the historian's portrayal, primogeniture is the principle of royal succession in Sparta. This is further suggested by another Herodotean tale, that, again, of Argeia, who refused to reveal to the Spartans which of her twin sons was the first-born and thus the rightful heir to the Spartan throne.<sup>94</sup>

However, it should be taken into account that primogeniture was not the only norm in Herodotus' Sparta, even though it is the most frequently mentioned one. In Book 7, Herodotus puts a claim of Spartan royal succession by right of porphyrogenesis into Demaratus' mouth, when the exiled Spartan king supports Xerxes' succession to the Persian throne.<sup>95</sup> The term porphyrogenesis means 'born in royal purple' and the concept applies when there is a dispute between children born both before and after their father's coming to the throne. The lawful successor to the throne is the son born during the father's kingship (i.e. 'born in royal purple'). Although scholars generally mistrust Herodotus' statement about Spartan porphyrogenesis, in the historian's

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<sup>92</sup> Hdt., 5.41-42.

<sup>93</sup> For Cleomenes' dubious legitimacy, cf. Ogden, 1996a, 253-254; 1997, 125. Cf. also Hart, 1993, 166.

<sup>94</sup> Hdt., 6.52.

opinion. this principle of royal succession is as much a Spartan fact as primogeniture is.<sup>96</sup>

## 2. *The question of Demaratus' legitimacy*

Herodotus tells us how Demaratus, Ariston's son, went to his mother to enquire of her the truth about his birth, for there were rumours, instigated by Leutychides, that Demaratus was not Ariston's son, but that he was either the offspring of his mother's first husband or the son of the household's muleteer. In answer to Demaratus' question, his mother informed him that three days after her arrival to Ariston's house, she was visited by an apparition in the guise of Ariston, who lay with her and then put on her the garlands that he had. When, not long afterwards, Ariston went to her and saw the garlands, he demanded to know the person who had given them to her. Although he could not believe the woman's oaths that he had given them to her himself, when it was discovered that the garlands had actually come from the shrine of the hero Astrabacus, he was forced to accept that a divine hand was in the matter. However, because Demaratus was born before the full ten (lunar) months of pregnancy were completed, Ariston proclaimed that he was not his son, something which he later reconsidered, for there were other cases of seven-month-old babies, as well.<sup>97</sup> Demaratus' mother comforts her son's worries by stating to him that he was either the son of the hero Astrabacus or of Ariston, for it was upon that night that she conceived him.<sup>98</sup>

Evidently, the Herodotean Demaratus was quite concerned about his paternity, because upon it depended his legitimate succession to the Spartan throne. Quite interesting is the convenient explanation that his mother offers to Demaratus: by claiming her son's divine conception, she gives him the opportunity to lay claim to

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<sup>95</sup> Hdt., 7.3. Cf. also Chapter Five.

<sup>96</sup> For the issue of porphyrogenesis, cf. Ogden, 1996a, 238; Michell, 1952, 104; Carlier, 1984, 240-247.

<sup>97</sup> Notice that in Herodotus' narrative, Demaratus' mother omits eight-month-old babies because of a belief that they were still born. For the subject, cf. Hippocrates, 1.447; Diogenes Laertius, 8.29; Aristotle, *Generation of animals*, 772b. Cf. also Hanson, 1987, 589-602; Parker, 1999, 515-534.

<sup>98</sup> Hdt., 6.68-69. For adultery as virtually unknown in Sparta, cf. Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 15; Plutarch, *Moralia*, 228b-c; Isocrates, *Panathenaicus*, 259.

divine parentage, which in itself was a qualification for kingship.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, the accusation that Demaratus was the son of a muleteer also conveniently finds its explanation in that Astrabacus was the protector of muleteers.<sup>100</sup> Does Herodotus here implicitly refer to the cunningness and sexual freedom of Spartan women, embodied in Demaratus' mother? After all, her claim of divine descent for her son could very cleverly get her out of a difficult situation, and her son would still remain the successor to the Spartan throne. To resume the question of legitimacy, in the Herodotean narrative it seems that it is synonymous with succession.<sup>101</sup>

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It could be argued that the Herodotean ethnographies have been shaped by Greek preoccupations and serve primarily to elevate Greek norms. Nonetheless, Herodotus was successful in partly distancing himself from crude ethnocentricity, realising that the peoples in his ethnographies 'are different, but are different in such a way as to reveal some fundamental characteristics of nature'.<sup>102</sup> Thus, although their customs are in contradiction with his own norms and morals, nevertheless, on the whole, he does not condemn them. For Herodotus it is νόμος ὁ πάντων βασιλεύς ('custom is the king of all').<sup>103</sup> For him, the point of this would be 'that keeping within the bounds of *nomos* is what matters, regardless of the variations of *nomoi* from one society to another. *Nomos* for him is an answer, a place where the historian's enquiry can stop.'<sup>104</sup> He was able to realise that 'the power of *nomos* is to be at once removed from it, and possess the attitude necessary for studying it'. Hence, 'the historian's virtue is

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<sup>99</sup> Cf. Gray, 1995, 192, who compares Demaratus to Candaules' wife and Amestris avenging Ariston's lust for his mother.

<sup>100</sup> For Astrabacus and muleteers, cf. McQueen, 2000, at 6.69. Cf. Charon of Lampsacus, *FgrH*, 262 F 2, for the analogous myth of Zeus' appearance to Alcmena in the guise of her husband Amphitryon. Cf. also Ogden, 1996a, 257-258, who sees in Demaratus' mother case 'a parallel insemination by both Ariston and Astrabacus, just as Heracles had been jointly fathered by both Amphitryon and Zeus'. Cf. Burkert, 1965, 166-177, who sees in the story a marriage ritual in which the husband embodies the god during the intercourse.

<sup>101</sup> For a discussion about bastardy in Sparta, cf. Ogden, 1996a, 217-263.

<sup>102</sup> Thomas, 2000, 72.

<sup>103</sup> *Hdt.*, 3.38. Cf. Pindar, fr. 169, 1-4.

<sup>104</sup> Humphreys, 1987, 214 and 219. Cf. Konstan, 1983, 1-3; Evans, 1965, for a discussion of *nomos*.

receptivity to foreign wisdom'.<sup>105</sup> And if we are to see the women in the ethnographies of the *Histories* in this light, it becomes more apparent that he respects them for what they are in the context to which they belong.

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<sup>105</sup> Lateiner, 1989, 151.



## Chapter Five: Persian women

In Chapter Four, we postponed consideration of Herodotus' Persian women despite the fact that his treatment of them does belong under the general theme of ethnographies. The reason is because they represent Persian culture, that is, the culture that, in Herodotean terms, more directly 'opposed' and 'threatened' the Greek one; after all, the Persians *did* invade Greece! Therefore, they repay consideration in their own right.<sup>1</sup> It has been quite often pointed out in this thesis that the author of the *Histories* has a particular taste in the sensational and the garish. In the Persian case, this is reflected in the stories 'describing the outlandish behaviour of royal women' both because of the political and military antagonism and differences between Greece and Persia, and because of the idea the Greeks had of the Persians as being effeminate and ruled by women.<sup>2</sup>

For a better understanding of Herodotus' conceptualisation of women in Achaemenid Persia and of their institutions and practices, they may be considered under four categories: I) The harem; II) Powerful and politically influential women; III) Marriage practices among the Achaemenids; IV) Customs of Achaemenid Persia. In the course of this chapter, it will be argued that, for Herodotus, Persian royal women did enjoy certain privileges, but at no point are they portrayed as being free to act as they pleased without having to answer to anyone. Only the wife and mother of the king seem to have had considerable influence over the king and the Persian court in the *Histories*, but not because they were women but because their position made it possible for them. As for the representation of the rest of the Persian women, although they are shown to have more freedom in relation to their Greek counterparts, they are just pawns in the game of Persian imperialism and expansionism.

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<sup>1</sup> It must be noted that Herodotus is our chief source for information about the Persian Empire due to the scarce data deriving from the Iranian sources. Especially on the subject of women, we can only rely on him and later Greek authors. For the subject, cf. Dandamayev, 1985, 92; Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 1993, 22.

<sup>2</sup> Brosius, 1996, 1.

## I. The harem

According to Herodotus, the Persians γαμέουσι δὲ ἕκαστος αὐτέων πολλὰς μὲν κουριδίας γυναῖκας, πολλῶ δ' ἐπι πλεῦνας παλλακὰς κτῶνται ('each [Persian] has many lawful wives and keeps even more concubines').<sup>3</sup> Although the historian does not refer to it as such (and we have no way of knowing whether the harem existed in Herodotus' mind or not), these women must have constituted a harem.<sup>4</sup> This was an institution, which, together with polygamy, was common to the whole of the ancient Orient, including the Homeric society and Egypt.<sup>5</sup> The harem had always occupied a special place in the investigation of ethnographers and investigators of sexual life, as well as in the minds of ordinary people. The reason is that the unfamiliar and exotic has always excited curiosity, and as mentioned, the author of the *Histories* appears to have shared such a taste. Two further issues involved in the historian's representation of Persian women in the royal court are the following: The first concerns the proximity of the Persian Empire to Greece. The second concerns the cruelty and treachery that was associated with Persian women and the effeminacy that characterised Persian men. Obviously, the political and social threat that the Persians presented to the Greeks are reasons enough for the historian's representation of Persian women. Yet, it should be noted that, in the Herodotean narrative, the harem is not portrayed as anything as simple as a few women waiting to please the Persian king or the Persian nobles. When dealing with the harem in the *Histories*, it is imperative that it is treated as a single and highly complicated unit, like Herodotus did.<sup>6</sup> For, in the Halicarnassian's portrayal, the Persian harem is seen as a society within a larger society, where every member has a certain position and a certain function to keep this unit running.

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<sup>3</sup> Hdt., 1.135.

<sup>4</sup> Albeit cautiously, the Greek word which is closer to meaning to 'harem' is γυναικωνίτις; cf. Plutarch, *Cato Minor*, 819d.

<sup>5</sup> However, cf. Hdt., 2.92, where he reports that each Egyptian has one wife as in Greece. But cf. also Diodorus Siculus, 1.80, who reports on Egyptians keeping as many wives as they pleased. For the harem in Homeric society, cf. Homer, *Iliad*, 24.493-497. Cf. also Asheri, 1997, at 1.135.

## a. Ranking

Judging by Herodotus' remark on Persian marital practices mentioned above, he must have considered polygamy to be the norm in Achaemenid Persia. Although the overall number of wives and concubines that the rulers had remains unclear in the *Histories*, at times, the historian does hint at some kind of a ranking system among all those women of the harem. Hence, in Book 3, Herodotus mentions that νόθον οὐ σφι νόμος ἐστὶ βασιλεῦσαι γησίου παρεόντος ('no bastard son can customarily rule if there is a legitimate one').<sup>7</sup> Indeed, in his portrayal of Achaemenid Persia, the factor that determined a son's claim to the throne was paternal descent.<sup>8</sup> So, if this is the case in the *Histories*, the question that arises is what the criteria for referring to some sons as νόθοι and to others as γήσιοι were. Ogden, in a discussion of the Hellenistic world, contends that the issue of νόθος and γήσιος is just a fallacy. He claims that 'the allegations of bastardy that arose within the royal houses are almost entirely intelligible as 'discursive'' that is, 'tendentious or persuasive claims made by one amphimetric group against another, with the bastard claim being rationalised in a way that attempted to mark out some qualitative and supposedly significant difference between the two groups.'<sup>9</sup> One could argue here that Ogden's argument can also apply to the issue of νόθος and γήσιος in the *Histories* if we come to think of the game of power involving succession among the Herodotean royal male offspring, let alone their mothers. After all, their power and status is portrayed as being closely linked with the power and status of their sons.<sup>10</sup> Yet, it is important that in Herodotus' eyes, the issue of νόθος and γήσιος *does* exist in the Persian royal court, with νόθος denoting two things. Firstly, it suggests that the offspring is the 'product' of a non-marital relationship, probably with a concubine. And secondly, it goes beyond that, signifying the child born of a wife that is not Persian and, thus, unable to succeed his father to the throne. This latter point is rather obvious in the Herodotean Amasis

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<sup>6</sup> Penzer, 1936, 15 and 174.

<sup>7</sup> Hdt., 3.2. Cf. Ctesias, *FgrH*, 688 F 15, for the bastard sons of Artaxerxes I.

<sup>8</sup> For example, cf. Darius' choice of heir in Hdt., 7.2-3.

<sup>9</sup> Ogden, 1999, x.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Hdt., 7.8, for Atossa and Xerxes. Cf. my discussion about royal wives and their power, which is closely linked with succession. Cf. also Carney, 1993, 320-321, who has pointed out that 'in a polygamous situation, the mother of a king's son is very likely to form a political unit with him, the goal of which is his succession.'

story. When the Egyptian king is reluctant to give his daughter in marriage to Cambyses on the grounds that *ὅτι οὐκ ὡς γυναικῶν μιν ἐμελλε Καμβύσης ἐξειν, ἀλλ' ὡς παλλακὴν* ('Cambyses would not have her as his wife but as his concubine'), this does not necessarily mean that Cambyses would not marry her.<sup>11</sup> After all, as pointed out in Chapter One, what Cambyses was aiming at was not the hand of Amasis' daughter but the Egyptian throne, to which he could have access only through a marriage alliance or war. Thus, what Amasis episode rather means is that because his daughter was not a member of the Persian aristocracy, but a foreigner, she could not be a chief Persian wife.<sup>12</sup>

### 1. *The royal wives*

In Herodotus' Persian world, the mother of the king appears to be the head of the harem, if we are to judge from the influential position held by Atossa. And, indeed, Aeschylus' choice of Atossa in his *Persians* must have been well thought out. For, as Brosius has remarked, this choice was not only based on the fact that Atossa 'was the link between three kings', being Xerxes' mother, Darius' wife and Cyrus' daughter, but also because 'she held the most important position at the Persian court': that is, the mother of the king.<sup>13</sup>

The second highest-ranking woman in the Herodotean Persian royal palace was the king's chief wife; that is, the wife that was the mother of the heir to the Persian throne. Both Atossa, as Darius' chief wife, and Amestris, as Xerxes' chief wife, are examples of this Herodotean notion.<sup>14</sup> Presumably, both of them could exercise control over the other women and, certainly in the Herodotean world, influence over the king, but they are not portrayed to be the ones who pulled the strings when it came to ruling the empire.

Unfortunately, Herodotus' narrative does not include representation of the rest of the members of the royal wives, the royal daughters or sisters. There can be no easy

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<sup>11</sup> Hdt., 3.1.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Asheri and Medaglia, 1997, at 3.1; Brosius, 1996, 32.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Brosius, 1996, 17 and 30. However, we should not rule out the possibility, which is quite plausible, that Aeschylus might have known of no other Persian queen.

answer as to why the historian does not refer to them. It could be either that the historian was not as well informed on them, *or* that he must have felt that ‘the more closely related a woman was to the king, the more this would be reflected in her position among the other women of the court’, and, thus, their relatively ‘weak’ position in relation to the royal mother and wife was of little importance to his narrative.<sup>15</sup> However, we should not also exclude the idea that Herodotus, despite decking out his description of the Persian court with polygamous wives and concubines, can only visualise family dynamics, for narrative purposes, in the shape of a more conventional Greek-style family.

## **2. *The royal concubines***

As already mentioned, the Herodotean Persians’ concubines outnumber their wives.<sup>16</sup> Since the subject of Persian concubinage in the Herodotean narrative receives extensive treatment in Chapter Six, it suffices here to say that they are not allotted an influential position at the royal court. They are rather portrayed as an integral part of the Persian culture and the Persian royal harem. It is also of importance that in the Herodotean narrative, although the majority of Persian royal concubines appear to be of noble birth, their non-Persian origin prevented their offspring from being heirs to the Persian throne. Hence, this Herodotean representation alone is enough to distinguish the king’s wives from the king’s women, placing them at the bottom of the harem hierarchy.

### **b. Harem arrangements**

Since the Persian kings in the *Histories* had a lot of wives and kept even more concubines, one wonders how these women got to visit the king. In the course of the narrative of how the royal wife Phaedyme and her father Otanes exposed the false king Smerdis and his plot, Herodotus reports that ἐν περιτροπῇ γὰρ δὴ αἱ γυναῖκες

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Hdt., 3.68, 133 and 7.69. Cf. Brosius, 1996, 30.

<sup>15</sup> Brosius, 1996, 13.

<sup>16</sup> Hdt., 1.135. Cf. Strabo, 15.3.17, who offers an explanation for the custom, saying that they marry many wives and keep concubines for the sake of having many children.

φοιτεουσι τοῖσι Πέρσησι ('the women take turns to go to the Persians').<sup>17</sup> Hence, in the Persian world of the *Histories*, there existed a fixed schedule for when the king's wives were to go to the king and, even though nothing is mentioned of Herodotean Persian royal concubines, we can assume that the same thing applied to them as well.<sup>18</sup>

## II. Powerful and politically influential women

There are four Persian women who feature prominently in the *Histories* as holding considerable power and political influence. Two of them are queens, chief wives and mothers of the heirs to the throne, and their names are synonymous with power, mischievousness and brutality in Greek eyes. They are Atossa and Amestris. The other two are not named but Herodotus informs us that the one is the mother of Sataspes and the wife of the Persian noble Teaspes, and the other is the wife of the Persian noble Intaphrenes. All four of them, especially the former two, are used by Herodotus to show the dependence of the Persian kings upon women's political advice and influence on decisions about punishments. This fact alone is indicative of the weakness of the Persian rule and the decadence of its kings, for such power at the hands of women was an incomprehensible concept for the Greeks.<sup>19</sup> We must always bear in mind that the historian does not censure women and their actions but the men who allow women to have such power and, consequently, who allow these actions to take place. Although Herodotus does indicate in the *Histories* that Persian women exercised power, as was the common Greek belief, he shows them to do it only in a limited context and under certain conditions. The context is that of the family, as they defend their family's interests and the lives of their children; they work to maintain the stability and status of their family, and they are there to remind their men of the conventions and the rules of the society they live in.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Hdt., 3.69.

<sup>18</sup> But cf. *Esther*, 2.11-14, where the women are called by name to go to the king. Cf. also Diodorus Siculus, 17.77, where Alexander selects the woman that he is going to lie with, following the Persian customs.

<sup>19</sup> Brosius, 1996, 105.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Dewald, 1981, 97 and 105.

## a. Atossa

Of all the wives of Darius, Atossa is the one pictured as holding the most influential position at the Persian court. There are two occasions in the *Histories* in which she features prominently as influential, for she is represented as having the ability to speak her mind when it came to military and political issues. Yet, her role in the *Histories* serves a purpose, and the power that she holds must always be considered in tandem with her position as the mother of the heir to the throne and consequently as the king's chief wife. It is quite important that the queen's representation in the Aeschylean tragedy of 472, *Persians*, (which substantially pre-dates the *Histories*) does not differ radically from that of Herodotus. Her presence dominates the whole play and the same power that she holds in the *Histories* is conveyed.<sup>21</sup> However, although she is shown to be the representative of Persian monarchy, this is only during her son's absence.<sup>22</sup> Her power in Aeschylus is always in connection with her son and her dead husband. If there is a difference observable between the Atossa in Herodotus and in Aeschylus it is that in the play she is also pictured as a sympathetic motherly figure, worrying about her son and his ill-fated expedition. In Sancisi-Weerdenburg's words, 'Xerxes is every bit the young daring rascal and Atossa is consistently portrayed as his counterpart, the wise old lady, comporting herself in a queenly dignified way'.<sup>23</sup>

### 1. *Atossa as the 'cause' of the Persian Wars*

We are first introduced to Atossa's influence in Book 3. Following Herodotus' narrative, Atossa is afflicted with a disease on her breast. Being troubled by it, the queen sends for Democedes, a Greek doctor, who in the aftermath of Polycrates' fall is sent to Persia where he gains an influential position at the royal court. Democedes promises to help the queen only if she swears to grant him whatever he wishes for, with anything shameful excluded, upon a successful cure. And so it happens. Atossa is made well and the next scene takes place in the royal bedroom where we overhear

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Harrison, 2000b, 45-46; Hall, 1996, 13

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Aeschylus, *Persians*, 213-214. Cf. Michelini, 1982, 139-140; Millender, 1989, 376.

<sup>23</sup> Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 1993, 24. Cf. also Podlecki, 1970, 5.

Atossa urging her husband and king, Darius, to conquer Hellas, this being Democedes' request. Her speech is quite fascinating, for she employs strong arguments so as to persuade the king and eventually prevails when Darius promises to march first against Hellas and not Scythia, as he had in mind.<sup>24</sup>

The episodes featuring Atossa and Democedes, on the one hand, and Atossa and Darius, on the other, raise many issues concerning Atossa's influence and Herodotus' representation and use of Atossa. Moreover, according to Waters, they are vital for our understanding of Herodotus' view of the Persian Wars.<sup>25</sup> The first thing that comes to our attention is that Democedes has Atossa promise him that she will grant him whatever he requests of her.<sup>26</sup> But that is not all. When Atossa promises him this very thing, Herodotus draws the picture of a woman who has great influence -- if not power -- in the Persian royal court. Another thing that strikes us as odd is the use of a Greek doctor treating a Persian queen. As Sancisi-Weerdenburg has suggested, one wonders whether a Greek doctor, even one with unparalleled abilities, could have access to 'the inner circle of Achaemenid kingship, surrounded as it was by all kinds of taboos and encumbered by a heavy ceremonial ritualism.'<sup>27</sup> Although the historian has prepared us for Democedes' role by saying in 3.132 that he was in an exceptional position, the story of Atossa and Democedes must be regarded as 'patently fictitious', with Democedes' bizarre request and Atossa's promise indicating Herodotus' intention to develop this folk tale further, and signifying at the same time that Atossa and her supposed influence over the king were used in the *Histories* for a specific purpose.<sup>28</sup>

The episode in which Atossa confronts Darius in their royal bedchamber and urges him to conquer Hellas offers one more indication of this woman's influential abilities. Of course, this story has to be regarded as fictitious, too, for the plain reason that Herodotus could in no way have had access to that chamber and, thus, have genuine

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<sup>24</sup> Hdt., 3.133-134. For Atossa's ailment, cf. Thomas, 2000, 29-31.

<sup>25</sup> Waters, 1966, 162.

<sup>26</sup> It seems that this is a common story motif (cf. e.g. 6.62 and 9.109) used rather over-enthusiastically by Herodotus here.

<sup>27</sup> Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 1993, 25. For Democedes in the Persian court, Cf. Griffiths, 1987.



information of what was said in there. His audience must have been aware of this as well. As How and Wells have noted, and with Waters' approval, Herodotus here aims at 'dramatic propriety and not at historic accuracy', giving his audience what they want to hear, emphasising the Persian king's decadence and effeminacy, and reflecting on the motives of the 'Persian imperialist aggression'.<sup>29</sup>

In the speech that Herodotus attributes to Atossa, the queen acts as Darius' conscience reminding her husband that a king's virility is revealed through warlike enterprises. Every Persian king has to extend the confines of his empire because the inactivity of his subjects poses a threat to the monarch, a stereotype that can be found in the Greek political wisdom.<sup>30</sup> What is also clear in her words is the contrast of Darius with Cyrus and Cambyses.

The whole episode concerning Atossa, Democedes and Darius cannot have taken place. It was rather invented by Herodotus, who used the common Greek 'narrative pattern in which Persian kings follow the council of women who are depicted as the instigators of revolt and war'.<sup>31</sup> Atossa is just a literary construct. Herodotus used the combination of the influence that she must have had because of her position as the king's chief wife, and her supposed promise to Democedes to provide the πρόφασις and the αἰτία for Darius' expedition against Greece.<sup>32</sup> However, the true cause is only made apparent later on in Xerxes' speech before his councillors. Apart from repeating some of Atossa's arguments, the king also speaks of world dominion.<sup>33</sup> Following the model of Helen, who was the 'cause' of the Trojan War, Atossa becomes in Herodotus a 'cause' of the Persian Wars. In fact, every single war and expedition

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<sup>28</sup> Snodgrass, 1980, 168. Cf. Ctesias, who is another doctor that at least claims to have moved in Persian court circles.

<sup>29</sup> How and Wells, 1912, at 3.134; Waters, 1966, 162-163.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1313b 28. For Atossa as a wise advisor, cf. Chapter Two.

<sup>31</sup> Brosius, 1996, 51.

<sup>32</sup> For Atossa as the 'cause' of the Graeco-Persian War, cf. Aelian, *On Animals*, 11.27: 'it is said that the war between the Trojans and the Achaeans was caused by Helen, the daughter of Zeus; while the war between the Persians and the Greeks was caused by Atossa, Darius' wife, who wished to obtain Athenian women for her service'. Cf. also Waters, 1966, 163-164; Asheri and Medaglia, 1997, at 3.134.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Hdt., 7.8.

between the East and the West that is recorded in the *Histories* had a woman as an αἰτία.<sup>34</sup> Why not the Persian Wars, too?

## 2. *Atossa as 'all-powerful'*

The next episode involving Atossa appears in Book 7, where the question of who should succeed Darius to the throne is presented. According to Herodotus, there were two rivals for the Persian throne. The first one was Darius' eldest son, Artobazanes, whose mother was the daughter of the Persian noble Gobryas and who was born before Darius became king. The second one was Atossa's son, Xerxes, who was born while his father Darius was king of Persia. It is again a Greek who has a say in the matter. This time it is the banished Spartan king Demaratus, who volunteers to offer his help on the difficult problem of succession faced by Darius. He advises the king that Xerxes should be the royal heir, for in Sparta also, as he contends, it is a custom for the son who is born during his father's reign to succeed him to the throne. Thus, Xerxes prevails and it is at this point that Herodotus reports that δοκέειν δέ μοι, καὶ ἄνευ ταύτης τῆς ὑποθήκης βασιλεῦσαι ἂν Ξέρξης, ἢ γὰρ Ἄτοσσα εἶχε τὸ πᾶν κράτος ('I believe that Xerxes would have been made king even without this advice, for Atossa was all-powerful').<sup>35</sup>

According to the historian, it was the king's choice who the heir to the Persian throne should be, and, thus, we can assume that, in the world of the *Histories*, there were no hard and fast rules connected with succession.<sup>36</sup> Herodotus seems not to attach any weight to Demaratus' advice or the Spartan custom.<sup>37</sup> What he is interested in is to emphasise Atossa's influence (as a chief wife), and to suggest that she would have gained the throne for her son with or without Demaratus' intervention.

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Chapter One.

<sup>35</sup> Hdt., 7.2-3. It should be noted that we do not actually know whether Darius cared about what was the Spartan custom of succession. It appears that it just suited Herodotus narrative.

<sup>36</sup> Dandamayev, 1989, 180.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 7.3 and Brosius, 1996, 109, who mention that nothing is known about this Spartan custom. Yet, we do not have any evidence proving Herodotus as wrong, so he may well be right in reporting it. Cf. Ogden, 1996, 238, for an enlightening discussion about *porphyrogenesis*. Cf. also Chapter Four.

Although in Book 3 Atossa's influence was only indirectly indicated through her truly remarkable manipulation of the king into undertaking a war against Hellas, in this episode Herodotus declares openly that she was all-powerful. But why is she represented as such? Is it because Herodotus needed her to be all-powerful so as to justify his use of the queen in Book 3? Is it because she was indeed all-powerful? Or is it because her power is actually connected with her position as the mother of the future king of Persia?

One could argue here, as Sancisi-Weerdenburg has, that behind Darius' choice over Xerxes as opposed to Artobazanes there lay hidden political motivations, in addition to Atossa's influence.<sup>38</sup> Darius, by choosing as his heir Atossa's son, Xerxes, and not the son of Gobryas' daughter, manages to avoid the danger of attaching too much power to an already powerful Persian family. If we take the aforementioned issues under consideration, it could be said that Atossa had no say in the question of succession and she can only be considered as all-powerful owing to the elevation of her status to that of the king's chief wife and the future king's mother. Yet, even this argument has its flaws, the reason being that Atossa was not the only daughter of Cyrus who was married to Darius.<sup>39</sup> If the king wished to choose an heir provided by one of Cyrus' daughters for the reasons mentioned above, why did he not choose one of Artystone's sons? After all, she was Cyrus' daughter herself and what is more, Herodotus reports that she was Darius' favourite wife.<sup>40</sup> However, one should not take this to mean that Atossa is truly almighty. As has been pointed earlier on, Persian women in the Herodotean world *can* be influential in politics and war but they can only exercise such influence by virtue of their role within the family and not, more formally, by virtue of any office they hold. Herodotus rather needed a familiar figure to the Greeks to make his point about the decadence of Persian kings. And Atossa was conveniently familiar from as far back as Aeschylus' *Persians*.

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<sup>38</sup> Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 1993, 26.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Brosius, 1996, 50.

<sup>40</sup> Hdt., 7.69.

## b. Amestris

Another powerful Persian queen in the *Histories* is Amestris, Xerxes' wife. She fills Atossa's place as the king's chief wife and the future king's mother. Like Atossa, she is represented as having considerable influence, she is crafty and clever but, unlike her, she demonstrates unrivalled brutality. Located towards the end of the *Histories*, the Amestris-Xerxes episodes signify the end of Herodotus' work, following the aftermath of the Persian defeat by the Greeks and signposting the beginning of the Persian Empire's downfall. By employing 'das ἐρωτικὸν πάθημα eines grossen Herrschers und die Unerbittlichkeit der Königin', Herodotus skilfully manages to end his *Histories* in the same way they were started, indicating at the same time that history repeats itself.<sup>41</sup> In the beginning of the *Histories*, we witness the fall of the naïve Lydian king Candaules because of his love for his own queen whereas the end of the *Histories* involves the fall of the Persian king Xerxes because of his love for his daughter-in-law.<sup>42</sup> Both kings are fatally possessed by a passion for women and both kings are punished by their queens. As Wolff and Dewald have argued, both stories are part of a well-planned and well-programmed response between the beginning and the ending of the *Histories*.<sup>43</sup> Since Herodotus' purpose was to record the Persian Wars, his narrative had to start from the very beginning when Persia was not yet an empire, presumably because his wish was, amongst other things, to emphasise the gradual growth of the Persian empire and the problems and flaws of its kings that grew together with the empire's expansion. The Candaules episode marks the beginning, before Lydia passed under Persian rule. The line that Candaules' queen founds with her new husband lasts five generations and rises to greatness during Croesus' reign, its final heir. For he is to be conquered by the Persian king Cyrus, who brings Persia to its heights. It is during Xerxes' reign that Persia's power seems to be in a steady decline, as his kingship is stained both by the Persian defeat by the Greeks and by the king's passion for the wrong women.<sup>44</sup> The ἐρωτικὰ παθήματα of

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<sup>41</sup> Wolff, 1964, 57. Cf. also Masaracchia, 1995, at 9.108; Lateiner, 1989, 46.

<sup>42</sup> Hdt., 1.8-12 and 9.108-112

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Wolff, 1964, 51-58; Dewald, 1981, n. 22.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 1993, 31, who argues that nothing is implied by Herodotus about 'a decline setting in during Xerxes' reign'. Yet, I will have to agree with Dewald, 1993, 21, who points out that Xerxes is partly responsible for Persia's future downfall. Moreover, I believe that Herodotus does imply this very thing, by

Candaules and Xerxes displease and insult a woman's heart and both their queens react in such a way that there are tragic consequences.

### 1. *Xerxes and Artaynte: a fatal passion*

While Xerxes is in Sardis, he falls in love with the wife of his brother Masistes. Despite all his efforts, Xerxes cannot seduce this woman. Being desperate, he can find no way to get to his brother's wife other than arrange a marriage between his son and Masistes' daughter, Artaynte. But as soon as the couple is married and the bride is taken to the palace, Xerxes forgets all about Artaynte's mother, for in the meantime he has fallen madly in love with Artaynte. Thus, he pursues the girl and succeeds in making her his mistress. Although they try to conceal their relationship, the truth comes to light when Artaynte, prompted by Xerxes to request of him anything she desires in return for her services, asks for the king's robe woven by Amestris. The king seeks to change her mind, offering her an army, gold and cities instead, but all in vain.<sup>45</sup> Xerxes cannot go back on his promise and gives Artaynte the mantle. And while she is delighted with the gift, Herodotus reports that the only thing the king fears is Amestris (φοβεόμενος δὲ Ἀμηστριν).<sup>46</sup>

Artaynte figures in the *Histories* as another influential woman at Darius' court. In Herodotus' representation, she embodies a weakness in Xerxes' character revealing the decadence and effeminacy of Persian kings, for she represents the power that a woman can enjoy if she happens to be close to the king. Yet, the passion for Artaynte is not the only weakness in the king's character. If it had not been her, it would have been her mother, his own brother's wife. Thus, another weak point of Xerxes is shown to be his irrational sentiments, falling first for the mother and then for the daughter, women who, on top of that, were his sister-in-law and his daughter-in-law

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placing the Amestris-Xerxes episode in the end, desiring to denote the decline of a king and his reign, which was no longer firm but ruled by his passions.

<sup>45</sup> For a similar episode in which Ariston and Agetus swear an oath to give each other whatever present they wished for from their possessions, cf. Hdt., 6.62-63; Chapter Four. The grant of cities was not an unusual gift. Cf. Hdt., 2.98; Thucydides, 1.138; Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 3.1.6. Cf. Gray, 1995, 208, who makes a nice parallel between Pheretime who asked for an army but got a golden spindle and Artaynte who was given an army but asked for a robe.

<sup>46</sup> Hdt., 9.108-109.

respectively. Brosius seems to disbelieve Xerxes' pursuit of these two women arguing, that there is an inconsistency in the story. She cannot see how, on the one hand, the king shows respect for the position of the married woman (Masistes' wife), but, on the other, disregards it by going after her daughter, who is his son's wife.<sup>47</sup> I have to disagree with Brosius because it is quite clear in Herodotus that Masistes' wife did not want to get involved with the king, at any rate at the time of asking. As Masaracchia has pointed out, in the Herodotean narrative, her hesitation balances that of Xerxes, and she seems to be stripped of every moral judgement.<sup>48</sup> In Artaynte's case, the girl is shown to fall for Xerxes more readily and easily than her mother, but at no point does Herodotus mention that Xerxes forced his passion upon her. She is rather portrayed as becoming his mistress out of her own free will. It is quite evident, then, that it is not a matter of Xerxes' respect for the position of the two married women but, of the women's respect for their position as wives.

Another inconsistency in the Artaynte-Xerxes episode, according to Brosius, is to be found in the fact that it is the king that goes to meet Artaynte instead of the other way round.<sup>49</sup> Although Brosius is right to say that this is unusual, Herodotus reports that Xerxes was very pleased with the mantle: ἐξυφήνασα Ἄμηστρις ἡ Ξέρξεω γυνὴ φᾶρος μέγα τε καὶ ποικίλον καὶ θέης ἄξιον διδοῖ Ξέρξη· ὁ δὲ ἡσθεὶς περιβάλλεται τε καὶ ἔρχεται παρὰ τὴν Ἀρταῦντην ('Amestris, Xerxes' wife, wove and gave Xerxes a great and many-coloured mantle, which was wondrous to look. Being pleased with it, he put it on and went to Artaynte'). So, it could be the case that he wanted to show it around.<sup>50</sup> And if we consider this in connection with his words to Artaynte (ἡσθεὶς δὲ καὶ ταύτῃ ἐκέλευσε αὐτὴν αἰτῆσαι ὅ τι βούλεται σὶ γενέσθαι ἀντὶ τῶν αὐτῷ ὑπουργημένων· πάντα γενέσθαι τεύξεσθαι αἰτήσασαν: 'As he was pleased with her too, he commanded her to ask of him anything she desired in return for her favours. For, he would grant her anything she asked'), they reveal a vain and superficial king, stunned by the vanity of a garment and the pleasure of sex to such a degree that he is caught in a disastrous entanglement.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, in Herodotus' representation Xerxes is

<sup>47</sup> Brosius, 1996, 113, n. 68.

<sup>48</sup> Masaracchia, 1995, at 9.108.

<sup>49</sup> Brosius, 1996, 113, n. 68.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Esther*, 5.3-8 and 7.2-3, where the king goes to Esther for a meal.

<sup>51</sup> Masaracchia, 1995, at 9.109. Cf. *Esther*, 5.3-8 and 7.2-3, where the king promises the same thing to Esther.

a vain, superficial king ruled by his passions and, consequently, by his women. This is further indicated by two factors. The first involves the audacious confidence with which the Herodotean Artaynte talks to her royal lover, whereas the second concerns the king's fear of his wife and her reaction. Xerxes' weaknesses fitted Herodotus' concept of Persians as effeminate and weak perfectly. Yet, although Amestris' reaction is brutally cruel, she is not represented as acting because she is all-powerful but because she feels that her family and its status are threatened.<sup>52</sup>

The robe given to Artaynte by Xerxes plays an important role in Herodotus' story and so does the word the historian uses to denote Artaynte's tragic joy over it; that is, *περιχαρής*. As Chiasson has observed, 'without exception, Herodotus uses the word to describe the short lived joy of characters who are doomed to grief or disappointment of some kind'.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, its most ironic and tragic echo can be found in the Herodotean story of Cleobis and Biton, where their mother is *περιχαρής* ('overjoyed') for her sons' feat only to cause their own death as a response to her prayer.<sup>54</sup> Of course one could argue here that Cleobis and Biton's death is seen as a blessing, a fortunate occurrence. However, I doubt that any mother would be pleased to see her children die, no matter how fortunate an occurrence that might be.

To turn to the robe itself, the royal gift serves as a proof and reward for one's loyalty to the king, something which is revealed in Book 3, where Otanes is to receive clothes annually as a sign of high status and honour.<sup>55</sup> However, as Brosius has remarked, it is also a gift that 'creates imposed obligations on the recipient'.<sup>56</sup> Xerxes provokes his wife's anger not only because he oversteps the limits of husbandly behaviour but also of kingly behaviour. He fails to see the importance of the robe and the significance of Artaynte's insistent request for it. The robe does not just represent

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. Ayo, 1984, 37-39, who presents Amestris as cruel and monstrous while Artaynte as innocent. In terms of Amestris' vindictiveness and vengeance, I can understand why Ayo has presented her as such. But to claim that Artaynte was innocent? Never. She has the same share of responsibility for the events to follow as has Xerxes and Amestris.

<sup>53</sup> Chiasson, 1983, 115.

<sup>54</sup> Hdt., 1.31. On *περιχαρής* in other Herodotean stories, cf. 1.119; 3.35, 157; 4.84; 5.32; 7.37, 215; 9.49. Generally for Cleobis and Biton, cf. Lloyd, 1987.

<sup>55</sup> Hdt., 3.84.

<sup>56</sup> Brosius, 1996, 75.

the love of the wife for the husband, of which the king is disrespectful and disregarding when he gives it away to another woman. As Sancisi-Weerdenburg has argued, 'it equals his kingship'.<sup>57</sup> By giving it away, he also gives up on his post and duties as a king. The fact that Artaynte does not wish to have only a beautiful mantle but also the kingship accompanying it does not escape Amestris' notice. It is in this context that Herodotus represents Amestris, her fury and her actions, and it is in this context that he justifies her, although he never portrays her as wholly innocent.

## 2. *Amestris' revenge*

When Xerxes' relationship comes to light, one would have expected Amestris to deal with it immediately. Yet, she does not and, thus, she is revealed as a cunning, clever and at the same time ruthless woman who waits for the perfect moment to strike in order to get her own back. Her power is vested in her cleverness and patience. Following Herodotus' narrative, Amestris waits until the king's birthday to have her well-planned revenge. That day is one of a great importance and of celebration in Persia and one on which the king makes gifts to the Persians.<sup>58</sup> It is that day that Amestris chooses to ask for Artaynte's mother and Masistes' wife. Xerxes strives to change her mind, for he knows the purpose of the request but Amestris insists and her request is eventually granted. In an attempt to avoid scandal, the king calls for his brother and tries to persuade him to leave his wife and marry one of Xerxes' daughters. Yet, Masistes refuses and goes back home where he finds his wife brutally tortured and mutilated, with her breasts, nose, ears, lips and tongue cut off by Amestris. The curtain falls on the *Histories* with Masistes' revolt against Xerxes and the death of his family.<sup>59</sup>

A reasonable question posed by the reader of Herodotus would be why Amestris turned against Masistes' wife and not Artaynte herself who, after all, was the guilty

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<sup>57</sup> Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 1993, 29; cf. generally her discussion of Xerxes' robe, pp. 29-30. Cf. Plutarch, *Artaxerxes*, 5.2, for the robe worn only by the king. For a discussion on the Amestris episode, cf. Braund, 1998.

<sup>58</sup> For the importance of the king's birthday cf. Hdt., 1.133 and Plato, *Alcibiades*, 1.121c. For gifts given by the king, cf. Hdt., 1.136, 3.84, 8.10 and 9.109; Thucydides, 2.97; Plutarch, *Alexander*, 69; Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 8.5.21 and 7.1.

<sup>59</sup> Hdt., 9.110-112.



party. The answer is simple if we think of Amestris not simply as a vindictive woman but as a clever politician. In Herodotus' representation, she has both qualities. Her actions cater for both her family's well-being and for the preservation of the kingship. Xerxes' gift to Artaynte could not have gone unnoticed in the Persian royal court and everyone's assumption, without the exception of Herodotus' readers, should have been that the vengeance of the queen would fall upon the girl. If she were to turn against Artaynte, she would have made the second most powerful family in Persia her enemies. By turning against the girl's mother she catches the family by surprise, forcing them to act while disorganised. And although Herodotus does not actually mention this, her actions could certainly be interpreted as such. The course of events justifies Amestris' 'clever politics' as Masistes and his family die in battle after they revolt against the king.<sup>60</sup> In this way, she is portrayed as getting both her revenge and the satisfaction that the Persian throne is no longer under threat.

To turn now to the mutilation that Amestris forces upon Masistes' wife, it is undoubtedly brutally cruel, but, as Lateiner has observed, the examples of mutilation 'embody alien concepts and practices of government and justice and Herodotus seems to take them seriously as another view of social and political organisation.'<sup>61</sup> Such barbarities are broadly reminiscent of king Echetus in the *Odyssey*.<sup>62</sup> The disfigurement of the human body can be viewed as a permanent and public form of punishment, or, even better, of humiliation; one that it will always bear testimony to the mutilated party's wrongdoings. It should also be noted that mutilation in the *Histories* is more than often performed on the orders of a king or a queen.<sup>63</sup> We have only to remember that when Intaphrenes cuts off the nose and ears of Darius' gate-warden as well as of his messenger, the king fears a possible rebellion, which leads to the arrest of Intaphrenes and his family.<sup>64</sup> And if we assume that Artaynte and her request of the royal robe served as the means through which Masistes could have access to the Persian throne, then they are both rebels against the king and Amestris'

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<sup>60</sup> Dewald, 1981, 117 n. 21.

<sup>61</sup> Lateiner, 1987, 92.

<sup>62</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, 18.83-87. For similar barbarities, cf. also Homer, *Odyssey*, 22.474-477, and *Iliad*, 21.455 and 23.21; Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 1.9.13.

<sup>63</sup> For an exception to this, cf. Hdt., 3. 154.

brutality can partly be explained.<sup>65</sup> However, one cannot help wondering whether there is a special importance in the mutilation of the woman's breasts. Herodotus informs us that Amestris plotted to destroy Masistes' wife and not Artaynte because she felt that she was the one responsible. At first reading, it appears that what the historian meant by reporting this is that Amestris thought that it was Masistes' wife that was her husband's mistress and not Artaynte. However, the flaw in this contention is that it was Artaynte that wore the king's robe and not her mother. Hence, it seems that the narrative rather suggests one of the following two things: It could either be that Amestris thought that Masistes' wife prompted her daughter to pursue a relationship with the king, win him over and the kingship with him as well. Or it could be that Amestris held her responsible for Artaynte's birth and upbringing, not to mention the fact that she did nothing to prevent her daughter from becoming the king's mistress. If this is the case, then Amestris is represented to have cut off the woman's breasts to punish her for nourishing Artaynte, as a mother's warmth and nourishment centre on the female breast. Amestris is paralleled by another vengeful queen of the *Histories*, namely Pheretime. She too is shown by the historian to have meted out a similar brutal mutilation, only that she was directed against a whole city of women. She hacked off their breasts just because they were her enemy's wives, that is, the wives of the men who had murdered her son.<sup>66</sup>

Herodotus does not aim to justify Amestris' vengeful actions. However, although he represents her as masterful, it is clear that the power that she holds is actually given to her by the king himself. It is Xerxes who delivers his brother's wife into Amestris' hands and to brutal mutilation, despite suspecting what destiny awaits her. Amestris' power, then, is limited or enhanced by the king. Thus, once again, Herodotus does not censure women but the men who allow power in a woman's hands.

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<sup>64</sup> Hdt., 3.118. Cf. Hdt., 4.202 and 9.112, where mutilation is ordered by Pheretime and Amestris respectively; they are both royalty. However, cf. Hdt., 8.104-106, for the mutilation exacted by Hermotimus the eunuch.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 1993, 29-30, for Artaynte supporting her father Masistes to get to the throne.

<sup>66</sup> Hdt., 4.202.

### c. Intaphrenes' wife and Sataspes' mother

These two nameless women are represented in the *Histories* as politically influential, for they both appeal to the king on behalf of their family and they are able to avert, or partly avert, the death penalty imposed on them by the king. However, although the fact that they can plead with the king for their causes as representatives of their families gives an important indication of the status of noble Persian women in the *Histories*, Herodotus does not seek to portray them as all-powerful masters of men. They are ordinary women caught in a family disaster and they do their best to preserve their families.

According to Herodotus, the family of Intaphrenes' wife is sentenced to death after an attempted rebellion against the king.<sup>67</sup> The woman's lamentation outside the palace gates moves Darius, who sends a messenger to tell her that she must choose a member of her family and the king will spare his life. The woman chooses her brother, giving the king the following explanation for her choice: ὦ βασιλεῦ, ἀνὴρ μὲν ἂν μοι ἄλλος γένοιτο, εἰ δαίμων ἐθέλοι, καὶ τέκνα ἄλλα, εἰ ταῦτα ἀποβάλοιμι· πατὴρ δὲ καὶ μητὴρ οὐκέτι μευ ζώντων ἀδελφεὸς ἂν ἄλλος οὐδενὶ τρόπῳ γένοιτο ('Oh king, I can have another husband, if the gods so desire, and other children, if I lose these. But since my father and mother are no longer alive, there is no way to have another brother'). Her answer pleases Darius, who, apart from her brother, spares the life of her eldest son, too.<sup>68</sup>

As Sancisi-Weerdenburg has observed, Intaphrenes' wife is very similar to Artaynte, for her family too is charged with treason and is put to death, except for the two members that she manages to save.<sup>69</sup> A similar choice to Intaphrenes' wife can be found in the story of Polycrates' daughter, who chose her father, on the ground that he is irreplaceable compared to a possible husband.<sup>70</sup> But, above all, the choice of Intaphrenes' wife of her brother is a famous argument in Sophocles' *Antigone*.<sup>71</sup> This

<sup>67</sup> For Intaphrenes' rebellion, cf. Hardy, 1996, 105; Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 1993, 29.

<sup>68</sup> Hdt., 3.119. For a comparable story, cf. Hdt., 2.30. Cf. also Hardy, 1996, 107.

<sup>69</sup> Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 1993, 30.

<sup>70</sup> Hdt., 3.124. Cf. Chapter Two.

<sup>71</sup> Sophocles, *Antigone*, 909-912. For the Herodotean/Sophoclean passage, cf. Brown, 1987, 200; Griffith, 1999, 279; Germain, 1967, 106; Goheen, 1951, 78; Bowra, 1944,

Herodotean story could reflect a system that concentrates on the priority of the brother and not of the husband or, as Asheri and Medaglia have noticed, it could reflect the juridical reality of some forms of pardon on occasions of collective punishment.<sup>72</sup> However, it appears to be more plausible that, in a Greek context -- as the Sophocles parallel indicates -- the passage seems primarily to be an entertaining piece of sophistry.

The other woman who pleads with the king so as to save the life of a member of her family is Sataspes' mother. This woman not only manages to prevent her son's death but she is also the one who chooses a new punishment to be imposed on her son in place of the first one imposed by the king. According to the narrative in the *Histories*, Sataspes, the son of Teaspes, who was an Achaemenid noble, is sentenced to impalement after raping the virgin daughter of Zopyrus, another Persian noble. His mother begs Xerxes for his life, saying that she will lay upon him an even greater punishment. Xerxes consents and Teaspes is ordered by his mother to sail around Libya. However, fearing the length and loneliness of the trip, he returns before completing the journey and so Xerxes punishes him by reverting to the impalement for the charge first brought against him.<sup>73</sup>

Although Sataspes' mother, who was Darius' sister and thus Xerxes' aunt, is shown to be influential enough to alter a sentence and save her son's life, her representation is not one of powerfulness because her influence is permitted to her by the king. This is revealed by the fact that when Teaspes fails to complete the task set by his mother, the king imposes upon him the original charge and sentence.

Although Intaphrenes' wife never actually meets the king face to face, in the Herodotean world, the stories of Intaphrenes' wife and Sataspes' mother imply that, firstly, noble women could plead their cases with the king and, secondly, that the king took their appeals seriously. However, this does not make them all-powerful, nor are they portrayed as such by Herodotus. In his representation, it is significant that both

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93-96; Aly, 1969, 255; Waters, 1985, 43; Lateiner, 1989, 136; West, 1999. Cf. Apollodorus, 2.6.4, for Hesione's choice of her brother. Cf. also Tacitus, *Germania*, 20.3, for the importance of the brother.

<sup>72</sup> Asheri and Medaglia, 1997, at 3.119.

their pleas are family based. Consequently, they are shown to be women caught in the middle of a family crisis, trying to defend those in their care.

### III. Marriage practices among the Achaemenids

#### a. Marriage alliances among Persian kings

Throughout his *Histories* Herodotus tells us about the marriage practices of the Persians. Almost nothing is mentioned about the common people of Persia as the historian's representation concerns chiefly the royalty and there is some scattered information about the nobility, as well. Consequently, we are in no position to know whether he believed that the common people of Persia followed the practices and customs of the kings.

The Persian kings in the *Histories* enter marriage alliances with the wives of previous kings, with their own sisters, and with daughters of Persian nobles or foreign kings.<sup>74</sup> As Herodotus' reign-by-reign narrative progresses, we witness a change in the marital habits and alliances of the Herodotean Persian kings. Although the early kings made all sorts of international marriage alliances and held the wife and the offspring to be legitimate, later Persian kings continued to enter such kinds of alliance, but perceived illegitimacy became a greater obstacle to succession as time went on. An example of the first phenomenon is the Median Mandane's marriage to the Persian Cambyses I, for the offspring of this union, namely Cyrus, succeeds to the Persian throne, even though his mother is non-Persian. An example of the second phenomenon can be found in Cambyses II. Accordingly, during Cyrus' reign in Herodotus, although marriage alliances between royal non-Persian women are still sought, the historian tells us that it is Cambyses II that succeeds his father to the throne, whose mother, Cassandane, was the daughter of the Persian noble Pharandates.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Hdt., 4.43.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Brosius, 1996, 47, who contends that marriage alliances with daughters of both Persian nobles and of non-Persian royals reflected the Persian kings' 'need to provide a stable base for their expanding political dominance'.

<sup>75</sup> For Mandane, cf. Hdt., 1.108-109. Cf. also Chapter Two. For Cyrus and Cambyses, cf. 1.205-214; 3.2-3; 2.1. Cf. Ctesias, *FgrH*, 688 F 9, where Cyrus' wife is Amytis,

During the reign of later Persian kings in the *Histories*, when Persia has reached its height, we witness endogamy and incestuous marriages in an attempt to keep the power within the royal line. Although the Herodotean Cambyses II seeks a marriage alliance with the daughter of the Egyptian king Amasis, he also marries Phaedyme, the daughter of the noble Otanes, and he is the first Achaemenid king to marry two of his full sisters.<sup>76</sup> The marriages of the Herodotean Darius appear to be well thought out, probably because this king is not the rightful successor to the throne.<sup>77</sup> What characterises Darius' policy is endogamy, despite the deal made with his fellow-conspirators that γαμέειν δὲ μὴ ἐξεῖναι ἄλλοθεν τῷ βασιλείῃ ἢ ἐκ τῶν συνεπαναστάντων ('it is not possible for the king to marry a woman unless she comes from the households of the conspirators').<sup>78</sup> On his accession, he inherits the harem of the previous kings, but he also enters further marriages. Of the royal line, Darius marries Cyrus' daughters, Atossa and Artystone, and Parmys, the daughter of Cyrus' son Smerdis. He also marries the daughter of the noble Otanes, Phaedyme, and we know that before he became king, he was married to a daughter of the noble Gobryas.<sup>79</sup>

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the daughter of Astyages. Cf. also Lloyd, 1976, at 2.1, for Cyrus' wife being Astyages' daughter.

<sup>76</sup> Hdt., 3.1-2, 31 and 68. Cf. also Hdt., 3.32, where the historian reports that Cambyses murdered his wife and sister while she was pregnant. This has led Brosius, 1996, 36, to argue that the historian mentioned the king's incestuous marriages to demonstrate 'his insanity by his failure to observe moral codes'. Cf. Ctesias, *FgrH*, 688 F 13, who mentions nothing of Cambyses killing his sister or that he married two of his full sisters. Cf. also Asheri and Medaglia, 1997, at 3.32 and Brosius, 1996, 46-47, who claim this story to be fictional, deriving from an Egyptian source. Cf. the *Avesta*, where the marriage between blood relatives is praised. For other incestuous marriages among Persians, cf. Plutarch, *Artaxerxes*, 23 and 27; Quintus Curtius, 8.2.19; Xanthus of Lydia, *FgrH*, 765 F 31.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Hdt., 7.11, where Darius claims that he belongs to the Achaemenid line, as he shared a common ancestor with Cyrus in Teispes. Cf. Young, 1988, 24, for Darius' lineage.

<sup>78</sup> Hdt., 3.84.

## **b. Members of the royalty and the nobility**

### **1. Royal daughters and sisters**

Significantly, Herodotus appears to be very selective in showing us members of the Persian court and exposing their relationship. As we shall see, the *Histories* have no record of royal daughters or sisters entering a marriage alliance with commoners or non-Persians.<sup>80</sup> In the historian's conceptualisation, they just serve as internal tokens of friendship, loyalty and security, as they are given to Persian nobles, satraps or military leaders. They elevate the status of the groom and his family as a marriage with the king's daughter or sister is a kind of a social promotion. Yet, at the same time, they are also the king's guarantee for stability, for the marriage alliances that they represent create obligations on the side of the groom. Accordingly, in the historian's representation, three of Darius' daughters are married to the military leaders, Daurises and Hymaees and a fourth is the wife of the military leader and Persian noble, Mardonius; another one is the wife of the commander of the Phrygian infantry, Artochmes.<sup>81</sup> The prospective marriage alliance between Masistes and one of the royal daughters of Xerxes so as to suppress a scandal reveals quite explicitly the historian's idea that they serve as pawns in the game of power.<sup>82</sup> Following the same Herodotean pattern, one of Darius' sisters is the wife of the Persian noble Otanes while a second one is married to the Achaemenid Teaspes.<sup>83</sup>

### **2. Noble daughters**

Despite the scant references to the daughters of noble Persians in the *Histories*, their representation resembles closely that of their royal counterparts. However, there are also two cases in the Herodotean narrative where noble daughters become wives of foreigners. Accordingly, Herodotus informs us that Pausanias the Lacedaemonian

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<sup>79</sup> Hdt., 3.88 and 7.22. Cf. Brosius, 1996, 37-64, for Darius' accession to the throne.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Diodorus Siculus, 14.81, where Conon, a Greek admiral of the Persian fleet, receives gifts from the king but he could not get a royal daughter, probably because he was a foreigner.

<sup>81</sup> Hdt., 5.116, 6.43 and 7.73.

<sup>82</sup> Hdt., 9.111.

<sup>83</sup> Hdt., 4.43 and 7.79.

betrothed himself to the daughter of the Persian general and noble Megabates.<sup>84</sup> We come across the second incident in Book 6, where Darius gives Metiochus, the son of Miltiades, a house and property and a Persian wife and grants that the children born of this wedlock will be deemed as legitimate Persians.<sup>85</sup> Since the status of Metiochus' wife is not stated, we can only assume that she belonged to the nobility. What is of particular importance, however, is that the king is portrayed to have the power to 'bestow the rank of 'Persian' on people not of pure Persian descent.'<sup>86</sup>

What is evident in the marriage practices of the Achaemenids in the *Histories* is that they were characterised by political choices and purposes. The kings are portrayed to enter political marriage alliances with foreign rulers or Persian nobles to achieve stability, loyalty and growth of the empire. The noble Persians enter marriage alliances with the king to achieve a social elevation whereas the foreign rulers do so in order to avoid a war and ensure peace and alliance. Although the needs of the empire are shown to change as it grows bigger and there is a need for a shift in marriage practices and alliances, the role of women, whether they are of royal or noble birth, is portrayed as remaining the same.

#### **IV. Customs of Achaemenid Persia**

Herodotus incorporates into his narrative a number of Persian customs. Once again, they concern mostly the royalty. What we discover is that Persian women did enjoy certain privileges in contrast with Greek women, but on no occasion does Herodotus represent them as exercising influence over their men. They were just women who lived according to the customs of their homeland and culture.

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<sup>84</sup> Hdt., 5.32. Cf. Thucydides, 1.128, who reports that Pausanias was after the king's daughter and not Megabazus'. Cf. also Blamire, 1970, his discussion about Pausanias' relationship with Persia.

<sup>85</sup> Hdt., 6.41.

<sup>86</sup> Kuhrt, 1995, 696.



## a. Children

In Book 1 Herodotus reports that the second greatest merit after valour in battle is the procreation of many sons. The Persian father is not to see his male children before they reach five years of age, the reason being that if the boy should die while he is still being reared, the father may suffer no pain. For the first five years of their lives, then, the boys stay with the women. After that they leave the women's quarters and receive their education, which consists of only three things: riding, archery and telling the truth.<sup>87</sup>

What is interesting in the historian's world is that the Persians are interested only in the procreation of sons. Even more interesting, though, is the coldness displayed by the Persian disregard for the maternal sorrow, which receives no sympathy at all. They only care about the feelings of the father, who is protected from feeling distressed should the boy die during his rearing. In Herodotus' words, πρὶν δὲ ἢ πενταέτης γένηται, οὐκ ἀπικνέεται ἐς ὄψιν τῷ πατρὶ, ἀλλὰ παρὰ τῆσι γυναιξὶ διαίταν ἔχει· τοῦδε ἕνεκα τοῦτο οὕτω ποιέεται, ἵνα ἢν ἀποθάνῃ τρεφόμενος, μηδεμίαν ἄσπην τῷ πατρὶ προσβάλῃ ('a boy is not seen by his father before he is five years old, but lives with the women. This is done so that, if he dies while he is reared, the father will suffer no distress').<sup>88</sup> What is also of interest is that this is a custom that Herodotus in fact praises (αἰνέω μὲν νῦν τόνδε τὸν νόμον), something which led Arieti claim that this is perhaps the only passage in the *Histories* that is 'so indicative of the ancient Greek attitude towards women'.<sup>89</sup>

## b. Burial rites and mourning

Herodotus discusses certain Persian rituals based upon burial. Thus, in Book 7, Amestris buries fourteen sons of notable Persians alive as a thank-offering for attaining to old age.<sup>90</sup> Undoubtedly, Amestris' act is represented by the historian as part of a ritual sacrifice, but, as Brosius has remarked, 'healthy scepticism should be

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<sup>87</sup> Hdt., 1.136.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Strabo, 15.3.17-18, who reports that the children were not to be seen by either the mother or the father.

<sup>89</sup> Arieti, 1995, 144.

exercised when considering whether it was a Persian custom to bury people alive', at least as part of a religious ritual.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, the historian mentions a slightly different kind of burial when Cambyses has twelve Persians buried upside down after he finds them guilty of some petty offence. This burial cannot be considered -- and it is certainly not represented as such -- as a sacrificial ritual but rather as a cruel punishment. However, in Cambyses' case, one could argue that the episode is included to illustrate his insanity.<sup>92</sup>

As far as Persian women and mourning is concerned, the only thing that Herodotus mentions is the following. In Book 2, he reports that Cyrus mourned deeply the death of his queen, Cassandane, and he also bade the people under his rule to mourn for her.<sup>93</sup>

### c. Financial status

There are four incidents in the *Histories* that suggest that Herodotean Persian royal women enjoyed a financially independent life.<sup>94</sup> In Book 3, the wives of king Darius reward a Greek physician who saved the king's life. The interesting thing is that it was not just any reward but, as Herodotus reports, each of them took a vessel, dipped it into a chest full of gold and thus rewarded the physician. He also adds that the eunuch who accompanied the physician to the women was able to gather a great sum of gold by collecting whatever fell from the vessels. In Book 9, king Xerxes offers an

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<sup>90</sup> Hdt., 7.114.

<sup>91</sup> Brosius, 1996, 114. Cf. Plutarch, *Moralia*, 171d-e. For a contrasting opinion, cf. Boyce, 1975, 109-110 and 112.

<sup>92</sup> For other cases of Persian queens burying people alive as a punishment, cf. Ctesias, *FgrH*, 688 F 14 and 15.

<sup>93</sup> Hdt., 2.1. Cf. Polydeuces, 7.17, where Darius II proclaims an official mourning period for his father, Artaxerxes II. Cf. also Euripides, *Alcestis*, 425-426, where king Admetus has his subjects mourn for the death of his queen, Alcestis. For Persian signs of mourning, cf. Hdt., 9.24. According to the Nabonidus Chronicle, the Persians cut their hair during the mourning period for the king's wife, offering evidence that it was a practice common to all Persians and not just the army. Cf. also Plutarch, *Alexander*. 72.3.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Brosius, 1996, 123-180, for an extensive discussion about women and the economy of Achaemenid Persia. Cf. Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 121c-123cd; Xenophon, *Anabasis* 1.4.9 and 2.4.27, for the wealth of Persian queens. Evidence of the queens'

army, cities and gold in abundance to his mistress Artaynte. Although one could argue that this does not make a general point about the financial status of Herodotus' Persian women, as Xerxes would do anything to avoid a scandal, it does indicate that they could hold estates and gold otherwise the king would have offered her other things. In Book 7, Artanes, Darius' brother, gives his daughter the whole wealth of his house as a dowry. Last but not least, in Book 2, Herodotus mentions Anthylla, an Egyptian town, which provided the queen with her shoes. This reminds us of Artaxerxes' gift of towns to Themistocles, one (Magnesia) to provide him with bread, another (Lampsacus) with wine and a third (Myous) with food.<sup>95</sup>

#### d. Public appearance or seclusion?

In the *Histories*, Persian women were required to make public appearances during feasts, banquets and army expeditions. The wife of Cyrus II, Cassandane, died in Babylon, which indicates that she followed the king there. At least one wife of Cambyses II accompanied him to Egypt and it seems that the wife of the noble Masistes went with him to Sardis.<sup>96</sup>

As far as the presence of Persian royal women during banquets is concerned, Herodotus tells the story of the Macedonian king Amyntas who entertained the Persian envoys in his palace. According to the narrative, as soon as dinner was over, the Persian envoys requested of Amyntas the presence of both lawful wives and concubines in the banquet in accordance -- as they claim -- with the Persian custom.<sup>97</sup> The Amyntas story is rather an odd one, and it could be that Herodotus uses it in order to emphasise the Persian decadence. Nenci comments that the historian is so keen to make this point that he fails to note the Persian envoys' disobedience to their

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independent wealth can also be found in the Fortification texts and the Murasu texts. Cf. also Hall, 1989, 95.

<sup>95</sup> Hdt., 3.130; 9.109; 7.224; 2.98. Thucydides, 1.138.

<sup>96</sup> Hdt., 2.1; 3.31; 9.108. Cf. Ctesias, *FgrH*, 688 F 14, for Damaspiia, the wife of Artaxerxes I, who followed her husband on a campaign.

<sup>97</sup> Hdt., 5.18. Cf. Plutarch, *Moralia*, 613a and Isaeus, 3.14, who report that only concubines attended the Persian banquets. Yet, cf. Herakleides of Kyme, *FgrH*, 689 F 2; Plutarch, *Moralia*, 613a and *Artaxerxes*, 5.5 and 26.6, who claim that lawful wives did attend banquets but left when the concubines entered. For Greek banquets having

culture and customs, even in terms of his own imaginary Persian world.<sup>98</sup> It is indeed the only mention in the *Histories* that lawful wives could attend banquets together with the concubines and the problem is that it is stated by Persian envoys who are far away from their homeland.

Another public occasion which Herodotean Persian royal women, and presumably women of the aristocracy, attended was the king's birthday. Herodotus reports that it was a major feast in Persia and greatly celebrated. Amestris is certainly represented as able to attend it and even asks for a wish of hers to be granted. As Brosius has quite rightly observed, perhaps it was the official character of the specific celebration that required the presence of royal women.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, it appears that in the world of the *Histories*, this is the case, for at no point does the historian state, or even imply, that they had complete freedom of movement in the court. On the contrary, they are pictured as having limited access to the king, with the exception perhaps of the chief wife and the king's mother. Nor could they have access to one another.<sup>100</sup> Although this is reported by the historian to have been the norm while the false-Smerdis ruled Persia, for fear that his illegitimate rule might be exposed by the women, still Herodotus does not portray it as an odd and exceptional practice for the court. Consequently, in the Herodotean world, the life of royal women seems to be one of seclusion and their public presence rather served a purpose; namely, they were intended to demonstrate the grandeur of the king's court, constituting a part of his public image.

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Brosius has remarked that 'Herodotus describes Persian women as individuals who acted in complete independence from their husbands.'<sup>101</sup> Truly enough, Persian women are occasionally shown to exercise undue influence at court. However, as we have seen in the course of this chapter, this is not because Herodotus wants to portray

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a social importance as they were for the entertainment of men, cf. Plato, *Laws*, 637c: Theopompus, *FgrH*, 115 F 204.

<sup>98</sup> Nenci, 1994, at 5.18.

<sup>99</sup> Brosius, 1996, 94.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Hdt., 3.68-69.

<sup>101</sup> Brosius, 1996, 197

them as powerful in their own right, but to give a message about the effeminacy of their men. In so far as Persian women are shown to exercise any power, this is only in the special context of the court or for dynastic reasons.

## Chapter Six: Concubines, prostitutes and slaves

Τὰς μὲν γὰρ ἑταίρας ἡδονῆς ἕνεκ' ἔχομεν, τὰς δὲ παλλακὰς τῆς καθ' ἡμέραν θεραπείας τοῦ σώματος, τὰς δὲ γυναῖκας τοῦ παιδοποιεῖσθαι γνησίως καὶ τῶν ἔνδον φύλακα πιστὴν ἔχειν ('we keep *hetairai* for pleasure, concubines for attending to the daily needs of the body and wives for producing legitimate heirs and be trusty guards of our property').<sup>1</sup> This is a well-known passage on the uses of women in Athens presented by the orator Apollodorus in his forensic speech against Neaira, the famous prostitute. What we are given here is a set of labels for women in an attempt to 'put them in their proper sexual place'. However, there is, indeed, 'a whole lexicon of labels and terms', as Davidson has quite rightly observed, with which to do it.<sup>2</sup> In Greek terms, a *pallake* was kept for a more permanent relationship. She was 'a woman living in a relationship of dependence' as she cohabited with a man; she could be a free Athenian, a foreigner or, usually, a slave, but in all three cases, her children could not succeed to the *oikos*.<sup>3</sup> In other words, she was placed in a man's house as his mistress and not as his lawful wife, but she was certainly not a prostitute. While a *pallake* was dependent on a man, a *hetaira* did not in general have to rely on just one man to make her living as she used sex for money. However, although she was some kind of a prostitute, she should not be associated with the low class of a *porne*, for *hetairai* 'were an expensive luxury'.<sup>4</sup> As the very word signifies, a *hetaira* was a 'companion', only that the 'company' she offered came with a price, which was usually a high one. She received gifts as well as money; indeed, the money itself would have been regarded as a gift rather than payment. (Confusingly, however, the term *hetaira* could also be applied to a *pallake*.) As to the legitimate wives, the passage is quite clear as to their connection with the production of legitimate offspring and the inside of the *oikos*.

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudo-Demosthenes, 59.122.

<sup>2</sup> Davidson, 1997, 73.

<sup>3</sup> Fisher, 1976a, 13. Cf. also Wolff, 1944, 73; Just, 1989, 52; Vernant, 1990, 57.

<sup>4</sup> Brown, 1990, 248. Cf. Aelian, *Varia Historia*, 12.63, for Archedice's price; not everyone could afford her.

At first sight, the information introduced in this first paragraph seems to be quite irrelevant to the portrayal of concubines, prostitutes and slaves in the *Histories*, as the majority of them are foreigners and not Greeks. However, the knowledge of how concubines (*pallakai*), courtesans (*hetairai*) and low-class prostitutes (*pornai*) were thought of among the Greeks is very important, as it will help us understand whether Herodotus imported his own preconceptions and prejudices when referring to such women or to foreign customs associated with them.<sup>5</sup>

In the previous chapters, it has been argued that Herodotus' representation of women is not an unfavourable one, as their actions, customs, fate, indeed their whole lives, depended upon their men, who were responsible for all courses of action as well as for the license they chose to allow to their women. Similarly, in this chapter it will be argued that Herodotus is not opposed to women practising concubinage or prostitution for, in most cases, if not all, they are forced by their fathers, their customs or war to act as such. Of course, the same thing goes for the slaves, as they did not choose slavery but it was rather imposed upon them, either by birth or war. The chapter is divided into three sections: I) Concubines; II) Prostitutes; III) Slaves.

## I. Concubines

In their vast majority, the concubines that appear in the *Histories* are kept by Persians. The only other cases of concubines being present at a royal court are in Egypt and Scythia, and there are only brief mentions of concubines among the Pelasgians and Lycians.<sup>6</sup> Since the historian attaches more weight to Persian concubinage and incorporates into his narrative a problematic passage regarding the Egyptian practice, while because all the rest of the aforementioned passages are quite straightforward as to the historian's representation, this chapter shall deal only with Persian and Egyptian concubines. In the world of the *Histories* concubines are mostly present at royal courts, although, in Persia, Herodotus mentions that they were also kept by nobles and there is only feeble indication that they entertained the army. Hence, on

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<sup>5</sup> The traditional English translations for *hetaira* and *porne* do not reflect the true meaning of the Greek words, but these two are the closest in meaning that we have.

<sup>6</sup> Hdt., 2.130; 1.84, 173; 4.71; 6.138. Cf. Powell, 1938b, s.v. *παλλακή*.

the whole, the historian either chose to altogether ignore it or he had no knowledge of concubinage among the common Persian and Egyptian people.

#### a. Persian concubines

The first time that Herodotus speaks of concubines among the Persians is in Book 1 where he mentions that the Persians have many lawful wives and keep even more concubines.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, concubines seem to be an integral part of the Persian court in the *Histories*. Although Herodotus uses the word *pallake* to refer to them, one should take caution not to transfer the low class implications of a Greek *pallake* to his Persian concubines.<sup>8</sup> It is evident that Herodotus did not do so, for, although in his narrative they seem to have shared some common features with their Greek counterparts (e.g. illegitimacy of the offspring), he never treats them as low class. Indeed, if we are to judge by their portrayal in the *Histories*, they were respectable women, who, as we shall see, became members of the royal harem.

Although Herodotus is careful enough to inform us that the number of concubines exceeded that of the lawful wives, at no point does he actually report the exact or, even, rough number of them. According to other ancient authors, they ranged from three hundred to three hundred and sixty five, something which led Olmstead to assume that their number could be linked with the days of the calendar year.<sup>9</sup> It appears that Herodotus' silence actually served a purpose. He was not interested in the actual size of the royal harem in itself but in the fact that the Persians revealed their extravagance by keeping large numbers of women, this being one of their weakest features as it indicated that they were actually governed by their women, their desires and their effeminacy. A mere number would not change this fact.

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<sup>7</sup> Hdt., 1.135. Cf. Asheri, 1997. at 1.135.

<sup>8</sup> Brosius, 1996, 31. In classical Athens it has been argued that *pallakai* were slaves; cf. Patterson, 1991, 399.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Herakleides, *FgrH* 689 F 1, who mentions 300 concubines. According to Plutarch, *Artaxerxes*, 17.2 and Deinon, *FgrH*, 690 F 27, they were 360. According to Quintus Curtius, 3.3.24, they were 365. Cf. Olmstead, 1948, 424. Cf. also Brosius, 1996, 31, who doubts the historical accuracy of Olmstead's argument.



## 1. *Origin*

There are two passages in the *Histories* where Herodotus indirectly informs us about the origins of particular groups of Persian concubines. The first one appears in Book 6, where the Persians carry the most beautiful Ionian maidens away to their king after mastering their cities.<sup>10</sup> We come across the second passage in Book 9 where, according to Herodotus' narrative, the concubine of the Persian noble Pharandates deserts to the Greek camp shortly after the battle of Plataea. During her speech to Pausanias, we learn that she is a Coan by birth, and was similarly taken away by the Persians as a war captive.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, the following things can be said about the origin of concubines in the Herodotean world. They are shown to come as spoils of war. Some of these women are of a noble status in their fatherlands if we are also to take into account the Amasis' episode, where the Egyptian king is reluctant to give his daughter away in marriage to the Persian king Cambyses for fear that she will be his concubine and not his wife.<sup>12</sup> Yet, there is also indication that some women are taken away to be made concubines just because they are pretty.

## 2. *Status*

In Book 1, Herodotus does not only mention that the Persians keep concubines in large numbers but he also contrasts them with their legitimate wives.<sup>13</sup> As we have seen in Chapter Five, it is suggested in the *Histories* that they came last in the hierarchy of the royal harem. This means that they had no influence owing to the fact that they were concubines; that is, official mistresses of the king but who, nevertheless, had not entered a legitimate marriage with him so that their offspring could be regarded legitimate successors to the Persian throne. However, this does not

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<sup>10</sup> Hdt., 6.32.

<sup>11</sup> Hdt., 9.76. Cf. *Esther*, 2.3-4, where the women of the king come from provinces under his rule and are chosen by local governors. Cf. Verrall, 1910, 314-315, for the story being copied by the historian from an authentic document. But cf. Hart, 1993, 198 n.111, who reports that Cos was under the influence of Halicarnassus, and that is how Herodotus knew the story. Cf. also Flory, 1978b, 416, who, quite interestingly, lists Pharandates' concubine as a brave figure.

<sup>12</sup> Hdt., 3.1. Cf. Quintus Curtius, 12.3.10, who mentions that the king's concubines were not only of eminent beauty but also of eminent birth.

<sup>13</sup> Hdt., 1.135.

mean that they are shown to lead an uncomfortable or unrespectable life. The chief indication comes once again from the episode with the Persian concubine from Cos: She has rich adornments and clothes and even attendants! (In Herodotus' words, κοσμησαμένη χρυσῶ πολλῶ καὶ αὐτὴ καὶ ἀμφίπολοι καὶ ἐσθῆτι τῇ καλλίστῃ τῶν παρεουσέων: 'she decked herself out with a lot of gold, as did her attendants, and put on her best clothes').<sup>14</sup> Both details emphasise the contrast with the Greek concept of a *pallake* and the low status implied by this very word.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. Duties

The fact that the Coan concubine flees to the Greek camp immediately after the battle of Plataea indicates that, in the Herodotean world, the Persian nobles, and consequently the king, had women accompanying them on their military campaigns. Indeed, in Book 7, we come across two more passages where Herodotus reports of concubines following the Persian army.<sup>16</sup> Yet, what is puzzling but, at the same time, of utmost significance in these two passages is the fact that Herodotus is not clear as to whether they are royal or, in any case, high class ones. It rather seems that this is not the case, for the historian just generally lists them as following the Persian army. Consequently, this is the only occasion that the Herodotean narrative indirectly refers to concubine-keeping among the Persian commonalty. Nonetheless, it should be noted that, since he does not lay any particular emphasis on the subject, it could be that he thought that these concubines did not actually belong to the Persian soldiers but they were rather part of the king's procession, and the king's entertainment gift to his soldiers, most probably from the women that must have come as spoils of war.

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<sup>14</sup> Hdt., 9.76. Cf. Pausanias, 3.4.9-10, who insists on her rich clothing; cf. also Quintus Curtius, 3.3.24, on the rich adornment of Persian concubines that followed the Persian army. However, cf. also Demosthenes, 48.55 and Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 3.11.24 on two Greek *pallakai* who had much jewellery, clothing and servants. But cf. Keuls, 1985, 272, who has argued that such women should be considered as relatively fortunate.

<sup>15</sup> Brosius, 1996, 191. For the episode of the Coan lady serving as a means of glorifying Pausanias, cf. Verrall, 1903, 99-101; Blamire, 1970, 295-305; Masaracchia, 1995, at 9.64.

<sup>16</sup> Hdt., 7.83, 187. Cf. also Quintus Curtius, 3.3.24, who also reports on wives and concubines following the Persian army.

It should be noted that Herodotus' women follow the king, the nobles and the army on campaigns not just for entertainment purposes. They also serve as a means through which the king can display his grandeur, but also his decadence, in Greek eyes.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, there is no way to know whether Herodotus reports a historical phenomenon here or this is just a fictive attempt to project corruption into the Persians. What we do know is that corruption is also indicated by his portrayal of the extravagant procession of the Persian army. This becomes all the more meaningful if we bear in mind that there is little early evidence for female campfollowers with the Greek armies.<sup>18</sup>

To return to the tasks of the king's women, accompanying the king in military campaigns was not the only duty of the Herodotean concubines. As we have seen in Chapter Five, their presence was also required at banquets and feasts. For, according to the narrative in Book 5 of the *Histories* (albeit contradicted elsewhere), it is a Persian custom -- as the ambassadors claim -- to have the wives and concubines sit by the men during a banquet.<sup>19</sup>

On the whole, Persian concubines are portrayed as an integral part of the Persian royal court and life, or even better, as an element of the Persian culture. However, in the Herodotean narrative, they also serve a purpose. They are used to highlight the Persian weaknesses and decadence by means of the extravagance they stand for.

## **b. Egyptian concubines**

Herodotus' representation of Egyptian concubines is a bit problematic and raises several questions. The only occasion that he speaks of concubines being present at the

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<sup>17</sup> Brosius, 1996, 191. Cf. Quintus Curtius, 3.3.24, for the splendour of the Persian procession.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Ogden, 1996b, 110.

<sup>19</sup> Hdt., 5.18. However, this passage is indeed problematic and has attracted contrasting opinions. Ogden, 1999, 274, Borza, 1990, 102 and Carney, 1993, 314-315, have argued that it is fictitious, whereas Brosius, 1996, 94-95, believes that there can be truth in Herodotus' description of the Persian custom involving women's presence at banquets and feasts. Cf. Plutarch, *Moralia*, 613a, who also mentions the presence of concubines during banquets. Cf. also Chapter Five. Cf. Herakleides, *FgrH*, 689 F 1,

Egyptian palace is in Book 2 during the course of his narrative concerning the death of king Mycerinus' daughter.<sup>20</sup> And even then, their presence is only indicated by the wooden statues of Mycerinus' concubines, which stand in a chamber near the cow-image coffin of Mycerinus' daughter. According to the narrative, these statues of the concubines are twenty colossal wooden figures made like naked women. However, Herodotus is not entirely convinced by these statues and introduces another story, according to which the statues are not Mycerinus' concubines but his daughter's serving-maids.<sup>21</sup> The question posed here is why Herodotus did not believe that the wooden figures actually represented the king's concubines. Is it because, as he says, he has only the priests' word to show him who they are? Is it because he thought concubinage was not practised among Egyptian kings? Or is it because, although he knew of the presence of concubines among the Egyptians, he did not want to represent the Egyptian royal court and the kings as effeminate and decadent as he did the Persians? It could be any of these reasons or all of them combined. The only thing we know for certain is that when talking of the marital habits of the Egyptians in Book 2, he happens to mention that they followed the Greek patterns by having just one wife. However, he does not make it clear whether they could keep other women in addition to their lawful wives.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, according to Diodorus Siculus, all but the priests could keep as many wives as they pleased.<sup>23</sup>

## II. Prostitutes

In Herodotus' account, prostitution is a theme which, for the most part, appears in the context of his ethnographies, and, more specifically, in the course of his narrative of the marital customs of these peoples. However, there are two occasions which are exceptions to this rule, namely the stories regarding the daughters of the Egyptian

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who informs us that the royal concubines accompanied the king to royal hunts during the day while during the night they guarded his sleep, playing music and singing.

<sup>20</sup> Hdt., 2.130.

<sup>21</sup> Hdt., 2.131. However, some could argue that Herodotus rather rejects the story of the serving maids and, by implication, he accepts that they were the king's concubines.

<sup>22</sup> Hdt., 2.92.

<sup>23</sup> Diodorus Siculus, 1.80. For kings and wealthy men having a large harem despite theoretical Egyptian monogamy, cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 2.92; Lloyd, 1976, at 2.92 and 1988, at 2.130. Lloyd also adds that concubines can be portrayed naked.

kings Cheops and Rhampsinitus. The vocabulary that Herodotus uses to refer to the women involved in the practice is quite interesting. One would expect to find words like πόρνη or εκπορνεύομαι, and indeed he does use them, but not in all cases. Is it because he wanted to make a particular point? It appears that they hold the key to Herodotus' projection of female prostitution in the *Histories*, for he does not censure the women but the men. In his representation, women do not become prostitutes out of their own free will but they are rather forced by custom or the male, whether this is for financial or personal reasons.

### a. Sacred prostitution in Babylon and Cyprus

The first case involving prostitution that appears in the *Histories* is connected with custom. In Book 1, Herodotus reports that: ὁ δὲ αἰσχιστος τῶν νόμων ἐστὶ τοῖσι Βαβυλωνίοισι ὅδε· δεῖ πάσαν γυναῖκα ἐπιχωρὴν ἰζομένην ἐς ἵρον Ἀφροδίτης ἀπαξ ἐν τῇ ζῳῇ μιχθῆναι ἀνδρὶ ξεῖνω. Πολλὰ δὲ καὶ οὐκ ἀξιεύμεναι ἀναμίγεσθαι τῆσι ἄλλησι οἷα πλούτῳ ὑπερφρονέουσαι, ἐπὶ ζευγέων ἐν καμάρησι ἐλάσασαι πρὸς τὸ ἵρον ἐστᾶσι, θεραπῆη δὲ σφι ὀπισθε ἔπεται πολλή. αἱ δὲ πλεῦνες ποιεῦσι ὧδε· ἐν τεμένει Ἀφροδίτης κατέαται στέφανον περὶ τῆσι κεφαλῆσι ἔχουσαι θάμιγγος πολλὰι γυναῖκες. αἱ μὲν γὰρ προσέρχοντο, αἱ δὲ ἀπέρχοντο. σχοινοτενέες δὲ διέξοδοι πάντα τρόπον ὁδῶν ἔχουσι διὰ τῶν γυναικῶν, δι' ὧν οἱ ξεῖνοι διεξιόντες ἐκλέγονται. ἐνθα ἔπεᾶν ἰζηται γυνή, οὐ πρότερον ἀπαλλάσσεται ἐς τὰ οἰκία ἢ τις οἱ ξείνων ἀργύριον ἐμβαλῶν ἐς τὰ γούνατα μιχθῆ ἔξω τοῦ ἵρου· ἐμβαλόντα δὲ δεῖ εἰπεῖν τοσόνδε· 'ἐπικαλέω τοι τὴν θεὸν Μύλιττα' (Μύλιττα δὲ καλέουσι τὴν Ἀφροδίτην Ἀσσύριοι). τὸ δὲ ἀργύριον μέγαθός ἐστι ὅσον ὧν· οὐ γὰρ μὴ ἀπώσεται· οὐ γὰρ οἱ θέμις ἐστὶ γινεταὶ γὰρ ἵρον τοῦτο τὸ ἀργύριον. τῷ δὲ πρῶτῳ ἐμβαλόντι ἔπεται οὐδὲ ἀποδοκιμᾶ οὐδένα. ἔπεᾶν δὲ μιχθῆ, ἀποσιωσαμένη τῇ θεῷ ἀπαλλάσσεται ἐς τὰ οἰκία, καὶ τῷπὸ τούτου οὐκ οὔτῳ μέγα τί οἱ δώσεις, ὡς μιν λάμψαι. ('The basest custom among the Babylonians is the following. Every woman of the land must once in her life sit in the temple of Aphrodite and have sex with a stranger. There are many who do not wish to mingle with the other women owing to their riches, and thus go to the temple and stay in their wagons, and they have many servants who follow them. But this is what most of them do: they sit inside the temple of Aphrodite wearing garlands made of string on their heads. Others come and others go. In-between the women, there are corridors marked with string, which the strangers take and choose (a woman). When a woman

has sat down, she is not set free to return to her home before a stranger casts money into her lap and has intercourse with her outside the temple. And when he casts the money, he must utter the following: 'I call upon you in the name of the goddess Mylitta'. (For, the Assyrians call Aphrodite Mylitta.) The amount of money does not matter. For, it cannot be rejected. It is against the custom, for the money is made sacred. The woman follows the one who first casts her money, and she rejects no one. By having intercourse, she acquits herself of service due to the goddess and she is set free to return home. And thereafter, there is no amount, no matter how great it is, that will get her'.) We are also told that the same custom is practised in some parts of Cyprus.<sup>24</sup>

There are one or two things here that are of importance for our understanding of Herodotus' portrayal of female prostitution, even if it was of a sacred nature. The first is Herodotus' remark about the Babylonian ritual of female prostitution being ὁ δὲ αἰσχιστος τῶν νόμων. As already argued in Chapter Four, this is one of the very few times when Herodotus openly attacks and condemns a foreign custom. There is another occasion when he expresses his displeasure, though not his disapproval, that is, at the permission of intercourse in temples and of entering the temples without having been cleansed after sex. Yet, he is careful enough to say that the Greeks and Egyptians were excluded from this practice.<sup>25</sup> Probably, as Romm has argued, 'the intrusion of sexuality into religious worship was more than he could accept with equanimity.'<sup>26</sup>

Of particular importance is Herodotus' choice of word to refer to the practice. Accordingly, what he writes is that every Babylonian woman must ἀπαξ ἐν τῇ ζῴῃ μιχθῆναι ἀνδρὶ ξείνῳ. The emphasis, of course, is on μιχθῆναι as it does not in itself

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<sup>24</sup> Hdt., 1.199. For a similar version, cf. Strabo, 16.1.20; Lucian, *De Dea Syria*, 11; Justin, 18.5; Jeremiah, *The apocryphal epistle*, 43. Cf. also Chapter Four.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Hdt., 2.64. However, cf. Hdt., 1.182 and Strabo, 17.1-46, for Egyptian temple prostitution in Thebes. For intercourse in Greek temples as a heinous sin, cf. Pausanias, 7.19.1-6; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4.797-801 and 10.686-707; Apollodorus, 3.9.2. Cf. also Lloyd, 1976, at 2.64.

<sup>26</sup> Romm, 1998, 99. Cf. Hdt., 9.116 and 120, for Artayctes' sacrilegious act of having intercourse in Protesilaus' shrine and his subsequent punishment. Although Herodotus does not overtly express his displeasure, it could be argued that Protesilaus' punishment is indicative of it.

indicate prostitution (being one of the standard words for 'intercourse'), and indeed it would not do so if it were not for the fact that the intercourse had to be with a stranger for a sum of money. Why did Herodotus choose this word to describe the intercourse? Is it an ironical figure of speech? Is it a euphemistic term which indicates that he actually respected the sacred nature of the prostitution even if he initially condemned it? Or is it because he does not wish to be harsh to the Babylonian women, who after all practised prostitution out of necessity and not willingly? Well, it could be either, but, I believe, that an emphasis should be placed on its being a euphemistic term for the reasons that will become apparent below.

This Herodotean passage is the subject of great controversy among scholars. Thus, Fisher and Mendenhall adopt a dismissive attitude towards the story, which they describe as 'anachronistic' and full of sarcasm.<sup>27</sup> However, it is quite evident from the passage that the historian is not being sarcastic about the women for practising such a custom because they are only obeying the laws or customs of their culture. Firstly, the fact that the money the strangers cast into the women's lap becomes sacred indicates this. Secondly, as McLachlan has rightly observed, the very word ἀποσιωσαμένη 'used to describe the post-coital status of the woman shows that he understands that in her ritual performance she has fulfilled an obligation to the goddess'. McLachlan has also seen in this Herodotean custom a 'ritual defloration' connected with the taboo of blood shed during the first intercourse. However, as he himself notes, this may not be the case, for the historian refers to them as γυναῖκες and not παρθένοι.<sup>28</sup>

#### **b. Prostitution for financial purposes**

In Herodotus' narrative, prostitution was not only connected with ritual, as in the case of Babylon. It is also portrayed as a source of financial income for the parents and as a means through which girls could gain their dowry in times of war and poverty. It is interesting that in almost all cases where prostitution for financial purposes is projected, Herodotus' vocabulary to refer to the practice shifts from μιχθήναι to

<sup>27</sup> Fisher, 1976a, 226 and 230; Mendenhall, 1974, 111 n.4.

<sup>28</sup> McLachlan, 1992, 149 and n.14. For ἀποσιώω as a word used to indicate ritual purification, cf. Plutarch, *Theseus*, 25.6.3; Aeschylus, fr.186a Radt. For sacred

καταπορνεύουσι and πορνεύονται, with the exception of the prostitution of Cheops' daughter where he uses the word πρήσσεσθαι, 'sells herself'.<sup>29</sup> These three words are associated with the lowest of occupations and classes, and all three are used to express the lowliness to which these girls are being subjected as well as to their fathers' cruel, even calculated design to use their female children as a means of income.

## 1. *Babylon*

Prostitution in Babylon is represented as a consequence of poverty and affliction resulting from war. According to Herodotus, ἐπεῖτε γὰρ ἀλόντες ἐκακώθησαν καὶ οἰκοφθορήθησαν, πᾶς τις τοῦ δήμου βίου σπανίζων καταπορνεύει τὰ θήγεια τέκνα ('after the conquest of their city, they were afflicted and their houses were ruined, and so all the common people who lacked a livelihood prostituted their daughters').<sup>30</sup> Although prostitution is portrayed as a necessary evil, it also illustrates the results of war, which often fall harshly upon women.

## 2. *Lydia*

According to Herodotus' account of the inscriptions on the tomb of Alyattes in Lydia, the tomb was built by three classes of people: the people of the market, artificers and prostitutes (αἱ ἐνεργαζόμεναι παιδίσκαι). The prostitutes' contribution was reported to have been the greatest.<sup>31</sup> He also adds that τοῦ γὰρ Λυδῶν δήμου αἱ θυγατέρες πορνεύονται πᾶσαι, συλλέγουσαι σφισι φερνάς, ἐς ὃ ἂν συνοικήσωσι, τοῦτο ποιέουσαι· ἐκδιδάσκει δὲ αὐταὶ ἑωντάς. ... Λυδοὶ δὲ νόμοισι μὲν παραπλησίοισι χρέωνται καὶ Ἕλληνας, χωρὶς ἢ ὅτι τὰ θήγεια καταπορνεύουσι ('the daughters of the common people are all made prostitutes so as to collect their dowry. They do this until they get married. And they give themselves away in marriage. ... The Lydians

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prostitution as ritual defloration, cf. also Williams, 1986, 20; Yamauchi, 1973, 213 and 216.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Hdt., 1.93, 94, 196; 2.126.

<sup>30</sup> Hdt., 1.196. Cf. also Chapter Four.

<sup>31</sup> Herodotus was at the mercy of his Lydian guides; cf. the discussion by West, 1985.



have similar customs to the Greeks. apart from the fact that they prostitute their daughters').<sup>32</sup>

This custom is quite similar to the ritual female prostitution taking place in Babylon and Cyprus.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Aelian and Strabo, who mention the same custom with slight variations, saw a religious significance in it. The latter compares it to that in the temple of Anaitis in Armenian Acilisene and adds that the women did not admit any man that came along, but that they preferred those of equal rank with themselves. Neither of them, however, limit the practice to the daughters of the common people.<sup>34</sup>

Once again, sexuality is concerned here. which can only remind us of Walcot's remark on Herodotus' 'almost unhealthy preoccupation with the sexually bizarre.'<sup>35</sup> And once again, many scholars have argued that Herodotus' implication is that 'the Greek way is the right way', since his discussion of such practices intends to 'defend the practices of Athens by pointing out the only alternative -- promiscuity.'<sup>36</sup> Their arguments gain support from the fact that Herodotus is satisfied with the inscriptions on the tomb, which he cannot even read. Pearson feels that his attitude towards the custom is not at all cautious, as it was in other cases and thus raises suspicions.<sup>37</sup> Herodotus does not offer a rational financial explanation for its use as he does in the case of the Babylonian prostitution, or a religious one as in the case of the Milytta worship.<sup>38</sup> It seems as if he mentions prostitution only to describe how the tomb was built and to explain the inscriptions on it.<sup>39</sup> Pearson also attributes what he sees as Herodotus' lack of a rational explanation for the Lydian custom to prejudice against the Lydians. Croesus' advice to disarm the Lydians and thus drive them to

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<sup>32</sup> Hdt., 1.93-94. Cf. Augustine, *De civitatem dei*, 4.10, for a similar custom reported among the Phoenicians. Cf. also Chapter Four.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Yamauchi, 1973, 222 and Lang, 1970, 148, who refer to the practice as cultic prostitution, probably imported from Babylon and Syria.

<sup>34</sup> Aelian, *Varia Historia*, 4.1; Strabo, 11.16. Cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 1.93.

<sup>35</sup> Walcot, 1978, 145-146. Walcot's remark is not outrageously weird. Herodotus was aware (as story-tellers still are) that people liked reading stories about sex and violence (as they still do).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Cartledge, 1995, 76-80; Keuls, 1985, 327-328.

<sup>37</sup> Pearson, 1941, 342. Cf. Hdt., 2.106, for the pillars of Sesostris, which he says he saw himself.

<sup>38</sup> Hdt., 1.196 and 199.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Pembroke, 1967, 4; Pearson, 1941, 342.

effeminacy, as Pearson thinks. is a point worth remembering, not to mention the earlier reputation of the Lydians for ἀβροσύνη ('delicacy') mentioned by Xenophanes.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, Pearson's argument about Herodotus' contempt for the Lydians may well be right, as he differentiates the Greeks and the Lydians on account of this very custom. Quite significantly, the fact that the historian emphasises that the girls were not given to marriage but actually ἐκδιδόασι δὲ αὐταὶ ἑωντάς ('gave themselves away to marriage') further supports this argument, for it portrays Lydian men as passive and effeminate while Lydian women as strong and independent.<sup>41</sup> Yet, the size of Alyattes' tomb may have served another purpose, as well. Perhaps Herodotus wanted us to think of the great number of prostitutes required to build such a great monument. Albeit indirectly, Herodotus indicates his sympathy towards women. For, as Arieti has commented, 'he leaves it to our imagination to ponder at all these young women who contributed to the actual construction of the tomb.'<sup>42</sup>

### 3. Egypt

According to the *Histories*. ἐς τοῦτο δὲ ἐλθεῖν Χέοπα κακότητος ὥστε χρημάτων δεόμενον τὴν θυγατέρα τὴν εωυτοῦ κατῆσαντα ἐπ' οἰκήματος προστάξαι πρῆσσεσθαι ἀργύριον (ὀκόσον δὴ τι, οὐ γὰρ δὴ τοῦτο γε ἔλεγον)· τὴν δὲ τὰ τε ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς ταχθέντα πρῆσσεσθαι, ἰδίῃ δὲ καὶ αὐτὴν διανοηθῆναι μνημῆιον καταλιπέσθαι καὶ τοῦ ἐσιόντος πρὸς αὐτὴν ἐκάστου δέεσθαι, ὅπως ἂν αὐτῇ λίθον ἓνα [ἐν] τοῖσι ἔργοισι δωρέοιτο. ἐκ τούτων δὲ τῶν λίθων ἔφασαν τὴν πυραμίδα οἰκοδομηθῆναι τὴν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν τριῶν ἐστηκυῖαν. ἔμπροσθε τῆς μεγάλης πυραμίδος... ('They said that king Cheops was so evil that he had his daughter sit in a chamber and ordered her to sell herself (but they did not say for how much money). She sold herself as ordered by her father, but as she was also minded to leave a memorial behind, she asked from each one who had intercourse with her to give her a stone to set in her work. It is said that the pyramid that stands in the middle of the three, in front of the great one, was built of these stones').<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Hdt., 1.155; Xenophanes, fr. 3 (Diehl).

<sup>41</sup> For the effeminacy of Lydian men, cf. Athenaeus, 12.515f. Cf. also McLachlan, 1992, 150.

<sup>42</sup> Arieti, 1995, 114.

The account is very similar to the one regarding the building of Alyattes' tomb in Lydia, the only difference being that it was the king's own daughter who sold her body and services at her father's bidding to raise the money needed for the construction of the pyramid and not a range of prostitutes as in the case of Lydia. However, in both stories, the women manage to leave a monument for themselves, with the Egyptian princess leaving a pyramid and the Lydian prostitutes' contribution being inscribed on Alyattes' tomb.<sup>44</sup> But why did a king have to prostitute his daughter and why did a daughter have to be the owner of the pyramid? Lloyd has suggested that this would make the story more unpleasant, which could very well be the case.<sup>45</sup> Herodotus seems to be convinced that the pyramid belonged to the daughter of Cheops but he appears to be either uncertain about, uninterested in, or sceptical about the prostitution part of the story if we are to judge by the phrase *ὀκόσον δὴ τι* with regard to the payment exacted by the girl. Indeed, scholars believe that the account is a mere fable intended to cast discredit to both the pyramid builders and king Cheops.<sup>46</sup> Lloyd has described it as a 'hostile propaganda' connected with an anti-Cheops tradition probably 'directed by the priests against a monarch who had expended so much on his own monument to the detriment of the temples.'<sup>47</sup> And Helck has characterised it as 'Dragomangeschichte' that was fabricated to make it more intelligible to a Greek audience.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps Herodotus used it to make his *Histories* more appealing to his Greek audience, which, because it was Greek, was undeniably keen to listen to tales that more or less argued for the superiority of the Greek culture and tight control over the women. As for the truth of the story, Herodotus leaves it to his listeners/readers to decide whether there is any in it. However, it should be noted that whether the prostitution of Cheops' daughter was just a tale incorporated into the *Histories* to suit the Greek taste or not, the bottom line

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<sup>43</sup> Hdt., 2.126.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. also Hdt., 2.134-135, where Rhodopis also leaves behind a pyramid constructed with the money she earned from prostitution.

<sup>45</sup> Lloyd, 1988, at 2.126.

<sup>46</sup> How and Wells, 1912, at 2.126; Lloyd, 1988, at 2.126. Cf. Hdt., 2.121, for the story of Rhampsinitus' treasure chamber, which is another tale casting discredit to pyramid builders.

<sup>47</sup> Lloyd, 1975, 108-109. Cf. Hdt., 2.124, which proves Lloyd's point: 'After him, Cheops reigned, who brought the people to utter misery. First, he closed the temples so as to stop people from sacrificing and then, he forced all Egyptians to work for him'.

<sup>48</sup> Helck, 1959, 2202. Cf. also Lloyd, 1988, at 2.126; Eyre, 1984, 96.

is that in Herodotus' representation, the daughter of Cheops does not sell herself willingly or because she enjoys it. Once again, a male, who in this case is a king and, worst of all, the girl's own father, is responsible for a woman's acts.

### **c. Prostitution for a purpose: king Rhampsinitus' daughter**

The last episode of female prostitution concerns another Egyptian king, Rhampsinitus, who made a prostitute of his daughter to discover the thief of his treasury. Following the Herodotean narrative, this king possessed great wealth and, wanting to keep it safe, had a chamber built where he stored his treasures. However, the crafty builder of this chamber constructed it in such a way that a stone could be easily removed by one or two men, thus granting them access to the king's treasury and riches. When this builder was about to die, he let his sons in on the secret, who entered the chamber and robbed the king of his possessions night after night. As soon as Rhampsinitus realised that his riches were growing steadily less, he set traps. One of the brothers was caught and the other had to cut off his head to avoid the trail leading back to himself. The king, being much angered to find only a decapitated body and realising that there was an accomplice involved, hung the head on the outer wall and had it guarded day and night hoping that someone would weep or lament over it, so that he would thus have his thief. However, the surviving brother surpassed the king in cunningness, and managed to recover his dead brother's body by getting the guards drunk.<sup>49</sup> This infuriated the king, who was keener than ever to discover who it was that had plotted the deed. He had his daughter sit in a chamber and receive all men alike, but before they had intercourse with her, she had to compel them to tell her their greatest crime and cleverest deed. This intrigued the thief, who duly went to the king's daughter and confessed his crime but managed to get away, thus, getting the better of the king yet again. The story has a 'happily ever after' ending, for Rhampsinitus, amazed by the thief's trickery and cunningness, granted him immunity and, in addition, married him off to his daughter!<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> According to the story, the thief did not only get the guards drunk, but before leaving with his brother's body, he shaved their right cheeks as an insult and as a form of vengeance upon them. Cf. Vernant, 1991, 233-234

<sup>50</sup> Hdt., 2.121.

Once again, an Egyptian king is portrayed as prostituting his daughter to serve his purposes. In the case of Cheops, it was to gather money, whereas in the case of Rhampsinitus it was for a specific purpose, that is, to find a thief. However, the money element is not missing from this story either, for Rhampsinitus wants to catch the thief so as to get his money back. Both the Cheops and Rhampsinitus tales are fables, folktales, something which is more evident in the tale regarding Rhampsinitus. As How and Wells have observed, 'the king's daughter's question, the device of the thief and the marriage that ends the story, all show that it belongs to a fairyland, not to a world of reality.'<sup>51</sup> Indeed, it is a most familiar tale in universal folklore, retold by Pausanias in the story of Trophonius and Agamedes and in 'Ali-Baba and the forty thieves' in more recent times, although it should be mentioned that the prostitution element is missing from these two tales. This may indicate that it was introduced into the narrative by the historian himself.<sup>52</sup> Consequently, whatever the origin of the original tale or rather tales that were put together by Herodotus, as Fehling and Munson have argued, it must have been a tale intended to suit the taste of his audience.<sup>53</sup> For, in Lloyd's words, it is 'a fine specimen of narrative embellishment' with the 'listener/reader driven to ask himself whether the king's adversary can get away with it yet again'.<sup>54</sup> However, what is important in this story, as in all the rest, is that once more prostitution, in Herodotus' representation, is 'forced' upon the girl by a male.<sup>55</sup> There are no suggestions that Rhampsinitus' daughter would have gone ahead with it if she was not compelled to do so by her father, or that she took any pleasure in it.

### III. Slaves

There are only a few portrayals of female slaves that are not associated with concubinage -- as, for instance, the Coan lady or the Ionian maidens -- in the

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<sup>51</sup> How and Wells, 1912, at 2.121.

<sup>52</sup> Pausanias, 9.37.3-7. For the prostitution-of-the-daughter motif, cf. Thompson, 1957, H 507.1; O 2; and K 525.1.

<sup>53</sup> Fehling, 1989, 210-211; Munson, 1993, 38.

<sup>54</sup> Lloyd, 1986, 50.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Munson, 1993, 40-41, who has commented that what first was 'defined as opposite (king-thief) starts becoming one'. For, the thief's heinous act of decapitating his brother is equalled by the king's heinous act of prostituting his own daughter.

*Histories*. In fact, Herodotus mentions only three women slaves, all in a different context. One of them is a slave by birth, another one is a slave *hetaira* while the third is an Egyptian princess lowered to the status of slave as a consequence of war and defeat. Although the information he presents is too scant to draw a general picture of the life of slaves, it is enough to help us understand their significance in Herodotus' thinking.

#### a. Cyno

We are introduced to Cyno, a Median female slave, in the course of the story of Cyrus' birth and upbringing. According to Herodotus' narrative, the Median king Astyages ordered his most faithful servant, Harpagus, to kill the infant Cyrus after the ominous dreams he had about him. Harpagus, not being able to do it himself, ordered one of Astyages' cowherds, the slave Mitrdates, to expose the child on the mountains so as to be killed by wild beasts. It so happened that Mitrdates' wife, the slave woman Cyno, was also pregnant and gave birth to a dead baby boy while her husband was away seeing Harpagus. It is touching that both Cyno and Mitrdates worry about one another: Mitrdates about his pregnant wife and Cyno about her husband, who was unusually called to the presence of his master. When the cowherd brought the baby home and explained the whole story to his wife, the woman was moved by the baby's beauty, his cruel fate and probably by her own misfortune to give birth to a dead child. She thus begged and persuaded her husband to let her keep the royal infant and expose their own. And so Cyrus got to live and the baby slave got a royal funeral.<sup>56</sup>

The first thing that strikes us in the story is the name of the Median slave. Herodotus informs us that she was called Κυνὼ κατὰ τὴν Ἑλλήνων γλῶσσαν, κατὰ δὲ τὴν Μηδικὴν Σπακὼ (τὴν γὰρ κύνᾳ καλέουσι σπάκα Μῆδοι). ('In the Greek language she is called Cyno (i.e. "Dog", "Bitch") while in the Median language Spaco, for the Medians call the dog "Spax").<sup>57</sup> Earlier in Book 1, Herodotus states that ὡς ὦν Περσέων μετεξέτεροι λέγουσι οἱ μὴ βουλόμενοι σεμνοῦν τὰ περὶ Κῦρον, ἀλλὰ τὸν εἶοντα λέγειν λόγον, κατὰ ταῦτα γράψω ἐπιστάμενος περὶ Κύρου καὶ τριφασίας

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<sup>56</sup> Hdt., 1.108-113. Cf. *Exodus*, 2.2, for the beauty of the baby Moses.

ἄλλας λόγων ὁδοῦς φῆναι ('I will write what some Persians say who do not wish to make a grand story out of Cyrus' tale, but who tell a true story, although I know that there are three other accounts of Cyrus).<sup>58</sup> Consequently, the story that he provides here is the rationalisation of Cyrus' upbringing, although he himself accepts that there are several tales associated with Cyrus' childhood years, let alone his whole identity.<sup>59</sup> Arieti contends that Herodotus projects his own views of women as 'bitches', thus, reducing them to the status of animals implying at the same time their loose morals regarding sex.<sup>60</sup> We have got only to remember Livy's rationalisation of the legend of Romulus and Remus, where the she-wolf that suckled the infants is represented by Livy as a woman free with her favours. This earned her the nickname 'Lupa', meaning 'she-wolf' (i.e. in Latin terms, 'prostitute') among the shepherds and gave rise to the marvellous tale.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, one could say that 'Cyno' stands for something significant as her name suggests religious overtones. Herodotus himself tells us that the dog was a sacred animal among the Iranians and there is no doubt that in the original legend Cyrus was suckled by a bitch.<sup>62</sup> Justin reports both the legend of Cyrus being suckled by a she-dog and its rationalisation and so does Herodotus himself, who, when he has Cyrus reunite his birth parents, tells us about how the legend of Cyrus and the bitch came into existence.<sup>63</sup> Perhaps the association of the dog with the Iranian religion and the humble origins of the woman who brought up Cyrus in the rationalisation of the myth both serve to signify that great leaders have lowly origins, making them more accessible to the common people. Moses, who was a slave, and Romulus, who was the offspring of a rape, are two more examples of this folk motif of humble origins, exposure and leadership.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Hdt., 1.110.

<sup>58</sup> Hdt., 1.95.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 1.2.1, who, like Herodotus, states that Cyrus' mother was Mandane, the daughter of the Median king Astyages. But cf. Ctesias, *FgrH*, 688 F 9, and Nicolaus of Damascus, *FgrH*, 90 F 66, who do not accept Cyrus' relation with Astyages, with Nicolaus of Damascus adding that he was of humble birth.

<sup>60</sup> Arieti, 1995, 129 n.191.

<sup>61</sup> Livy, 1.4.7. Cf. Arieti, 1980, for the importance of Romulus for the Romans' conception of themselves.

<sup>62</sup> Hdt., 1.140. Cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 1.110; Asheri, 1997, at 1.110.

<sup>63</sup> Justin, 1.4; Hdt., 1.122. Cf. Asheri, 1997, at 1.122, who argues that the legend pre-existed in Herodotus.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Arieti, 1995, 130-131; Ogden, 1997, 1. Cf. Asheri, 1995, at 1.113, who argues that exposure serves as legitimisation of pseudo-history of a controversial usurpation,

The explanation of the name 'Bitch' given to the Median slave depends on how the audience views the story of Cyno and Cyrus' upbringing. However, Herodotus' representation of the woman who hides her grief for her dead baby to save the life of another woman's child, which is about to be exposed, reveals not a grim view of this woman but his admiration for her boldness and resourcefulness. 'Cyno' is not indicative of Herodotus' view of women as 'bitches', but of his view that women, as mothers, will go to any length to protect a child from an evil fate even if it is not their own.

## b. Rhodopis

Towards the end of Book 2, Herodotus breaks his narrative to give us the story of Rhodopis, a Greek slave *hetaira*, whose name was connected with the building of the third pyramid in Egypt. Following the storyline, Rhodopis was slave to the Samian Iadmon, who was brought to Egypt by another Samian called Xanthes, where she was freed for a large sum of money paid by one of her lovers, Charaxus of Mytilene, the brother of Sappho. Once freed, she continued her practice in Egypt and became a well-known and wealthy *hetaira*, but not wealthy enough, as Herodotus states, to be the builder of a pyramid. The historian does not accept her association with the pyramid on the basis of her wealth, which one could calculate easily by her dedications to Delphi. For Rhodopis, desiring to leave a memorial of herself in Greece, spent the tenth part of her wealth on a great number of ox-spits, which she dedicated to the temple and which stood behind the altar, even up until Herodotus' day.<sup>65</sup>

There are several stories associated with Rhodopis and the building of the pyramid. According to Diodorus Siculus, the pyramid was built by her lovers, who out of passion for her carried the building through as a joint enterprise. Pliny says that she built it on her own with the money she earned from prostitution, a fact which amazed him. Strabo and Aelian both report a more romantic, Cinderella-like version, where an eagle snatches one of Rhodopis' sandals only to drop it on the lap of the Egyptian

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a change in dynasties, the foundation of a kingship, etc. Cf. Patterson, 1985, for an enlightening discussion about infant exposure.

<sup>65</sup> Hdt., 2.134-135.



king, who, stirred both by the strange occurrence and the design of the shoe, searches the whole country in quest of its owner. And once he finds her, he makes her his queen and her death is honoured with the aforementioned tomb. Manetho gives an altogether different version, with queen Nitocris being the builder of the third pyramid. The only account that agrees in its greater part with Herodotus' is presented by Athenaeus, who reports the dedication made to Delphi and nothing of the pyramid, but gives a different name to the Rhodopis character; in his version, she is called Doricha.<sup>66</sup>

It is obvious that the Greek *hetaira* Rhodopis as well as the building of the third pyramid gave rise to many different versions of the same story. Even today, it attracts contrasting opinions. Aly has argued that Herodotus had knowledge of all the stories but decided to withhold information, namely that the person concerned with the building of the pyramid could have only been a queen.<sup>67</sup> Gera has commented that it is the blonde, red-cheeked Egyptian queen of Manetho that is responsible for the confusion between Nitocris and Rhodopis.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, Hall has regarded the Manethian story of queen Nitocris and the pyramid an impossibility giving a very interesting but at the same time far-fetched explanation of the pyramid, Rhodopis and Doricha. He has argued that the woman was actually called Doricha the 'rosy cheeked' (i.e. Rhodopis) and her association with the pyramid was all due to an old Arab story according to which the tomb was haunted by a very beautiful naked woman, who drove men mad. It is understandable that the association comes from the fact that the woman-ghost was naked, which implies that it was a prostitute and not a respectable queen. Regarding the two names attributed to the same, as it seems, woman, Hall has argued that it had to do with the Sphinx, which the Greeks wrongly

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<sup>66</sup> Diodorus Siculus, 1.64.14; Pliny, *Natural History*, 36.12.78; Strabo, 17.1.33; Aelian, *Varia Historia*, 13.33; Manetho, fr. 20; Athenaeus, 13.596 b-d. Cf. Anderson, 2000, 27-29, who combines the stories of Herodotus and Strabo and identifies a parallel between Rhodopis and Cinderella.

<sup>67</sup> Aly, 1969, 69. But cf. Lloyd, 1988, at 2.134, who quite rightly reports that there is no way to know whether Herodotus had access to the traditions.

<sup>68</sup> Gera, 1997, 102. Cf. also Lloyd, 1988, 14-15; Tyldesley, 1994, 217-218. Generally, there seems to be chronological confusion about Doricha/Rhodopis in the sources.

assumed to have the face of a woman, and, because the Sphinx's face was painted red, they thought of it as a portrait of their 'rosy cheeked' (ροδῶπις) Doricha.<sup>69</sup>

Generally speaking, what all the stories of Rhodopis have in common is that they are all tales about the elevation of a beautiful girl from low status, whether she is made a queen or she remains a *hetaira*, but a free and a very wealthy one; in other words, it is the 'rags to riches' story motif. In the *Histories*, she is certainly pictured as such and it feels as if Herodotus is not the least concerned about 'producing a survey and appraisal of Egypt's past' but about Rhodopis' activities, which must have been of particular interest to his Greek audience, since he reports himself that she was quite famous in Greece for her art of pleasing.<sup>70</sup> In close connection with this, Rhodopis' projection in the *Histories* is of importance for one more reason. She is a slave and, more significantly, a slave *hetaira*, who was freed by one of her lovers signifying that a slave *hetaira* could be granted her freedom by any client who would be willing or passion-stricken enough to pay for it.<sup>71</sup> She is portrayed as a very capable woman, who once freed she makes sure that she makes a reputation for herself, as well as enough money to leave memorials behind, whether it is a pyramid or the ox-spit dedications to Delphi. Such monuments can reveal values: wealth, power, social structure, they spread and secure fame.<sup>72</sup>

### c. The daughter of the Egyptian king Psammenitus

When Cambyses defeated the Egyptians, he put their king Psammenitus to a mental and emotional test. He first sat the Egyptian king and other Egyptians down in the outer parts of the city of Memphis and then, dressing his daughter in a slave's clothes, sent her with a vessel to fetch water in the company of other Egyptian girls. As the girls passed by their fathers crying and lamenting, all the Egyptians who sat beside their king wept at the sight of their daughters' evil fortune; all, apart from Psammenitus who remained silent and bowed to the ground. Next, Cambyses had

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<sup>69</sup> Hall, 1904, 210. Cf. Lloyd, 1988, 46, who accepts the connection between Rhodopis and Doricha.

<sup>70</sup> Lloyd, 1988, 48. Cf. Hdt., 2.135.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Pomeroy, 1975, 89; Lacey, 1968, 172.

<sup>72</sup> Lateiner, 1987, 97; Lloyd, 1988, at 2.134. Cf. Hdt., 1.93 and 2.126, for prostitutes leaving memorials behind.

Psammenitus' son and other young Egyptians pass by, all with ropes round their necks and bits in their mouths as they were about to be executed to make amends for the Mytileneans who had perished with their ship at Memphis. Even at this sight, the Egyptian king remained silent. The story goes that it so happened that one of Psammenitus' companions, who was once young and wealthy but now poor and past his prime, passed by the king. It was only at the sight of his companion begging that he broke down and lamented. Cambyses, being intrigued by Psammenitus' reactions, sent and asked him why he remained silent at his children's evil fortune but lamented for a man who was not his relative. And Psammenitus answered that his private grief was too great for tears but the sight of an old friend who had lost his good health and fortune called for lamentation.<sup>73</sup>

In this story, Herodotus develops and emphasises the idea of reversal of fortune both in the fate of Psammenitus and of his companion.<sup>74</sup> However, it is not just the unpredictability of the Egyptian king's fortune that is of interest here but also that of his children. His son is about to be executed and his daughter is condemned to slavery, both experiencing the consequences of defeat and war. Although the main focus of the passage is personal reversal of fortune, further stressed by the presence of Croesus later on in the narrative, it also offers valuable information about female slavery in the *Histories*.<sup>75</sup> Thus, in Herodotus' world, slavery can be the result of wars, even if the women brought down to the status of a slave are royalty, as in the case of Psammenitus' daughter. What is also of interest here is that the girl is not only dressed in a slave's attire but she is also given a vessel so as to fetch water. It seems then that, according to Herodotus, the fetching of water was one of the emblematic duties of a slave.<sup>76</sup> Once again in the *Histories*, a woman's fate and status depends upon the male, as a man's decisions of war or personal reversal of fortune directly affect the lives of the women associated with or related to him.

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<sup>73</sup> Hdt., 3.14. We might also see Psammenitus' reaction as the psychological 'last straw'; maybe, he could keep up his pretence of indifference no longer.

<sup>74</sup> Lloyd, 1988, 42-43; Harrison, 2000a, 58.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Flory, 1978a, 149.

<sup>76</sup> Asheri and Medaglia, 1997, at 3.14. Cf. Homer, *Iliad*, 6.456-459, where Hector fears that Andromache will be taken away as a slave should Troy fall. It is interesting

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To sum up, the women who are portrayed in Herodotus' *Histories* as concubines, prostitutes and slaves have nothing to do with the low class or morally loose women usually associated with the practices of concubinage, prostitution and slavery. Many of them are royal members or respectable women, whose evil fate or war forced them to low status. Even the ones who do not belong to the middle or upper classes are not represented as immoral. On the contrary, they are illustrated as 'fighters', adjusting to each occasion and incident, no matter how unfortunate or diminishing it is.

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that he mentions the fetching of water as one of the typical jobs she will have to perform if she is to be turned into a slave.

## Chapter Seven: Women and religion

Religious life and festivals, cults and priesthood, not only among the Greeks but also among the peoples of his ethnographies, are widespread in Herodotus' *Histories* and in this context the women play an important role. Indeed, in the historian's world, they are an inseparable part of religious life. Furthermore, the Herodotean narrative includes stories of ghosts, epiphanies, and incidents that could be described as 'miraculous'.<sup>1</sup> However, it should be noted that despite the fearful aspect such phenomena might present, they are not portrayed as terrible by the historian. Herodotus' apparitions do not mean harm and they are not appalling. They manifest themselves only when called or in times of crisis and need. Accordingly, the connection of women with religion and paranormal phenomena in the *Histories* can be examined under four categories: I) Women and religious festivals; II) Women as cult founders; III) Women and priesthoods; IV) Apparitions and miracles.

### I. Women and religious festivals

Women were so much a part of the religious life of the *polis* in the ancient world that De Polignac has quite rightly characterised their lot as 'cult citizenship'.<sup>2</sup> Their connection with the divine sphere was a particularly rich one, and they could be proud of their participation in sacred ceremonies.<sup>3</sup> Herodotus' representation clearly justifies this. It seems that for the historian, religious life was an important activity for the women, not only for the society but also for the women themselves, for, especially in the case of Greek women, it provided the only 'alternative, even if temporary, to domestic life'.<sup>4</sup> The only problem with the *Histories* and consequently with Herodotus' portrayal of the association between women and religion is that he mainly focuses on the religious lives of Egyptian and Greek women. It could be either that he had no knowledge of the women's involvement with the divine sphere of the

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<sup>1</sup> For a definition of 'miracle', cf. Luck, 1985, 135; Shimron, 1989, 37; Harrison, 2000a, 65.

<sup>2</sup> De Polignac, 1984, 79.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 641-648.

<sup>4</sup> Zeitlin, 1982, 130.

other peoples in his ethnographic accounts, or that it was of no importance to him, or it could simply be connected with the abundance of information that he provides about Egypt generally. A further hypothesis is what Linforth has suggested, namely that in the course of his work, Herodotus 'mentions by name the gods of some thirteen foreign peoples (about thirty seven titles in all) as if they were identical with gods bearing Greek names'. He concludes that 'Herodotus and his Greek readers instinctively believed that foreign gods were not different beings from the gods whom they knew under Greek names, but identical with them.'<sup>5</sup> It is possible, then, that Herodotus believed or knew that the peoples in his ethnographies celebrated their festivals in much the same way as the Greeks. Yet, the questions that remains is 'Why Egypt?' The answer is quite simple if we are to think of Herodotus' belief that the Greeks inherited their gods and religion, and consequently their festivals, from the Egyptians.

#### **a. Egypt**

Herodotus develops 'a history of religion', according to which the Egyptians, being the first of men and having divine kings in the first period of their existence, discovered the individual gods and transmitted them to the Pelasgians. It was from the Pelasgians that the Greeks got their gods, who were finally regulated by Homer and Hesiod.<sup>6</sup> The historian seems also to believe that the Greeks inherited many of their festivals from the Egyptians. In the Herodotean narrative, the women of Egypt play a prominent role in the celebration of these festivals and their participation in the festive rituals is vital.

#### **1. *Dionysiac worship***

According to the historian, on the evening of Dionysus' festival, all Egyptians kill a porker before their door as an offering to the god. The rest of the festival is ordered very much the same way as in Greece, with the exception of the dances and the phallic procession. For, in place of the phallus, the Egyptians have invented the use of

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<sup>5</sup> Linforth, 1928, 210. This view seems to be shared by Griffiths, 1970, 29-30, who quotes Linforth. Cf. also Campbell, 1898, 181.

<sup>6</sup> Hdt., 2.144, 52-53. Cf. Immerwahr, 1966, 311.

marionettes moved by means of strings. Following the flute player, who leads the procession, the women carry these puppets about the villages, while moving the phallus of the marionette, which is nearly as big as the rest of the body. Although Herodotus is aware of the sacred legend that explains the appearance and motions of these marionettes, he prefers to keep silent and not record it.<sup>7</sup>

Three things are noteworthy in this passage. The first is the historian's readiness to identify the Egyptian gods with the Greek ones and to parallel the Egyptian festivals with those of Greece. The second issue concerns Herodotus' reluctance to reveal sacred matters. Thirdly, and quite importantly, what draws our attention in this passage is the use of the marionettes in the Egyptian festival. In Herodotus' exposition, the movement of the phallus attached on the puppet was caused by pulling a string, most probably so as to bring it to an erect position. If we are to judge by the importance of the phalluses in the Greek Dionysiac processions also, reflecting the god's connection with fertility, we can assume that the same thing applies to this Egyptian festival of the *Histories*.<sup>8</sup> Yet, it is of importance that the historian remains remarkably passive in mentioning this rite; he neither expresses disapproval nor censures the women participating in the festival. Two things may explain the historian's attitude here: Firstly, if we are to judge by his silence regarding sacred matters, it might be the case that he does not want to question anything associated with the divine. And secondly, it appears that he views women's participation in the religious life and rituals as vital. Thus, in his mind, they just act in accordance with their country's customs.

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<sup>7</sup> Hdt., 2.48. For the possibility that Herodotus' silence is connected with the dismemberment of Osiris, cf. Burkert, 1985, 298.

<sup>8</sup> How and Wells, 1912, at 2.48; Lloyd, 1976, at 2.48; Farnell, 1909, 204-205. Interestingly, a modern Greek parallel to the Egyptian phallus attached on a puppet could be found in the monstrously elongated arm of Karaghiozis in puppet shows. For the Herodotean festival resembling an Osirian phallic procession, the Pamyliia, cf. Plutarch, *Moralia*, 365b-d. Cf. also Burkert, 1985, 298. For the identification of Osiris with Dionysus, cf. Diodorus Siculus, 1.11.3. For both gods sharing a dismemberment myth, cf. Plutarch, *Moralia*, 358a-b; Diodorus Siculus, 1.21 and 5.75; Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 60-235; Pausanias, 7.18.3. For the Rural and City Dionysia in Athens, cf. Aristophanes, *Acharnians*, 247-249; Plutarch, *Moralia*, 527d. For the festival of Haloa, cf. Harrison, 1922, 146. For the Dionysia in Lesbos and Alexandria, cf.

Regarding the women's participation in music and singing, this appears to be a standard element of Egyptian cult in the *Histories*, for, as we shall see, it also features in the festival of Artemis at Bubastis. Although Herodotus does not clearly state the purpose of music and singing in the rituals, if we are to judge by both the Egyptian festivals of Dionysus and Artemis, they are shown to heighten the religious excitement.<sup>9</sup>

## **2. The festival of Artemis at Bubastis**

According to Herodotus, the chief and most zealously celebrated of the Egyptian festivals was that in the honour of Artemis at the town of Bubastis. A great number of both men and women sail together in boats, as they reach Bubastis by the river. On their journey to the town, some of the women make a noise with rattles and some of the men play flutes, while the rest of both the men and the women sing and clap their hands. It is the custom that every time they come near a riverside town on their way to Bubastis, they bring the boats near the bank, where some of the women continue doing what has already been mentioned, while others dance, shout mockery of the women of the town or raise up their skirts and display their genitals. Then, once they reach Bubastis, they make a festival with great sacrifices and a lot of drinking. Actually, Herodotus informs us that more wine is drunk at this feast than in the whole of the rest of the year, and that seven hundred thousand men and women attend this festival annually.<sup>10</sup>

As far as music is concerned, three new elements are introduced into this Herodotean passage of Egyptian ritual; the rattles, the clapping and the flutes being played by

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Pausanias, 10.19.3; Athenaeus, 201e. For other phallic rites in the *Histories*, cf. Hdt., 2.51.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Lloyd, 1976, at 2.48. For music as a common feature in Egyptian cult, cf. Strabo, 17.1.44. For music and singing being an essential part of the Greek Dionysiac worship, cf. Aristophanes, *Acharnians*, 261; Athenaeus, 618c. Cf. also Plato, *Republic*, 475d, who reports that it was the singing choruses that were the chief attraction in the village festivals.

<sup>10</sup> Hdt., 2.60. For Herodotus' identification of Artemis with Bubastis, cf. 2.137, 138, 156.



men. Dancing also seems to be as important as music and singing in this festival.<sup>11</sup> However, what rather catches the eye in this Egyptian festival of Artemis in Herodotus is not the singing and dancing but the 'rude' custom regarding the shouting of mockery and the female genital display whenever the women come near a town.<sup>12</sup> Yet, it is noteworthy that once again Herodotus does not express any disapproval of the rite or the women involved. It seems that, as in the case of the Egyptian Dionysiac festival, he does not want to challenge the divine or censure the importance of female participation in local rituals.

### 3. *The festival of Isis at Busiris*

Following the Herodotean narrative, the festival of Isis at Busiris is the second most important after the one at Bubastis in honour of Artemis. The historian reports that τύπτονται γὰρ δὴ μετὰ τὴν θυσίην πάντες καὶ πᾶσαι, μυριάδες κάρτα πολλὰ ἀνθρώπων· τὸν δὲ τύπτονται, οὐ μοι ὀσιόν ἐστι λέγειν ('after the sacrifice, all the men and all the women lament in countless numbers. But it is not holy for me to say whom they lament'). It is not only Egyptians that attend the festival but also Carians, who, apart from joining in the sacrifices and lamentation, cut their foreheads with knives so as denote that they are strangers and not Egyptians.<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately, this Herodotean passage makes only a passing reference to Egyptian women and their lamentation for a god.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, it is quite apparent that in

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<sup>11</sup> For the importance of rattles and dancing in the Egyptian cult, cf. Lloyd, 1976, at 2.60.

<sup>12</sup> For the rite of female genital display being connected with primitive agricultural magic, cf. Hornblower, 1927, 152; Lloyd, 1976, at 2.60. Cf. Diodorus Siculus, 1.85, for a rite that took place at Esna in the presence of the cult statue of Hathor and before the Apis bull, which is clearly connected with the one mentioned by Herodotus. Cf. also Baubo in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*.

<sup>13</sup> Hdt., 2.61. Cf. Hdt., 2.59, where he records the festivals of the Egyptians in order of importance. Cf. Lloyd, 1976, at 2.59, for the significance of Herodotus' account of Egyptian festivals. Cf. also Lloyd, 1976, at 2.61, for the participation of the Carians being connected with the cult of Attis.

<sup>14</sup> Herodotus' silence indicates that he believed in the existence of Mysteries in Egyptian religion; cf. also Hdt., 2.171. However, scholars generally believe that the historian misunderstood the term 'mysteries': cf. Morenz, 1960, 89-90; Nagel, 1955, 132-133; Lloyd, 1976, at 2.61; Griffiths, 1970, 67. For the Mysteries being introduced into the Egyptian cult in the Hellenistic period, cf. Nock, 1933, 40; Nagel, 1955, 134;

Herodotus' representation, their participation in the festival of Isis is vital and they celebrate once again alongside the men.

## b. Cyrene, Barce and Libya

The historian tells us that οὕτω μὲν μέχρι τῆς Τριτωνίδος λίμνης ἀπ' Αἰγύπτου νομάδες εἰσὶ κρεοφάγοι τε καὶ γαλακτοπόται Λίβυες καὶ θηλέων τε βοῶν οὕτω γευόμενοι, δι' ὃ τι περ οὐδὲ Αἰγύπτιοι, καὶ ὕς οὐ τρέφοντες. βοῶν μὲν νυν θηλέων οὐδ' αἱ Κυρηναίων γυναῖκες δικαιοῦσι πατέεσθαι διὰ τὴν ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ Ἴσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ νηστείας αὐτῇ καὶ ὀρτὰς ἐπιτελέουσι· αἱ δὲ τῶν Βαρκαίων γυναῖκες οὐδὲ ὑῶν πρὸς τῆσι βουσί γεύονται. ('Thus, from Egypt to the Tritonian lake, the Libyans are nomads that eat meat and drink milk, but they do not eat cows, for the same reasons as the Egyptians, and they rear no swine. Also the Cyrenean women think of it as wrong to eat cows because of the Egyptian Isis, whom they honour with fasting and festivals. The Barcaean women eat neither swine nor cows').<sup>15</sup>

As the Herodotean narrative indicates, the abstinence from cow's meat on the part of the Libyan and Cyrenean women points to the Egyptian worship of Isis. Apart from this passage, the historian has remarked in Book 2 that no Egyptians may sacrifice cows, for 'her very image is in a woman's form with horns like an ox, as the Greeks picture Io, and all Egyptians alike hold cows as sacred' (τὸ γὰρ τῆς Ἴσιος ἀγαλμα ἐὼν γυναικῆιον βούκερων ἐστὶ κατὰ περ Ἑλληνες τὴν Ἰοῦν γράφουσι, καὶ τὰς βούς τὰς θηλέας Αἰγύπτιοι πάντες ὁμοίως σέβονται).<sup>16</sup> In other words, the cow is the living image of Isis, who is represented sometimes as a cow, at other times as a woman with a cow's head and at others again as a horned woman.<sup>17</sup> As for the historian's remark about the women's abstinence from pig's flesh, there are two reasons why they are portrayed as doing so. Firstly, in Book 2, Herodotus remarks that pigs were generally regarded as unclean beasts, especially by the Egyptians.<sup>18</sup> And secondly, the breeding

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Bleeker, 1967, 45; Griffiths, 1970, 42-43. For the existence of Egyptian Mysteries, cf. Diodorus Siculus, 1.20-23 and 29; Plutarch, *Moralia*, 364e-365a and 378b; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, 1.15 and 5.7.

<sup>15</sup> Hdt., 4.186.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Hdt., 2.41.

<sup>17</sup> How and Wells, 1912, at 2.41.

<sup>18</sup> Hdt., 2.47. Cf. Lloyd, 1976, at 2.47.

of pigs seems to have been incompatible with the habits of the Herodotean nomads. In Book 4, for example, it is stated that the Scythians, who were also nomads, were not willing for the most part to rear them in their country.<sup>19</sup>

### c. Greece

Despite the contradiction between women's exclusion from 'political life and their inclusion in religious life' in Greece, religion offers a rich source of material for understanding their role within the culture.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, their presence was integral to Greek cult, a fact clearly indicated in Herodotean representation.

#### 1. *Aeginetan and Epidaurian rites*

Herodotus records the rites of Aegina and Epidaurus in the course of his description of how the Aeginetans revolted from the Epidaurians. Following the narrative, the island and the people of Aegina were subject to the Epidaurians until they revolted against them, brought them much hurt and stole their images of Damia and Auxesia, which they set up in the middle of their own country at a place called Oea. Having set them in that place, θυσίησιν τε σφέα καὶ χοροῖσι γυναικῆιοισι κερτόμοισι ἰλάσκοντο χορηγῶν ἀποδεικνυμένων ἑκατέρη τῶν δαιμόνων δέκα ἀνδρῶν· κακῶς δὲ ἠγόρευον οἱ χοροὶ ἄνδρα μὲν οὐδένα, τὰς δ' ἐπιχωρίας γυναικῆας ('in order to appease them, they honoured them with sacrifices and choruses of mocking women, appointing ten men as providers of a chorus for each of the deities. And the choruses aimed their mockery not against any man, but against the women of the land'). The historian also tells us that, apart from the secret rites, the Epidaurians shared the same rite, too.<sup>21</sup>

The Aeginetans were Dorians from Epidaurus, something which explains their allegiance to the Epidaurians in the *Histories*. When they decided to revolt from the mother-city, they had to seize the statues to signify their independence in their

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<sup>19</sup> Hdt., 4.63.

<sup>20</sup> Zaidman, 1992, 339.

<sup>21</sup> Hdt., 5.83.

worship and to secure the favour and blessing of the deities.<sup>22</sup> Herodotus probably takes it for granted that his audience knows who Damia and Auxesia are and does not go into detail. The only information he provides is that Delphi advised the Epidaurians to set up images of the deities because their land brought forth no produce.<sup>23</sup> According to the myth, Auxesia and Damia were Cretan girls, who were stoned to death by the enemy during a civil war.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps their premature death was transformed into a cult and they themselves into deities of increase and fertility, as their names indicate: the name Damia is probably connected with δᾶ, which is a dialectal variant of γῆ ('land'), and Auxesia is clearly connected with ἀὐξάνω ('increase').<sup>25</sup> Moreover, it is possible that these earth-goddesses were the duplicates of Demeter and Kore, for the functions of the two pairs exhibit many similarities. First of all, they all were goddesses of the cornfield. Moreover, both divine pairs had a chorus of women in their service, the only difference being that there were males involved in the Herodotean representation of Damia's and Auxesia's rites. It is reasonable, then, to 'regard Damia and Auxesia as originally mere appellatives of Demeter and Kore themselves.'<sup>26</sup>

The chorus of women aiming mockery at the women of the country reminds us of the Egyptian festival in honour of Artemis at Bubastis. There too, the women are portrayed by the historian to shout raillery at the women of the towns they came across on their way to Bubastis.<sup>27</sup> If we are to judge by Damia's and Auxesia's names and by the similar rites performed in the Egyptian town of Bubastis, the mockery directed towards the women of Aegina and Epidaurus was supposed to benefit the recipient in this Herodotean passage, too; in other words, it was a fertility rite. However, Nenci seems to have a rather different view about the whole matter. He

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<sup>22</sup> For the Aeginetans being Dorians from Epidaurus, cf. Hdt., 8.46; Pausanias, 2.29.5. For the blessing of a deity once transported from its original location, cf. Livy, 5.22, although Juno was moved on her own consent. Generally, cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 5.83; Nenci, 1994, at 5.83.

<sup>23</sup> Hdt., 5.82. On Damia and Auxesia, cf. Figueira, 1993, 57-58.

<sup>24</sup> Pausanias, 2.32.

<sup>25</sup> Godley, 1981, 91 n.1.

<sup>26</sup> Farnell, 1907, 113. Cf. also Calame, 1997, 139.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Hdt., 2.60. Mockery was customary in other Greek festivals, as well: cf. Aristophanes, *Frogs*, 371-446 (in Eleusis); Aristophanes, *Wasps*, 1361-1363 (in

contends that the members of the mocking chorus were not women but men, a fact which could explain why in the Herodotean narrative, the insults were directed against the women of the land. From his perspective, the mockery was a kind of liberal pouring out of feelings regarding the subordinate female condition and nature.<sup>28</sup> However, Herodotus clearly states that it was the female chorus shouting the mockery, while the twenty males involved in the rite were the *choregoi* of the chorus (χορηγῶν ἀποδεικνυμένων ἑκατέρῃ τῶν δαιμόνων δέκα ἀνδρῶν). Hence, it all depends on what the involvement of the *choregoi* with the chorus was in the Herodotean portrayal, which actually does not get us very far, for the historian does not mention anything else apart from the fact that there were appointed twenty *choregoi* that provided for the chorus. Calame has suggested that the *choregos* had three functions: to organise, to begin and to conduct the chorus. He ‘gives the tone and indicates precisely the start of the dance, keeping together the voices and the steps of the chorus for the remainder of the performance.’<sup>29</sup> However, there are passages in Alcman and Lucian which indicate that a male *choregos* could also be the leader of a female chorus.<sup>30</sup>

Nonetheless, whatever the meaning and the involvement of the *choregos* with the chorus might have been, there are three things worthy of our attention in this Herodotean passage. Firstly, women once again are an integral part of a religious festival. Secondly, in this case, too, they are represented as celebrating side by side with men. Thirdly, and quite importantly, the historian brings into his narrative one more religious festival involving women behaving rudely, a fact which confirms his interest on the garish, as pointed out many times in the previous chapters of this study. Yet what is striking in this passage is that this interest of his is not restricted just to the peoples outside the confines of Greece.

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Dionysiac worship); Apollodorus, 1.5.1 (at the Athenian Thesmophoria); Pausanias, 7.27.9 (at Pallene); Athenaeus, 647a, and Diodorus Siculus, 5.4 (at Syracuse).

<sup>28</sup> Nenci, 1994, at 5.83.

<sup>29</sup> Calame, 1997, 49.

<sup>30</sup> Alcman, fr. 82c ; Lucian, *De saltatione*, 11-12. Calame, 1997, 64. Cf. also Farnell, 1907, 113, who believed that the chorus in the service of Damia and Auxesia had men leaders.

## 2. *Artemis Brauronia*

According to Herodotus, the Pelasgians that dwelt in Lemnos desired vengeance upon the Athenians who had driven them away from their city. Thus, after getting fifty ships, they lay in ambush for the Athenian women, who were celebrating the festival of Artemis at Brauron and carried many of them off to Lemnos, where they became their concubines. Once there, the Athenian women brought their sons up in the Attic manner and way of life. Because the Pelasgians feared that these boys might revolt against the sons of their legitimate wives and assume the power, they killed both the children and their Athenian mothers. This was the infamous Lemnian crime, according to the Herodotean version, which led to sterility of the land, disease in the herds and childlessness in Lemnos and which was resolved only after the Lemnians delivered their land to the Athenians as a penalty at the Delphic oracle's bidding.<sup>31</sup>

Herodotus does not say much about the festival of Artemis Brauronia, perhaps because he was certain his Athenian audience was more or less familiar with it. Indeed, it seems as if the chief purpose of this Herodotean passage is neither the festival nor the Lemnian crime but rather the subjection of Lemnos to the Athenians. Nevertheless, it provides valuable information about the historian's representation of the women's worship of the goddess. Accordingly, the first thing of importance is the Pelasgians' ability to approach the place where the festival was being held with their ships undetected. Clearly, then, the festival in honour of Artemis Brauronia is shown to be held near the sea and attended only by women.<sup>32</sup> The second thing that is of significance in this passage is the age of the participants, who, in the historian's representation, are referred to as γυναῖκες. Consequently, we have to ask ourselves what the historian means by γυναῖκες. Does he imply that the festival was attended by mature women, by adolescents of marriageable age, or by little girls? Or does his term γυναῖκες apply to the female sex more generally? One could argue that the

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<sup>31</sup> Hdt., 6.138-139. For a discussion of the Lemnian crime in the *Histories*, cf. Chapter Three. Cf. Cole, 1998, 30, his interesting suggestion that the divine punishment of the Lemnians was actually imposed upon them by Artemis angered by the rape of the women at her sanctuary. Cf. Pausanias, 6.19.3, for a similar punishment sent by Artemis to the city of Patrai after one of her priestesses entertained her lover in the temple.

Herodotean passage presents us with no problem if we distinguish between the active celebrants in and the observers of the rites at Brauron; the former will have been young girls, the latter women of all ages. However, the historian and the term he applies to the celebrants is rather vague. Thus, apparently, we have to rule out the possibility of Herodotus' bears being little girls, for the Pelasgians bring the raped women to Lemnos where they keep them as concubines and have children with them seemingly at once. Consequently, they had to be near to or at marriageable age. Moreover, we have to reconsider the idea that they were mature women, since other sources indicate that the festival was connected with a rite of passage.<sup>33</sup> This leaves us with the option that the γυναῖκες of Herodotus were adolescent girls. However, and despite the contradictory indications in the narrative, we cannot rule out the possibility that the girls in this Brauronian account are significantly below marriageable age and that Herodotus knew this. So, he may be re-telling a myth *despite* an awareness that it does not fit the facts of the rite well. *Or*, it could be that the historian deliberately used this rather vague term, assimilating the girls to women. It fits in well with his rape motif and the etiology of the Lemnian crime and, on top of that, it does not truly interfere with the age of the bears, which has attracted a lot of controversies among ancient authors and modern scholars.<sup>34</sup> After all, whether little girls, adolescents or adults, they *were* all γυναῖκες (i.e. females). Thus, one should rather consider it as another story in the *Histories* that portrays the significant participation of women in a city's cult.

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<sup>32</sup> For the sanctuary of Artemis at Brauron being an important harbour and, thus, open to intrusion, Cf. Cole, 1998, 29.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Calame, 1997, 99; Vernant, 1991, 209; Osborne, 1983, 165; Gould, 1980, 534; Just, 1989, 232; Perlman, 1989, 111 and 121. For the founding legend of the *arkteia*, cf. Suidas, s.v. *Arktos e Brauroniois*. Cf. also Schol. Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 645, where a second founding legend connected with Iphigeneia's sacrifice is reported. However, cf. Euripides, *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, 1587, where the girl is replaced on the altar with a deer and not with a bear as the Scholiast to Aristophanes records. Cf. Sale, 1975, 265-284, for the legends associated with Artemis and the *arkteia*.

<sup>34</sup> For the age of the bears, cf. Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 641-647; Schol. Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 641-647. For the bears being from five to ten years old, cf. Bevan, 1987, 19; Just, 1989, 232; Walbank, 1981, 279; Kahil, 1983, 237. For their age ranging from ten to fifteen, cf. Price, 1999, 95; Perlman, 1983, 115-130 and 1989, 121. Cf. Vernant, 1991, 217-218 and Dowden, 1989, 28-31, who believe that they could be from five to fourteen years old, thus indicating two categories of girls, those at puberty and the

### 3. *The Thesmophoria*

Herodotus makes only a passing reference to the Thesmophoria when he mentions the story of the Chians' slaughter by the Ephesians. Following the narrative, when the remainders of the Chian fleet were returning to their homeland, the crew of the crippled ships beached at Mycale, left their ships and made their way across the mainland. But when they entered the land of Ephesus, it so happened that νυκτός τε ἀπίκατο ἐς αὐτήν καὶ ἔοντων τῆσι γυναιξὶ αὐτόθι θεσμοφορίων, ἐνθαῦτα δὴ οἱ Ἐφέσιοι οὔτε προακηκοότες, ὡς εἶχε περὶ τῶν Χίων, ἰδόντες τε στρατὸν ἐς τὴν χώραν ἐσβεβληκότα πάγχυ σφέας καταδόξαντες εἶναι κλώπας καὶ ἰέναι ἐπὶ τὰς γυναῖκας ἐξεβοήθειον πανδημεὶ καὶ ἔκτεινον τοὺς Χίους. ('They arrived at Ephesus at night and the women were celebrating the Thesmophoria. The Ephesians, who had not heard the story of the Chians, seeing an army invading their country, thought that they were robbers coming after their women. So they marched out in a mass and slew the Chians').<sup>35</sup>

As was the case with the celebration of Artemis Brauronia, Herodotus mentions nothing about the celebration of the Thesmophoria. It is just shown to be a festival celebrated at the fields during the night by women, who are not in the company of any male. The historian's silence appears to be explicable in three ways: Firstly, he must have taken his audience's knowledge for granted, as the rites of the Thesmophoria were celebrated, presumably in much the same way, all over the Greek world. Secondly, it could be that giving details of the Thesmophoria at this point would have detracted from the *pathos* and speed of the narrative. Thirdly, and most importantly, he is bound to remain silent because of the secrecy that characterised the festival of the Thesmophoria.<sup>36</sup> For, earlier in Book 2, he says καὶ τῆς Δήμητρος

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little ones. Cf. Sourvinou-Inwood, 1971, 339-342, who argues that the age limit of the bears was ten. Generally, on the bears cf. Sourvinou-Inwood, 1988.

<sup>35</sup> Hdt., 6.16.

<sup>36</sup> For the Thesmophoria being celebrated for four days in autumn, cf. Campbell, 1898, 240; Zeitlin, 1982, 138; Versnel, 1992, 34; Lloyd, 1988, at 2.171; How and Wells, 1912, at 2.171. For the connection of the Thesmophoria with the title *Thesmophoros* attributed to Demeter, the goddess' contribution of grain and the establishment of laws and institutions of civilisation, cf. Cole, 2000, 136-137; Nilsson, 1971, 25; Zaidman, 1992, 350-351. Cf. also Schol. Lucian, *Dialoghi*



τελετῆς πέρι, τὴν οἱ Ἕλληνες θεσμοφόρια καλέουσι, καὶ ταύτης μοι πέρι εὐστομα κείσθω, πλὴν ὅσον αὐτῆς ὅστι ἐστὶ λέγειν ('and I will say nothing of the rite of Demeter, which the Greeks call Thesmophoria, apart from what it is holy to say').<sup>37</sup> It is of significance that Aristophanes, too, in his *Thesmophoriazousae*, avoids anything that can be regarded as a serious resemblance to or reference to the central ritual.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, it should not go unnoticed that this Herodotean story implies that the Ephesians thought there was a real possibility that their womenfolk might be kidnapped, either by neighbours or brigands or malcontents, a fact which does indicate not only the dangers of rural society but also the protectiveness of Greek males of their women.

## II. Women as cult founders

There are three accounts in the *Histories* that portray women as the founders of religious cults and institutions. Although they have to abandon their homeland and culture, still they bring their country's customs with them, which they manage to teach to the people of the new land and, more importantly, to get them established among them.

### a. The Danaids and the Thesmophoria

In the second book of the *Histories*, after Herodotus has reported that he will not reveal anything forbidden regarding the rite of the Thesmophoria, he adds the following: οἱ Δαναοῦ θυγατέρες ἦσαν αἱ τὴν τελετὴν ταύτην ἐξ Αἰγύπτου

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*Meretricii*, 2.1, where the connection of *Thesmophoros* with the contribution of grain and civilisation is attested.

<sup>37</sup> Hdt., 2.171. Cf. also Hdt., 2.48 and 61, for the historian's silence regarding Egyptian rites.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Parke, 1977, 84; Zeitlin, 1982, 147; Lowe, 1998, 149; Simon, 1983, 18; McDowell, 1995, 260-261; Taafe, 1993, 74-75. For the secrecy that pervaded the Thesmophoria and the strict exclusion of males, cf. Aelian, fr. 44 and Pausanias, 4.17.1, on Battus and Aristomenes respectively, who tried to penetrate the festival and were ruthlessly punished by the women.

ἐξαγαγούσαι καὶ διδάξασαι τὰς Πελασγιώτιδας γυναῖκας ('it was the daughters of Danaus that brought this rite out of Egypt and taught it to the Pelasgian women').<sup>39</sup>

Lloyd has observed that this story is 'an unusually explicit illustration of Herodotus' mistaken opinion that the major part of Greek religious institutions derived from Egypt.'<sup>40</sup> If this is the case, and it seems that it is, then there are a few reasons why the historian has chosen Egypt and the Danaids. The first has to do with the mistaken identification of the Egyptian goddess Isis with the Greek goddess Demeter, for the epithet Θεσμοφόρος ('law-giver') was attributed to both of them, as was the introduction of agriculture. However, it is not likely that their worships were connected in any way.<sup>41</sup> The second reason for attributing the transmission of the Thesmophoria to the Danaids has to do with their alleged Egyptian origin. Their sex must have also played a role in view of the character of the Thesmophoria and of the importance of women in the transmission of culture.<sup>42</sup> One last reason, which actually appears quite plausible, might have been the representation of the women celebrating the Thesmophoria both as the safe, domestic 'bees' as well as attackers of men. This ambivalence is reflected in their traditional myth and in Herodotus' account. For, according to the myth, the Danaids murdered their husbands on their wedding night, all but one (i.e. attackers of men), while in Herodotus' account they are attributed the transmission of rites of fertility (i.e. domestic bees).<sup>43</sup>

One thing that historically discredits Herodotus in this account is, as Lloyd has argued, the fact that he ascribed to the Pelasgians a major part in the development of Greek religion, for Pelasgians 'were, in the main, a creation of scholarly

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<sup>39</sup> Hdt., 2.171. Cf. also Hdt., 2.182, for the Danaids founding a temple of Athena in Lindus.

<sup>40</sup> Lloyd, 1988, at 2.171. Cf. also Campbell, 1898, 255; Dowden, 1989, 163-164.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 2.171. Cf. also Diodorus Siculus, 1.14, for Isis' and Demeter's connection with agriculture. Cf. Plutarch, *Moralia*, 378d-e, who is struck by the general analogy of certain agricultural rites in Egypt and Greece, something which led Harrison, 1922, 120-121, to assume that there is some element of probability in the Egyptian transmission of the Thesmophoria to Greece.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Lloyd, 1988, at 2.171. Cf. Hdt., 2.91, for Danaus, the girls' father, coming from Egypt. Cf. also Astour, 1965, 92-103, and Lloyd, 1975, 123-125, for the connection of the Danaids with Egypt.

speculation.<sup>44</sup> However, although the Pelasgians are *for us* a scholarly construct, for Herodotus they were a real people. Consequently, even if Herodotus' information on the transmission of the Thesmophoria is historically invalid, this passage still remains of primary importance because it is representative of the historian's opinion of the part played by women in the transmission and preservation of culture and custom.

## b. The Hyperborean maidens

According to Herodotus, every year the Hyperboreans send offerings wrapped in wheat-straw to Delos. These offerings arrive first in Scythia. Then, each nation receives them from its neighbour until they are carried to the Adriatic Sea, then to Dodona, the Melian gulf, Euboea, Carystos, and Tenos until they finally reach their sacred destination which is Delos; only Andros is excluded from carrying the offerings.<sup>45</sup> On the first journey, these offerings were carried by two maidens, called Hyperoche and Laodike, but when they failed to return to their homeland, the Hyperboreans decided from then on to carry the offerings to the borders and charge their neighbours to send them on from their own country to the next. As for the maidens who died at Delos, it is the custom for boys and girls to cut their hair in their honour and lay it on their tomb located on the left side of the entrance to Artemis' temple. Yet the Delians make mention of another pair of Hyperborean maidens, Arge and Opis, who came with the gods and who have been honoured ever since as deities of childbearing. To honour them, the Delian women collect gifts for them and call upon their names in the hymn made for them by Olen.<sup>46</sup> In addition, the ashes of the

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<sup>43</sup> For women as 'bees', cf. Apollodorus, *FgrH*, 244 F 89. For women as attackers of men, cf. Aelian, fr. 44 and Pausanias, 4.17.1. Cf. also Bowie, 1993, 206; Zeitlin, 1982, 145-146.

<sup>44</sup> Lloyd, 1988, at 2.171 and 1976, at 2.50. Cf. also Bernal, 1987, 78-79, for Herodotus and Pelasgians.

<sup>45</sup> For the tradition of the offerings to Delos, cf. Plutarch, *Moralia*, 1136b; Callimachus, *Hymn to Delos*, 283-290; Pausanias, 1.31.2. However, Callimachus and Pausanias bring the offerings via a slightly different route from the one in the *Histories*. For the exclusion of Andros, cf. Biancucci, 1973, 216; Parke, 1967, 281; How and Wells, 1912, at 4.33; Corcella and Medaglia, 1993, at 4.33.

<sup>46</sup> For ritual begging being involved with an invocation that promised husbands, children and safe delivery, cf. Robertson, 1983, 148. For Olen, cf. Pausanias, 8.21.3; 9.27.2; 10.5.7-8. Cf. also Maas, 1937, 2432-2433.

thighbones burnt in sacrifice are used for casting on their burial place, which is behind the temple of Artemis.<sup>47</sup>

The first thing we notice in the Herodotean narrative is that the whole celebration in honour of the two pairs of Hyperborean maidens seems to revolve round their tombs. Indeed, the tombs of heroic figures do not serve as just their burying sites, but rather as places in which people can honour and commemorate them; in other words, 'the tomb is usually the focal point of the cult' of a heroic cult figure.<sup>48</sup> Obviously, then, what we are dealing with in the historian's representation of Delos could be defined as a heroine cult. Although Herodotus does not report how the Hyperborean maidens actually died, the fact remains that, in his world, it was their death that laid the foundation for their cult.<sup>49</sup>

Strangely enough, although the two Herodotean pairs of maidens exhibit a lot of similarities, they receive honours of a different nature and from women of different age groups. Accordingly, as far as Hyperoche and Laodike are concerned, the historian informs us that it is the young boys and girls of Delos that cut their hair and lay it on their tomb.<sup>50</sup> It seems that what we are dealing with here is a rite of passage, with the hair-cutting representing a symbolic sacrifice and death as the youths dedicate a part of themselves to the Herodotean deities only to be reborn again in marriage.<sup>51</sup> As Zaidman has suggested, 'this sacrifice of hair was at once a propitiatory rite, a farewell to adolescence, and redemption of virginity'.<sup>52</sup>

In contrast to Hyperoche and Laodike, the second pair of the Hyperborean maidens, Arge and Opis, have a cult of their own. They are represented as honoured by women,

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<sup>47</sup> Hdt., 4.33-35. Cf. Pausanias, 1.43.4, who mentions just one pair called, Hekaerge and Opis. Yet, Callimachus, *Hymn to Delos*, 278-299, speaks of a triad of Hyperborean maidens named Upis, Hekaerge and Loxo.

<sup>48</sup> Larson, 1995a, 9. Cf. also Dowden, 1989, 1.

<sup>49</sup> For the premature death of a *parthenos*, her intermediary status of being neither a goddess nor a woman, and her association with the eternal maiden Artemis, cf. Blundell and Williamson, 1998, 6; Kearns, 1998, 102; Larson, 1995a, 25 and 118.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Radermacher, 1950, 325 n.1, for the name 'Laodike'.

<sup>51</sup> For similar local rituals in an Artemisian context, cf. Pausanias, 1.43.4, for Iphinoe; Euripides, *Hippolytus*, 1423-1427, and Pausanias, 2.32.1, for Hippolytus; Plutarch, *Aristides*, 20.6, for Eukleia. For the cutting of hair, cf. Lucian, *De dea Syria*, 60.

<sup>52</sup> Zaidman, 1992, 361. Cf. also Dowden, 1989, 2-3; Johnston, 1999, 42.

and not youths, who bring them gifts and call upon their names in hymns. According to the historian, Hyperoche and Laodike came to Delos to bring the promised tribute for easy labour to Eilithyia, while Arge and Opis came together with the gods. Prompted, as it seems, by Herodotus' remark on easy labour, Robertson has suggested that Hyperoche and Laodike were concerned with childbearing. However, this argument downplays, or even ignores, the agrarian significance of the offerings that Herodotus reports they bring (he does not actually mention what these offerings are, only that they are sacred items wrapped in wheat straws), and which were most likely offerings for the birth of Apollo and Artemis.<sup>53</sup> On the contrary, the connection of the Herodotean Arge and Opis with childbirth seems more credible, as we shall see.

A problem that Herodotus' passage presents is his remark that τὴν δὲ Ἄργην τε καὶ τὴν Ὀπιν ἅμα αὐτοῖσι θεοῖσι ἀπικεσθαι λέγουσι ('it is said that Arge and Opis came with the gods themselves'). Robertson believes that the two maidens came to deliver Apollo and Artemis whereas Sale's view is that Herodotus actually implies that Arge and Opis came in company with the twins, obviously referring not to their birth but to their arrival in Delos. Legrand has suggested that the two Hyperborean maidens actually came with Eilithyia and Leto to Delos in order to help with the delivery.<sup>54</sup> Yet, it could also be that the historian simply refers to the gods' cult images or the cult ritual itself that the maidens brought with them to Delos. Whatever Herodotus meant by this phrase, the bottom line is that in his portrayal, Arge and Opis were deities connected with childbearing. It is not only the statement that they came with the gods that bears testimony to this fact but also two further reasons. The first has to do with their names, which are actually epithets attributed to Artemis; especially the epithet Opis or Upis is said to have been given to the goddess because the women in childbirth revered (*opizesthai*) her.<sup>55</sup> As for the second reason, this

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<sup>53</sup> Robertson, 1983, 150. Cf. Larson, 1995a, 119-120, who partly disagrees with Robertson's statement.

<sup>54</sup> Robertson, 1983, 147-148; Sale, 1961, 82-84, who presents an altogether different view of Apollo's birth; Legrand, 1938, 231. For Robertson's point of view, cf. Pausanias, 1.18.5.

<sup>55</sup> For Opis as an epithet of Artemis, cf. Callimachus, *Hymn to Delos*, 204 and 240. Cf. also Radke, 1961, 926-929; How and Wells, 1912, at 4.35; Corcella and Medaglia, 1993, at 4.35; Larson, 1995a, 121; Robertson, 1983, 146-147.

derives from the historian's conceptualisation of their worship by women and not by young girls as in the case of Hyperoche and Laodike.

The Hyperborean maidens of the *Histories* have attracted controversies among scholars as to whether they are doublets of each other, whether both pairs are of the Hyperborean race, or whether their offerings imply an Athenian origin of the cult.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, there seems to be no easy answer, as Herodotus himself is deliberately creating an air of mystery about these Hyperborean maidens. Hence, we should rather focus on the Hyperborean maidens' importance in connection with the Herodotean conceptualisation of women, religion and cult. For they attest that, in the world of the *Histories*, heroines can be the founders of cults just like heroes and that the women themselves, whether virgins or married, are an integral part of their worship and commemoration.

### c. The oracles of Libya and Dodona

In his description of Egypt in the second book of the *Histories*, Herodotus includes two versions of the foundation of the oracular shrines in Libya and Dodona, struggling to make sense of complex and divergent traditions. His belief that Egyptian civilisation and religion existed long before the Greek found support in the tales reported to him by the priest of Zeus at Thebes in Egypt and the priestesses at Dodona. So, Herodotus goes on to attribute an Egyptian origin to both Greek priesthood as well as the Dodonian oracle itself.<sup>57</sup>

According to the 'Egyptian' account, after the Phoenicians carried away two priestesses from Thebes, they sold one of them in Libya and the other in Greece, where they became the first founders of divination.<sup>58</sup> However, in the version of the 'Dodonian prophetesses', the founders of the oracular shrines were not priestesses but two black doves, which came flying from Egyptian Thebes, one to Libya and one to

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<sup>56</sup> For the maidens being doublets of each other, cf. Nilsson, 1971, 37-38. For the offerings being borrowed from Athens, cf. Robertson, 1983, 149-151; Parke, 1977, 76. For the true Hyperborean maidens, cf. Sale, 1961, 75-89; Larson, 1995a, 121.

<sup>57</sup> Parke, 1967, 52-53.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Hdt., 2.35, for a contradiction on the historian's part, where he reports that there were no women priestesses in Egypt. Cf. Chapter Three.

Dodona. The latter, having settled on an oak tree, uttered in human voice that a shrine of Zeus should be founded in that place. The people of Dodona obeyed the divine message and established the oracle. The same message was conveyed to the Libyans by the second dove, which founded the shrine of Zeus Ammon.<sup>59</sup>

Herodotus was not satisfied with either of the two parallel and yet alternative versions. Hence, instead of simply choosing between the two accounts, Herodotus offers his own rationalistic view, producing at the same time a 'neat harmonisation of the two myths'.<sup>60</sup> Accordingly, he reports that if the priestesses were indeed carried away from the Phoenicians and sold one to Libya and one to Hellas, then the latter woman would have actually been sold to Thesprotia, for the part later known as Hellas was formerly called Pelasgia. Being in slavery there, she established a shrine of Zeus under an oak growing in the place she has chosen. Such an act would have been reasonable, firstly because of her being a priestess in the temple of the god at Thebes, and secondly because it would remind her of her homeland. As soon as she learnt the Greek language, she taught divination and informed the people that the other priestess was sold in Libya by the same Phoenicians who sold her in Hellas. Herodotus also explains away the element of the doves. He supposes that because the women spoke a strange language, the people thought it resembled the cries of birds.<sup>61</sup> When the women were at last able to speak the language of the people, the people said that the 'doves' uttered human speech. And so far as the black colour of the doves mentioned by the Dodonian priestesses is concerned, Herodotus believes that it had to do with the fact the women were Egyptians.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Hdt., 2.54-55; note that in this passage Herodotus cites female informants. Cf. Demon, *FgrH*, 327 F 20a-b, who reports that in the beginning there was not an actual temple of Zeus at Dodona, but rather the ground was demarcated by tripods to form a temple. Cf. also Lloyd, 1976, at 2.56.

<sup>60</sup> Parke, 1967, 54. Cf. also Fehling, 1989, 70; Benardete, 1969, 50.

<sup>61</sup> For unintelligible speech being regarded by the Greeks as bird cries, cf. Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 1050-1052; Aristophanes, *Frogs*, 680-685.

<sup>62</sup> Hdt., 2.55-56. For other foundation legends in most of which the dove figures as prominently as in the *Histories*, cf. Philostratus, *Imagines*, 2.33; Schol. Homer, *Iliad*, 16.223 and 234; Schol. Homer, *Odyssey*, 14.327; Proxenus, *FgrH*, 703 F 7; Suda, *FgrH*, 602 F 11; Plutarch, *Pyrrhus*, 1; Aristotle, *Meteorologica*, 352a35. Cf. also Parke, 1967, 35-41.

Clearly, in Herodotus' representation, the priestesses play an important role in both the cult of the oracular shrine and its foundation.<sup>63</sup> Although in the Homeric tradition, the centre of the cult at Dodona was the speaking oak, Zeus' sacred tree, in the world of the *Histories*, the significance of the sacred oak has diminished to just an oak on which the dove settled and marked the site of Zeus' shrine.<sup>64</sup> Evidently, if we are to judge by his portrayal, Herodotus believed that the birds were actually women implying that 'dove' was their epithet.<sup>65</sup> Yet, although Herodotus strove hard to explain the human voice of the birds, supposing that they were actually foreign women, he never considered the possibility that they were prophetic birds used by Dodona as a method of divination.<sup>66</sup> This could either be because there was no such practice in his day or because it simply did not suit his narrative.

In the historian's world, these two Egyptian women abducted from their homeland resemble two groups of women in the *Histories*. On the one hand, their situation is similar to the Carian and Athenian women who, although they are carried away by enemy men, still manage to preserve and transmit their culture's customs. And yet they also resemble the Amazons who, once they mingle with the young Scythian men, exhibit a remarkable ingenuity in learning a foreign language 'and integrating themselves into their new circumstances while preserving the essence of their former

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<sup>63</sup> For the Selloi being the original interpreters of Zeus' voice, cf. Homer, *Iliad*, 16.233-235. Cf. also Philostratus, *Imagines*, 2.33; Schol. Homer, *Iliad*, 16.234, for Pindar who names the prophets Helloi and not Selloi. For the shift to female service to the shrine owing to Dione's establishment as sharing Zeus shrine, cf. Strabo, 7.7-12. Cf. also Nicol, 1958, 136; Parke, 1967, 55 and 69.

<sup>64</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, 14.327-330, 19.296; *Iliad*, 5.693, 7.60; Pausanias, 1.17.5; Lucian, *Amores*, 21; Sophocles, *Trachiniae*, 1168. Cf. also Nicol, 1958, 139; Parke, 1967, 55-56; Lloyd, 1976, at 2.55.

<sup>65</sup> For the 'dove' being a priestess' title, cf. Pausanias, 10.12.10; Sophocles, *Trachiniae*, 172. Cf. Strabo, 7.1, who reports that *peleiai* actually meant 'aged women' and not 'doves', being confused with the form of *poliai* (aged women). Cf. Parke, 1967, 66, who disagrees, suggesting that by being called 'doves', the priestesses were associated with Zeus as his attendants. For the dove being closely associated with Zeus as it was regarded to be his attendant that brought him ambrosia, cf. Homer, *Odyssey*, 12.61-64.

<sup>66</sup> For the dove as a method of divination, cf. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman antiquities*, 1.14.5; Strabo, 7.10.



cultural role'.<sup>67</sup> Undeniably, there is no other passage in Herodotus' *Histories* that conveys more clearly and successfully the vital role of women in connection with religion, cult and culture.

### III. Women and priesthood

#### a. Priestesses

In the *Histories*, there are numerous references to women serving in the temples of gods and goddesses, whose presence and function is portrayed as of great importance to the *polis*, to the cult, and generally to religion.

##### 1. *Babylon, Egypt and Lycia*

According to Herodotus, the sanctuary of Zeus Belus in Babylon rose above the city in a series of eight towers, one on top of the other. In the last tower, and after a difficult ascent, lay the temple of the god and in it there was a couch and a golden table. No images of the god could be found in the temple and no human beings could stay there during the night apart from a native woman, chosen by the god. Herodotus reports that he got his information from the Chaldaean priests of Zeus Belus in Babylon, who also informed him that Zeus himself entered the temple at night and rested upon the couch, while the woman, who was his earthly consort, was not allowed to have intercourse with men. The historian also adds that the same priests who gave the information on Zeus Belus told him that the same thing happened in Egypt, where a woman sleeps in the temple of Theban Zeus, as well as at Patara in Lycia, where the prophetess of Apollo is shut in the god's temple during the night.<sup>68</sup>

There is an abundance of tales in ancient mythology narrating the marriage between a deity and a mortal and many persons in antiquity claimed to be the descendants of gods. Probably, these beliefs were also incorporated into rituals and, thus, the stories

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<sup>67</sup> Dewald, 1981, 118-119 n.27. For the Athenian and Carian women, cf. Hdt., 6.138 and 1.146; Chapter Three. For the Amazon/Scythian account, cf. Hdt., 4.110-117; Chapter One.

of the Chaldaean priests that Herodotus incorporated into his narrative reflect these ritual sacred marriages or *hieroi gamoi*.<sup>69</sup> Especially in Egypt, the pharaohs were believed to be in the most literal sense the descendants of the god, who temporarily assumed the form of the reigning king and, in that disguise, he had intercourse with the queen. Hence, although it is not overtly stated in the Herodotean narrative, it is implied that the god's consort in the temple of Thebes was no other than the queen of Egypt herself.<sup>70</sup>

It could well be that an explanation of the Babylonian kings' origin is also reflected in the Babylonian sacred marriage of the *Histories*. After all, the divine origin of their kings as the incarnations of the god himself was one of the most fundamental beliefs of the Egyptians. Perhaps there is a connection between Egypt and primitive Babylon, for also the Babylonian king was supposed to be divine in origin.<sup>71</sup> As Zeus Belus or Bel was identified with Marduk, the chief god and 'master' of Babylon, his human bride was one of the 'brides of Marduk' mentioned in the code of Hammurabi.<sup>72</sup>

For Herodotus, a sacred marriage must have taken place with the god Apollo at Patara in Lycia, as well. Yet the historian clearly reports that καὶ κατὰ περ ἐν Πατάρουσι τῆς Λυκίης ἡ πρόμαντις τοῦ θεοῦ, ἐπεὰν γένηται -- οὐ γὰρ ὦν αἰεὶ ἐστὶ χρηστήριον αὐτόθι --, ἐπεὰν δὲ γένηται, τότε ὦν συγκατακλήεται τὰς νύκτας ἔσω ἐν τῷ νηῶ. ('Similar is the case of the prophetess of the god at Patara in Lycia, whenever she is

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<sup>68</sup> Hdt., 1.181-182; note Herodotus's disbelief about Zeus Belos at 1.182. For Thebes, cf. also Strabo, 17.1.46; Diodorus Siculus, 1.47.1.

<sup>69</sup> Frazer, 1905, 170; 1922, 129-130. In Herodotus, the Chaldaeans are a tribe or group of priests, although in 7.63 we come across them in the army of Xerxes. The ethnic 'Chaldean' could also signify the group of priests, who apart from the cult of Marduk, cultivated various sciences, like astrology (cf. Hdt., 2.109); yet, it could also be the synonym for a charlatan or a visionary. Cf. Asheri, 1997, at 1.181.

<sup>70</sup> For divine procreation pictured on the walls of two of the oldest temples in Egypt, cf. Robins, 1983, 67; Frazer, 1922, 130-131; James, 1958, 120-121. In later times the role of the god's wife at Thebes changes. In the decline of Egypt, she gains considerable power while in Roman times, a young beautiful girl is appointed as the 'divine consort' to become the god's concubine until she reaches puberty. For the god's wife in Roman times, cf. Strabo, 17.1.46; Diodorus Siculus, 1.47. Generally, cf. Frazer, 1922, 134-135.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Sayce, 1902, 40-41; Oppenheim, 1964, 98; Postgate, 1992, 266-269; Pollock, 1999, 188 and 191.

<sup>72</sup> How and Wells, 1912, at 1.181; Asheri, 1997, at 1.181; Frazer, 1922, 130; Postgate, 1992, 131.

appointed, then she is shut in the temple at nights'). Probably, this representation is connected with the belief that the god did not spend the whole year there, as he was supposed to stay in the island of Delos during the summer months, the winter months in Lycia and the rest in Delphi.<sup>73</sup>

Herodotus was careful enough to state that he did not believe the Chaldaeans' statement about the god having intercourse with the chosen woman. It was the historian's disbelief that aroused Arieti's curiosity, who wondered why Herodotus is ready to believe that the gods 'punish Croesus for thinking he was happy but refuses to believe that the god lies with a woman in a temple'.<sup>74</sup> The answer to his question is given by Harrison, who has argued that the historian's 'scepticism is likely to be connected to his unwillingness to ascribe immortal parents to men'.<sup>75</sup>

## 2. *Timo and Miltiades*

According to a tale told by the Parians, Timo, the under-priestess of the chthonian goddesses, informed Miltiades how to enter and take the city of Paros. On her advice, he climbed over the city walls and leapt into the precinct of Demeter Thesmophoros. Not being able to open the door to the *megaron*, he went into the shrine either to remove something that should not have been removed or with some other intent (perhaps a sexual assignation (?), as will be suggested below). Once there, he was seized with religious fear, which prevented him from carrying out his deed and soon after that he gave up the siege of Paros, as well. However, on his way back from the precinct by the same way, while leaping down from the wall, he fell and hurt his leg, which was the cause of his death, as he perished of gangrene. When the Parians found out about Timo's betrayal, they sent to Delphi to enquire whether they should put her

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. Horace, *Odes*, 3.4.58-64. Cf. also How and Wells, 1912, at 1.182; Nenci, 1994, at 1.182.

<sup>74</sup> Arieti, 1995, 174.

<sup>75</sup> Harrison, 2000a, 88. For Herodotus reluctance to ascribe immortal parents to heroes, cf. 1.173; 2.91, 43-45, 112, 143 and 145; 4.5; 6.53; 7.150. He refers to Perseus' divine origin only once in 7.61. However, cf. also 6.53, for Ariston's wife being visited by Astrabacus. Harrison, 2000a, 90, has attributed this to Herodotus' belief in epiphanies, while Legrand, 1932, 131, has characterised it as a Herodotean untidiness in thought.

to death. But the Pythia forbade them to do so, stating that it was an apparition that had guided Miltiades to his doom and not Timo herself.<sup>76</sup>

As to Miltiades' expedition against Paros, the historian states that the siege was laid rather because of a grudge than because of the Parians aiding the Persians, thus ascribing personal motives to a great event.<sup>77</sup> A question arises in regard to his preference for the Parian version and divine interference. Although we cannot be sure why Herodotus chose to incorporate this story into his *Histories*, it constitutes the historian's representation of priestesses, Demeter and the Mysteries. For, obviously, the chthonian goddesses referred to in the passage are Demeter and Persephone.<sup>78</sup>

There seems to be a certain amount of 'power' vested in priestesses, for Timo was able to betray both the city and the goddess that she served by revealing the Mysteries to a man. Timo betrayed her office when she directed a man into the *megaron* while Miltiades inflicted divine punishment upon himself when he entered it and polluted it even further by trying to remove one of the objects. Most probably, this was supposed to be some kind of religious item, for example a sacred image, upon which the safety of the city was believed to depend.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, whatever this sacred item was, Herodotus is quite explicit that it was Miltiades' improper involvement with Demeter's rites that brought him to his end. This same notion is represented by Aristophanes in his *Thesmophoriazousae*, as well. It is not only a play dealing with the women's festival and the reversal of roles that it entailed. In the punishment of Euripides and Mnesilochus, it conveys also a warning of the perils awaiting men who try to penetrate the goddess' rites.<sup>80</sup>

But what was Timo's motive? Herodotus does not mention what motivated her. He rather portrays her as volunteering to offer her help to Miltiades to enter the town. Fontenrose has argued that the Parians based the story on a pattern of Greek myths

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<sup>76</sup> Hdt., 6.134-135.

<sup>77</sup> Hdt., 6.133; How and Wells, 1912, at 6.134. For a rationalised version, cf. Ephorus, *FgrH*, 70 F 63; Nepos, *Miltiades*, 7.3-4.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Hdt., 6.16 and 7.153.

<sup>79</sup> How and Wells, 1912, at 6.134; McQueen, 2000, at 6.134.

<sup>80</sup> For similar stories of men tampering with Demeter's rites, cf. Hdt., 6.16; Aeneas Tacticus, 4.8-11; Plutarch, *Solon*, 8; Pausanias, 4.17.1; Aelian, fr. 44.

that project women betraying their cities incited by love.<sup>81</sup> Accordingly, there is the story of Skylla who betrayed Megara for the love of Minos by cutting her father's lock of purple hair, which supposedly held the safety and fate of the city. Similar is the tale of Komaitho who betrayed Taphos for the love of Amphitryon, with the exception that the lock of hair is golden.<sup>82</sup> Evidently, the sacred object that Miltiades sought to remove resembles the lock of hair in the tales mentioned and maybe Timo's motive was love, after all. However, Herodotus mentions nothing; in fact, he does not even imply it. And on top of that, when her betrayal comes to light, she is not punished, because the Pythia conveniently states that it was an apparition that instructed Miltiades, who was doomed to ill fate, anyway.<sup>83</sup> It was Miltiades' doom that led Harrison to draw a very nice parallel between him, Timo and Croesus. He has quite rightly argued that it was Timo that gave the advice, but Miltiades who acted on it.<sup>84</sup> In this light, Timo resembles the Pythia while Miltiades Croesus, for both men should have checked the advice twice before acting upon it. And, quite interestingly, it could be argued that Timo appears as the opposite of Herodotus' 'wise advisors'.

### 3. *Pedasa*

In Book 1 Herodotus introduces a bizarre tale regarding the priestess of goddess Athena at Pedasa. According to the *Histories*, whenever a misfortune was to befall the people of Pedasa or their neighbours, the priestess grew a great beard. The historian informs us that this happened to them three times. The same portent is mentioned again in Book 8, in almost the same words, the only difference being that it happened twice.<sup>85</sup>

The first thing that strikes us is that the historian shows no signs of wonder, amazement, or disbelief at the story. On the whole, he seems to accept it, as he does

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<sup>81</sup> Fontenrose, 1978, 78.

<sup>82</sup> For Skylla, cf. Apollodorus, 3.15.8; Aeschylus, *Choephoroi*, 613-622; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 8.6-151. For Komaitho, cf. Apollodorus, 2.4.7.

<sup>83</sup> For apparitions in the *Histories*, cf. Hdt., 4.15; 7.16; 8.37, 84; 9.100. Cf. also the discussion later on.

<sup>84</sup> Harrison, 2000a, 229.

<sup>85</sup> Hdt., 1.175 and 8.104. Cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 1.175, who claim that what is mentioned in Book 8 'clearly proves that Book 1 was written later'. On the people of Pedasa, cf. also Strabo, 13.1.59.

not even try to rationalise it or offer a plausible explanation for the priestess' beard. Harrison has wondered whether we should 'label this episode a wonderful-but true story, a marvel rather than a miracle proper'. But as he himself concludes, as 'we have no way of telling what Herodotus deemed significant and what merely padding', 'we must surely then attach some significance even to those stories which Herodotus is clearly sceptical simply on the grounds of their inclusion'.<sup>86</sup> Whatever we label this Herodotean tale, it is of significance that once again a woman's role in a city's cult is not questioned.

## **b. Prophetesses**

### **1. *The Pythia***

As Dewald has very crisply put it, 'if we were to count number of appearances as the principal criterion, the Pythia would be the most important woman in the *Histories*'.<sup>87</sup> She appears in each and every book apart from the second, and on forty-five occasions she advises people of every rank and birth, whether Greeks or barbarians.

Despite the Pythia's role in the *Histories*, the Herodotean narrative does not include a detailed account of her function at Delphi. After all, there was no need to describe the Delphic procedure, for his audience would have known about it.<sup>88</sup> However, there are passing references to procedures and methods of divination from time to time. Accordingly, in the world of the *Histories*, the Pythia and the oracle could not be consulted all year round, for Apollo -- as pointed out earlier on in this chapter -- was believed to spend some months at Patara in Lycia and Delos. Moreover, she did not issue oracles every day, but only once a month, if we are to judge by Croesus' test of

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<sup>86</sup> Harrison, 2000a, 75.

<sup>87</sup> Dewald, 1981, 111.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Hdt., 7.111. For the origin of the institution of female priestesses at Delphi connected with the cult of Ge, cf. Dempsey, 1918, 54-55; Parke, 1939, 14. For the Pythia being of humble origin, cf. Parker, 1985, 301. For the Pythia's divine utterances being delivered in a state of frenzy, cf. Poulsen, 1920, 24-26; Dempsey, 1918, 55; Parke, 1939, 17; Maurizio, 1995, 70. For the opposite school of thought, which maintained that she was putting on an act, cf. Fontenrose, 1978, 211, 197, 204 and 212; Dewald, 1981, 119 n.28.

the oracular shrines.<sup>89</sup> The Herodotean narrative suggests that knowledge of political affairs both inside and outside the Greek world must have been part of the Pythia's accomplishments, probably, so as to issue appropriate responses to the consultants.<sup>90</sup> This alone could explain why the Delphic oracles were notoriously considered to be ambiguous, with the most famous twofold Delphic oracle being the one delivered to Croesus.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, since the oracle could not always be lucky, the obscurity of answers provided a convenient way out.<sup>92</sup>

The Herodotean Pythia is by no means portrayed as perfect. After all, she was human and she could easily abuse the power vested in her as the god's instrument. Herodotus records two instances where the Pythia was bribed to deliver an oracle that suited the bribers. According to the first, as told by the Athenians, the Alcmaeonids bribed the prophetess to bid any Spartan who should come to enquire of her on a private or public account to set Athens free.<sup>93</sup> This alleged bribery of the oracle is mirrored on another occasion. When the dispute over Demaratus' fatherhood arose, Cobon, a man of great power at Delphi, as Herodotus reports, instigated by Cleomenes, bribed the Pythia priestess named Perialla to give the judgment that Demaratus was not the son of Ariston. Yet, in this story, the historian mentions the punishment that awaited the priestess as soon as her bribery was discovered. She was deprived of her honourable office.<sup>94</sup> In the case of Cleomenes' bribery, Herodotus sees in his death divine

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<sup>89</sup> For Apollo in Lycia and Delos, cf. Hdt., 1.182; Horace, *Odes*, 3.4.58-64; Poulsen, 1920, 23. For the issuing of oracles once a month, cf. Croesus' test, Hdt., 1.46-48; Parke, 1943, 19-22.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Hdt., 5.72 and 6.134, for the political engagement of priestesses. However, it could be argued that the Pythia need not have known about political circumstances; it would have been enough if the priests did.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Hdt., 1.46-59 and 84-86. For Croesus, cf. also Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1407a; Diodorus Siculus, 9.31. For Croesus' oracles being not genuine but a fabrication by the priests, cf. Cicero, *On Divination*, 2.115-116. Cf. also Fontenrose, 1978, 113; Parke, 1943, 21, and 1967, 134, 201; Dobson, 1979, 353. For other ambiguous Delphic oracles, cf. Hdt., 3.57-58, 5.92, 6.19 and 140; Lucian, *Zeus rants*, 43. For the thesis that not all Delphic responses were obscure, cf. Parker, 1985; and Fontenrose, 1978, who believes that they were spurious.

<sup>92</sup> Poulsen, 1920, 26; Parker, 1985, 302.

<sup>93</sup> Hdt., 5.63. However, cf. Plutarch, *Moralia*, 860d, who denies the bribery. Cf. Parke, 1939, 166, and Nenci, 1994, at 5.63, who contend that in the case of the Alcmaeonid bribery an Athenian tradition could have been fabricated. .

<sup>94</sup> Hdt., 6.66. Cf. Hdt., 7.141, for some Athenian ambassadors arguing with the Pythia for a more favourable response. Cf. also Thucydides, 5.16, for the Pythia's bribery.

revenge and punishment for tampering with the god and his oracle.<sup>95</sup> But what about the priestess? Her only punishment was the loss of her office, while in the case of the Alcmaeonid bribery, Herodotus does not even record a punishment.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, it is odd how trust in the oracle was not vitiated. It could be that, in Herodotus' thinking, Perialla served as the scapegoat. Or perhaps the priestesses' supposed Apollonian possession on the one hand vested them with authority while on the other exonerated them of responsibility. In Whittaker's words, 'if public opinion maintained that the Pythia was possessed by Apollo, the responsibility and moral judgments of Delphi were those of society itself'.<sup>97</sup>

The oracle of Delphi was not the only oracular shrine in Greece. In the *Histories* alone, Herodotus makes mention of eighteen oracles and forty-three responses apart from the fifty-three he records from Delphi. However, it was considered the leading oracular shrine in the classical Greek world.<sup>98</sup> The Pythian priestess in the *Histories* is not only the representative of the god but also of society. She oversees the foundation of colonies, represents morality and politics, resolves disputes, and reinstates cultural order by reminding people of limits and conventions.<sup>99</sup> However, it is worthy of our attention that she fulfils these functions as the mouthpiece of Apollo; she is not shown to exercise power as a person in her own right.

## **2. The oracle of Dionysus**

In Book 7, Herodotus reports of the oracular shrine of Dionysus in Thrace. The historian does not say much about its methods of divination apart from the fact that a prophetess uttered the oracle's responses, as in Delphi. The only noticeable difference, or at least one that Herodotus emphasises, is that there were also prophets

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<sup>95</sup> For the different versions about Cleomenes' madness and death, cf. Hdt., 6.75 and 84. Cf. also De Romilly, 1977, 45-56; Lateiner, 1989, 203-204; Van der Veen, 1996, 62; Harrison, 2000a, 106; Griffiths, 1989, 51-78.

<sup>96</sup> Bribery was regarded as acceptable if it was in the interests of the city; cf. Harvey, 1985b. Maybe in this case, the Alcmaeonids would have claimed that their money was patriotically spent.

<sup>97</sup> Whittaker, 1969, 34-35. Cf. also Harrison, 2000a, 143; Parker, 1985, 302; Price, 1985, 142; Gould, 1994, 96.

<sup>98</sup> Zaidman and Schmitt-Pantel, 1989, 121.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Dewald, 1981, 111.



in the shrine, the Bessi.<sup>100</sup> Most probably, the reason why Herodotus does not go into detail in describing the oracle or its functions is explained by his statement that πρόμαντις δὲ ἡ χρέωσα κατὰ περ ἐν Δελφοῖσι, καὶ οὐδὲν ποικιλώτερον ('there is a priestess that utters the divine response as at Delphi, and there is nothing elaborate about it'). Yet, this statement of his is quite important, because it reveals not only his absolute certainty that his audience would understand how the Pythia acted but also a preference for, or a particular respect for Delphi and its priestess.<sup>101</sup>

#### IV. Apparitions and miracles

##### a. Battle apparitions

Herodotus records occurrences of phantoms of heroes seen in the battlefield fighting or encouraging the warriors. In one of these occurrences, the phantom is a woman. Accordingly, in Book 8 of the *Histories*, the historian informs us that during the battle of Salamis φάσμα σφι γυναικὸς ἐφάνη, φανεῖσαν δὲ διακελεύεσθαι ὥστε καὶ ἅπαν ἀκοῦσαι τὸ τῶν Ἑλλήνων στρατόπεδον, ὄνειδίσασαν πρότερον τάδε, ὦ δαιμόνιοι, μέχρι κόσου ἔτι πρύμνην ἀνακρούεσθε; ('a female apparition appeared and gave orders in such a way so as to be heard by all the Greek army, uttering first this reproach: "Oh wretched men, for how long will you be backing water?").<sup>102</sup>

Masaracchia has seen in this Herodotean female apparition the manifestation of goddess Athena, who features in epic as the protector of Greek warriors. Perhaps, the phantom was indeed thought to be Athena, but if so, it is odd that Herodotus does not say so. After all, he refers to the apparition as a woman and not a goddess. Walcot has commented that 'the threat posed by a potential loss of one's women to the enemy is the incentive to fight relentlessly, and a phantom in the shape of a woman is an

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<sup>100</sup> Hdt., 7.111. For the Bessi being the interpreters of the god's oracles and having political influence, cf. Euripides, *Rhesus*, 970-972; Dio Cassius, 56.34. Cf. Strabo, 7.5.12, for the Bessi being a race of bandits. However, in other accounts they feature as a distinct race who retained the oracle of Dionysus until it was transferred to the Odrysae: cf. Livy, 39.53; Pliny, *Natural history*, 4.11.40; and Dio Cassius, 51.25.

<sup>101</sup> Parke, 1939, 18-19; Harrison, 2000a, 122 and 145; How and Wells, 1912, at 7.111. Cf. also Immerwahr, 1966, 234-236; Kirchberg, 1965, 11-29; Schwabl, 1969, 258; Christ, 1994, 191; Shimron, 1989, 44; Forrest, 1984, 7.

effective means of making this threat explicit'.<sup>103</sup> However, it could also be that in the cruelty of the battlefield, the image of a woman would be more familiar and welcome, as the men would picture in it their mothers, sisters, wives and daughters.

#### **b. Two miraculous apparitions: the wife of Ariston**

Herodotus interrupts his narrative about how the Spartan king Ariston got by means of guile the beautiful wife of his best friend Agetus in order to tell a story from the woman's childhood. As a baby, this Spartan woman was very ugly. Moved by the grief of the parents for their child's ugliness and because she thought that the daughter of a prosperous family should be blessed with beauty, the baby girl's nurse would take her every day to the shrine of Helen at Therapne, set her by the image, and pray to the goddess to remove the ugliness of the child. One day, as the nurse was leaving the temple, a woman appeared before her and asked to see the child. Although initially the nurse refused the strange woman's request, she finally conceded and showed her the baby, whose head the stranger stroked and so removed its ugliness. From then on, the girl's appearance changed and she grew to be the most beautiful woman in Sparta.<sup>104</sup>

This is not Ariston's wife's only encounter with the wondrous. Herodotus records a second incident, which took place three days after the woman's marriage to the Spartan king. An apparition in the guise of Ariston appeared before her and lay with her, leaving the woman the garlands he wore as a token of his affection and probably as a proof of his actual presence. When the real Ariston came to his wife and demanded an explanation for the garlands, she swore that it was he that had given them to her. Ariston was persuaded of his wife's oaths only when it was discovered that the garlands were missing from the shrine of the local Spartan hero Astrabacus, a fact which proved divine manifestation.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Hdt., 8.84. Cf. also Chapter One. For other battlefield apparitions, cf. Hdt., 6.117 and 8.38-39; Plutarch, *Theseus*, 35.5; Pausanias, 1.15.3. Cf. also Felton, 1999, 28.

<sup>103</sup> Masaracchia, 1990, at 8.84; Walcot, 1978, 143.

<sup>104</sup> Hdt., 6.61. For the worship of Helen and Menelaus at Therapne, cf. Isocrates, 10.63. For their burial place at Therapne, cf. Pausanias, 3.19.9. For the hill where their temple was, cf. Polybius, 5.18.20; Livy, 34.28. Cf. also McQueen, 2000, at 6.61.

<sup>105</sup> Hdt., 6.69. Cf. also Chapter Four.

To start with the miraculous incident which occurred in the first years of Ariston's wife's life, it is of some interest that the historian does not state who the strange woman was that healed the baby girl's ugliness. Certainly, the woman's gift of beauty to the baby strongly implies who she is, but it appears that Herodotus avoids stipulating that the woman was Helen either to create an air of mystery or because of his familiar reticence in divine matters, or both. In the world of the *Histories*, this much-disputed heroine apparently turned after her death into a goddess of beauty, for in Book 2, the historian identifies her with  $\xi\epsilon\iota\nu\eta$   $\text{Αφροδίτη}$ .<sup>106</sup> Hence, this probably explains the nurse's visits to her shrine in Therapne and the eventual healing of the baby by her phantom. This unique metamorphosis finds its supernaturally inspired parallel as well as its antithesis in another Herodotean tale, according to which the Neuri turn themselves into wolves and remain in this form for a few days before they resume their human shape.<sup>107</sup> Although the two stories share the parallel theme of metamorphosis, they are diametrically opposite for the following two reasons. Firstly, the Neuri assume this change in form through magic and not divine intervention. And secondly, there seems to be a contradiction in Herodotus' representation of such phenomena in that, although he overtly dismisses the Neurian case as untrue, he displays no signs of disbelief in the case of Ariston's wife. It seems as if the historian had his own code with regard to the unexplained; he is ready to dismiss human powers but not to challenge the divine. *Or* it could also be the case that Herodotus is happy to let supernatural details ride in family histories, but less so in scientific analyses of the natural world.

Likewise, Herodotus does not express disbelief in the story of Astrabacus' appearance, although a tone of cynicism can be detected.<sup>108</sup> Perhaps the historian was puzzled at the hero's return to the world of the living with the intent to procreate, especially if the location of his shrine outside Ariston's house had apotropaic and protective functions. For, as Ogden has put it, 'if this was the case, in sleeping with Ariston's wife, Astrabacus failed in his duty in spectacular fashion'.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Hdt., 2.112. Cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 6.61, who argues that Helen was worshipped as a tree-nymph, for which cf. Pausanias, 3.19.10; Theocritus, 18.43.

<sup>107</sup> Hdt., 4.105. Cf. Benardete, 1969, 173. On lycanthropy, cf. Buxton, 1987.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Harrison, 2000a, 87.

<sup>109</sup> Ogden, 1997, 111; cf. also pg. 111-115, his general discussion of Astrabacus. For Astrabacus, cf. Pausanias, 3.16.6 and 16.9. Cf. also McQueen, 2000, at 6.69. Cf.

### c. Ladice

In order to seal an alliance between his country and Cyrene, the Egyptian king Amasis took a Cyrenean wife called Ladice. Since she was the only woman with whom the king could not have intercourse, he accused her of magic and threatened her with death as a consequence. Ladice prayed in her mind to Aphrodite that if she were to have intercourse with Amasis that night, she would dedicate to the goddess a statue in Cyrene. Immediately after, her prayers were answered, for she was able to consummate her marriage and, from then on, Amasis loved her dearly.<sup>110</sup>

This Herodotean account shares with the story of Helen's apparition the element of a god's answer to a prayer. Although Herodotus records no divine manifestation in Ladice's case, we can nevertheless assume that it was divine intervention that granted the woman's wish owing to 'the sudden and convenient timing', for it is immediately after her prayer that she is able to have sex with Amasis.<sup>111</sup> What draws our attention to the narrative is the fact that Ladice's prayer is unspoken, for the historian records that 'she prayed to Aphrodite in her mind' (εὐχεται ἐν τῷ νόῳ τῇ Ἀφροδίτῃ). Pulleyn has suggested that this silent prayer was necessary due to Amasis' presence in the room. This could very well be the case, especially if we come to think of the king's death threat. Obviously, a mental prayer was the only thing that Ladice could resort to in her despair.<sup>112</sup> However, it could be also argued that in the Herodotean narrative, the execution of a silent prayer could appear even more miraculous than if it was said out loud.

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Burkert, 1979, 41-43, for the significance of Astrabacus' shrine outside the house, which was similar to the Herms.

<sup>110</sup> Hdt., 2.181. Cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 2.181, who argue that the story is a fabrication. Cf. also Lloyd, 1988, at 2.181, for the elements that must have contributed to the tale. For popular tales in connection with the consummation of a marriage, cf. Thompson, 1957, T 160. For tales regarding marriage and fear of magic, cf. Thompson, 1957, T 171-173, 175, 182.

<sup>111</sup> Harrison, 2000a, 77-78.

<sup>112</sup> Pulleyn, 1997, 187. For silent prayer, cf. also Versnel, 1981, 26-28; Van der Horst, 1994, 1-25. Cf. Zopyrus Byzantius, *FgrH*, 336 F 2, for Aphrodite, Hermes and Eros Ψιθυριστής ('Whisperer'), in which epithet Pulleyn, 1997, 187 n.67, has seen the 'people's need to address these deities in silence.'

#### d. Phye

Herodotus informs us how the Athenian tyrant Pisistratus achieved his reinstatement by staging his return with a sham goddess Athena ride by his side. According to the narrative, ἐν τῷ δήμῳ τῷ Παιανίει ἦν γυνή, τῇ οὐνομα ἦν Φύη, μέγεθος ἀπὸ τεσσέρων πήχεων ἀπολείπουσα τρεῖς δακτύλους καὶ ἄλλως εὐειδής. ταύτην τὴν γυναικὰ σκευάσαντες πανοπλίη, ἐς ἄρμα ἐσβιβάσαντες καὶ προδέξαντες σχῆμα, οἷόν τι ἔμελλε εὐπρεπέστατον φανέεσθαι ἔχουσα, ἤλαυνον ἐς τὸ ἄστυ προδρόμους κήρυκας προπέμψαντες, οἱ τὰ ἐντεταλμένα ἠγόρευον ἀπικόμενοι ἐς τὸ ἄστυ λέγοντες, τοιάδε ᾠὴ Ἀθηναῖοι, δέκεσθε ἀγαθῷ νόῳ Πεισίστρατον, τὸν αὐτὴ ἡ Ἀθηναίη τιμήσασα ἀνθρώπων μάλιστα κατάγει ἐς τὴν ἑωυτῆς ἀκρόπολιν'. ('In the Paeonian deme there was a woman called Phye, whose height was three fingers short of four cubits, and, as for the rest, graceful. This woman they dressed in full armour and put her on a chariot, giving her the sort of appearance that would make her look glorious. And as they entered the city, heralds ran before them, making such proclamations as they were ordered: "Oh Athenians, accept Pisistratus with a well-disposed mind, whom Athena herself honoured above all men, bringing him back to her own citadel"'). Persuaded that the woman was indeed Athena, the people worshipped Phye as a goddess and welcomed Pisistratus.<sup>113</sup>

Herodotus here attests a staged epiphany. Indeed, the historian appears to be puzzled about how the clever Athenians could fall for such a cheap trick.<sup>114</sup> Modern scholars are divided regarding this Herodotean passage. On the one hand is the school of those who picture it as a charade enabling Pisistratus' manipulation of the masses.<sup>115</sup> On the

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<sup>113</sup> Hdt., 1.60. Cf. also Athenaeus, 609c-d; Cleidemus, *FgrH*, 323 F 15; Aristotle, *Athenian constitution*, 14.4, for Phye being a florist and the wife of Hipparchus. For similar incidents, cf. Hdt., 4.180 and 95; 7.153. For another Paeonian woman in the Herodotean narrative, who performs such remarkable tasks that she attracts Darius' attention and admiration, cf. Hdt., 5.12-14. For an Ausean festival in the honour of goddess Athena, during which the most beautiful maiden is chosen and dressed to personify the goddess, cf. Hdt., 4.180. Cf. also Camps, 1985, 38-59, for the modern parallel to the impersonification of goddess Athena around Marrakesh.

<sup>114</sup> What is of interest here is Herodotus' utter disbelief of the epiphany of goddess Athena in the guise of the human Phye, and his neutrality in the similar cases of Helen's and Astrabacus' apparitions, who appear in the guise of Ariston and a strange woman respectively.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Gernet, 1968, 344-359; Berve, 1967, 545.

other hand, a second school comprises scholars who believe in its historicity and have tried to explain the implications of this Herodotean tale. Connor dismisses the manipulation-of-masses theme and instead argues that the Athenians, being familiar with similar cultic processions, were aware of the mortality and humanity of Phye and chose to respond with enthusiasm to Pisistratus' staged 'drama'. In his view, even the divine dressing of Phye confirms a cultic procession.<sup>116</sup> Snodgrass, Moon and Ogden have seen marital connotations in the tale, even a *hieros gamos* between the tyrant and the fake goddess Athena, while Sinos goes one step further and suggests 'the ritual entry of a victor returning to his city', but unfortunately overlooks the whole tone of the way in which Herodotus tells the story.<sup>117</sup> Else has noted that the Herodotean passage 'depends integrally upon the *Odyssey* and upon the *Odyssey* being well known to the whole population of Athens at the time', thus implying that it echoes the goddess' support for the hero Odysseus.<sup>118</sup> However, it could be argued that the dependence of the *Odyssey* is not so apparent; the 'charade' is perfectly comprehensible without any knowledge of it. And Boardman developed the hypothesis that Pisistratus was pretending to be Heracles, with Athene/Phye escorting him to the citadel as to Olympus.<sup>119</sup> However, Herodotus obviously saw none of the elements mentioned above in Pisistratus' procession. In his representation, Pisistratus did use the crowd's belief in divine manifestations to safeguard his return to the city of Athens. Moreover, interesting is the historian's report on the height and beauty of the girl who impersonated goddess Athena, two features which obviously feature in the narrative as divine characteristics.<sup>120</sup> As Harrison has observed 'Phye's divinity is false. However, if divinity is defined essentially in human terms, this has the consequence that humans are capable of attaining -- at least in part -- to divinity'.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Connor, 2000, 63-64. Cf. Stern, 1989, 13; Sinos, 1993, 79; Robertson, 1992, 143, who also see a cultic justification in the Herodotean story of Phye. For people dressed divinely, cf. Hdt., 1.62; Pausanias, 4.27, 7.18.7; Aelian, *Varia historia*, 12.32; Diodorus Siculus, 16.44.2-3; Dio Chrysostom, *Orations*, 37.21; Ehippus, *FgrH*, 126 F 5.

<sup>117</sup> Snodgrass, 1980, 114; Moon, 1983, 101-102; Ogden, 1999, 263; Sinos, 1993, 78. Cf. Connor, 2000, 60-61, who dismisses the suggestion of an *hieros gamos* in view of the absence of such rites in connection with goddess Athena.

<sup>118</sup> Else, 1957, 36-37.

<sup>119</sup> Boardman, 1972. Cf. also Ogden, 1997, 205 n.14; McGlew, 1993, 74-75.

<sup>120</sup> For beauty as the gift of a goddess, cf. Homer, *Odyssey*, 6.224-231; 18.190-196; 23.156-158. For beauty as a goddess' privilege, cf. Homer, *Odyssey*, 5.212-213.

<sup>121</sup> Harrison, 2000a, 163.

Yet, this fact in combination with a clever and scheming ruler can have undesirable consequences.

#### e. **Melissa**

In Book 5, Herodotus tells the story of how Periander the tyrant of Corinth stripped all the women of Corinth naked. This was his reason: Periander sent messengers to the Oracle of the Dead in Thesprotia, on the river Acheron, to enquire of his dead wife Melissa the whereabouts of a friend's deposit (ξεινικῆς πέρι παρακαταθήκης). However, Melissa denied him an answer sending him back a message that she was cold and naked, for the clothes buried with her had not been burnt and thus were of no use to her. As a token of speaking the truth, she added that Periander had cast his loaves into a cold oven. When the Corinthian tyrant received the message, he realised that it was really Melissa's ghost that had uttered it, since he had had intercourse with her dead body.<sup>122</sup> Immediately, he made a proclamation that all the Corinthian women should gather in the temple of Hera, and when they came dressed in their finest adornment as if they were attending a festival, Periander stripped them all alike naked and burned their clothes in a pit, making prayers at the same time to Melissa. When he had done so and sent for a second time to the Oracle of the Dead enquiring of the same matter, Melissa indicated the place where the deposit was hidden.<sup>123</sup>

This is a unique episode in the *Histories*. Unlike the passages discussed so far where apparitions of gods or heroes are shown to miraculously answer the prayers of mortals, the historian here reports the possibility of communication with departed spirits as well as the summoning of a dead person for oracular purposes.<sup>124</sup> This

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<sup>122</sup> For another case of necrophilia in Egypt, cf. Hdt., 2.89. According to the historian, women of notable men and of great beauty and reputation in Egypt are not given to the embalmers immediately after their death, for it was once discovered that an embalmer had intercourse with a newly dead woman.

<sup>123</sup> Hdt., 5.92. For other Oracles of the Dead, cf. Pausanias, 3.17.9 (at Phigalea); Plutarch, *Cimon*, 6 (at Heracleia); *Moralia*, 560e (at Taenarum). For offerings to the dead and necromancy, cf. Homer, *Odyssey*, 11.23-28. Cf. also Pausanias, 10.4.10.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Hdt., 7.12, 14 and 17, for the vision of the old man visiting Xerxes in his dream. Although it could be argued that it is Darius' ghost, the historian is not as explicit as in Melissa's case. For a similar tale to Melissa's death, ghost and necromancy, cf. Plutarch, *Cimon*, 6; Pausanias, 3.17, the story of Pausanias and Cleonice; however, Cleonice's ghost, unlike Melissa's, seeks revenge. Cf. also

theme of necromancy has excited the curiosity and interest of modern scholars, who, as in Phye's case, have attempted to decode the various messages and implications of the Herodotean account. Consequently, the first point of reference is obviously the deceased woman's name, which indeed draws our attention from the very beginning for the following reasons. Firstly, the name Melissa, 'Bee', has an apparent connection with the title of the priestesses of the chthonian goddess Demeter. This connection is further enhanced by Diogenes Laertius' statement that Melissa was not her real name, but Lyside.<sup>125</sup> Secondly, as Stern and Ogden have observed, the bee itself had both chthonian and oracular associations, thus creating a link between Melissa and the necromancy indicated in the passage.<sup>126</sup> Thirdly, the bee motif with its honey implications should not go unnoticed. To begin with, it is a theme that runs through Periander's family, as his father was named Cypselus after the beehive he was hidden in while he was a baby (*kypsele*).<sup>127</sup> In addition, there are a number of stories in antiquity in which honey features as a means of preserving a dead body and it is even fundamental for one's resurrection. Indeed, Herodotus himself recounts in Book 2 that the Egyptian embalmers preserved the body in honey.<sup>128</sup>

Another element in the Herodotean tale that catches the reader's eye is Melissa's message to Periander that ἐπὶ ψυχρὸν τὸν ἵπνον Περιάνδρος τοὺς ἄρτους ἐπέβαλε

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Lucian, *Philopseudes*, 27, for a parody of Melissa's tale. Cf. Felton, 1999, 78-81, for a discussion of Herodotus' and Lucian's passages.

<sup>125</sup> Diogenes Laertius, 1.94. For 'bee' as a priestess's title, cf. Apollodorus, *FgrH*, 244 F 89. Cf. also Cook, 1895, 5 and 14-17; Dempsey, 1918, 13 n.6; Godley, 1981, 345; Larson, 1995b, 352-354.

<sup>126</sup> Stern, 1989, 17 n.14; Ogden, 2001, 56. Cf. also Cook, 1895, 7, 14-15, 19, citing Schol. Pindar, *Pythian odes*, 6.60 and Schol. Theocritus, 15.94; Aly, 1969, 153 n.2; Larson, 1995, 354-357. For bees in connection with the context of necromancy, cf. Hdt., 5.114; Virgil, *Georgics*, 4.317-558; Aristotle, *History of animals*, 627b10; Pausanias, 9.40; Schol. Aristophanes, *Clouds*, 506; Virgil, *Aeneid*, 6.706.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. Hdt., 5.92.

<sup>128</sup> For honey used for embalming, cf. Hdt., 1.198; Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 5.3.9; Diodorus Siculus, 15.93; Plutarch, *Agésilas*, 50; Nepos, *Agésilas*, 8.7. Cf. the interesting tale of Herod the Great, who is said to have preserved his wife's dead body in honey for seven years in order to have intercourse with it: Josephus, *Jewish war*, 1.436.44; *Jewish antiquities*, 15.202-252; Talmud Bab., *Baba Batra* 3b and *Kiddouschin*, 70b; Sifra on *Deuteronomy*, 22.22. Cf. also Hyginus, *Fabula*, 136, for the death, preservation and resurrection of the Cretan king Minos' son, Glaucus.



(‘Periander had cast a bun in the cold oven’).<sup>129</sup> It is obvious that what her ghost alludes to in this encoded message, which is incomprehensible to the messengers but perfectly understandable by Periander, is her husband’s necrophilia. Herodotus has informed us earlier that the Corinthian tyrant killed his wife himself but he does not state why or how he killed her.<sup>130</sup> Nevertheless, Herodotus clearly tells us in Melissa’s message what happened after her death. It appears that, in ancient thought, there was an analogy between the female body and the oven. As Dubois has put it, ‘the metaphor of the oven seems to have strong affinities with the furrow/earth metaphor. It links the process of plant reproduction and their attendant agricultural and botanical imagery with the world of the artisan and the cook’.<sup>131</sup> Consequently, one should picture the female uterus as an oven and the male seed as the loaves placed in the oven, which will hopefully grow by the heat into offspring just like the bread rises and bakes.<sup>132</sup> This last imagery in conjunction with Diogenes Laertius’ statement that Melissa was pregnant when Periander killed her in a fit of jealousy has led scholars to conclude that there are fertility connotations in Herodotus’ story, also apparent in the motif of the mislaid deposit about which Periander calls Melissa’s ghost.<sup>133</sup>

To turn to Melissa’s demand of clothes because she is cold, and the subsequent burning of the Corinthian women’s clothing, Stern has read this as a ritual hierogamy or ritual sex, on the basis of Herodotus’ report that the women were dressed as if they

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<sup>129</sup> For other stories in the *Histories* that are closely associated with the female body and the oven, cf. Hdt., 1.51; 3.151; 8.137. For a discussion of these passages, cf. Dubois, 1988, 115-116.

<sup>130</sup> Hdt., 3.50. Cf. How and Wells, 1912, at 3.50, who believe that Periander’s jealousy is hinted at in Periander’s remark in 3.52. Cf. Diogenes Laertius, 1.94, who reports that Periander killed Melissa with a kick or a stool while pregnant, while in 1.100, Periander insists that it was an accident.

<sup>131</sup> Dubois, 1988, 110.

<sup>132</sup> Cf. Hdt., 5.137, where it could be argued that there is a connection between the female uterus seen as the oven, the male seed as the loaf and Perdiccas’ loaf cooked by the wife of the Macedonian king. As Perdiccas’ loaf was ever growing double in size, it could mean that he was going to have a descendant twice as great, i.e. a king. For the mother seen as a ‘container’, cf. Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, 658-663.

<sup>133</sup> For Melissa’s pregnancy being connected with Periander’s sexuality, cf. Stern, 1989, 18. Stern also argues that Diogenes’ statement that Periander burnt his concubines is a ‘confused recollection of Herodotus’ account that he burnt the women’s clothes to the ghost of his wife’. For fertility connotations in Melissa’s tale, cf. Ogden, 1997, 92-93; Dubois, 1988, 112.

were attending a festival.<sup>134</sup> Dubois, on the other hand, assuming (although Herodotus says nothing of the kind!) that the necrophiliac Periander undressed his dead wife to have sex with her, has concluded the following. She contends that the tyrant's act of stripping the Corinthian women is the compensation he offers to his wife for both her undressing and the semen he deposited in her dead body; in her view, 'he covers her to protect her from further deposits'.<sup>135</sup>

However, we may be reading too much into Herodotus' intentions. And although all the aforementioned arguments brought forward by scholars provide a reading of all the different elements and themes of the Herodotean tale, on the whole they are largely irrelevant and they seem to distract us from our understanding of the main point of the passage. After all, starting with Melissa's name, the historian does not seem to import into it all the different necromantic or fertility motifs that we see in it today.<sup>136</sup> And as far as the burning of clothes is concerned, it could be said that it just reflects Periander's attack on luxury.<sup>137</sup> Consequently, it seems that what the historian has primarily attempted to envisage in the Melissa story are the following two things: The first is connected with Periander's 'bad press', for he is portrayed as having no moral restraints or sexual taboos. Quite significantly, neither Melissa as character nor Herodotus as author condemn Periander for necrophilia, a fact which raises the

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<sup>134</sup> Stern, 1989, 19-20. Cf. also Vernant, 1982, 30, who implies ritual sex. For a close parallel to Melissa's nakedness and her being cold, cf. Pritchard, 1955, 52-57 and 106-109, the story of Inanna-Ishtar's descent to the underworld, which is accomplished by the removal of her clothes and regalia at each gate. When she finally arrives, she is cold and helpless and only through a return of these items can she ascend to life. Cf. Diogenes Laertius, 1.96 and Ephorus *FgrH*, 70 F 178, who record that Periander stripped their women of their gold in order to make a statue. Cf. also Justin, 21.3.

<sup>135</sup> Dubois, 1988, 113. Cf. also Nenci, 1994, at 5.92, who has suggested that the stripping and burning of clothes signifies a mourning ritual, considering that especially among the oriental world the tearing of garments was a sign of mourning: e.g. cf. Hdt., 8.99. For the use of Melissa as a title, cf. Apollodorus, *FgrH*, 244 F 89. Cf. also Cook, 1895, 5 and 14-17; Dempsey, 1918, 13 n.6; Godley, 1981, 345; Larson, 1995b, 352-354.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. Sourvinou-Inwood, 1991, 274 n.65, who notes that the story of Melissa expresses 'social roles', owing to Melissa's name and another image of the bee, that of representing the ideal wife. For the subject of the bee as a Greek image for the ideal woman/wife, cf. Detienne, 1981, 101; Lefkowitz, 1981, 36 and 73; Parker, 1983, 83; Pomeroy, 1999, 37, 52.

<sup>137</sup> Cf. Salmon, 1984, 200; Ogden, 1997, 93.

question whether there is a theme of tyrants having 'weird' sex in the *Histories*.<sup>138</sup> Indeed, if this Herodotean story is seen in connection with Hippias' dream of having sex with his own mother, then it could be argued that this could well be the case.<sup>139</sup> Secondly, it appears that in the Herodotean narrative, the world of the dead is a mirror image of the world of the living.<sup>140</sup> It is quite striking that Melissa's ghost is not pictured in the *Histories* as fearsome or horrendous. Although it is generally characterless, it does appear to have some human elements. Accordingly, she is shown to experience coldness due to nakedness, to express desire and even anger, and to require care and attention.

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As has been pointed out earlier in the chapter, the paranormal phenomena that Herodotean women witness or are themselves a part of are not represented by the historian as atrocious or austere in their implications. They are rather portrayed as part of the religious unexplained. Regarding female participation in religion and the state cults, Herodotus takes it for granted (it was, after all, standard in the Greek world) and never questions or disapproves of their 'intrusion' into this public field of the community. Clearly, in the *Histories* of Herodotus, the active presence of women in the sacred and ritual activities of 'the public world is not merely tolerated but required'.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> For another case of necrophilia in Egypt, cf. Hdt., 2.89.

<sup>139</sup> Hdt., 6.107. For Periander having sex with his mother, cf. Diogenes Laertius, 1.96 and Parthenius, *Erotica Pathemata*, 17. Cf. Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, for the same theme. Cf. Vernant, 1982, 29, who compares Periander's incest with Oedipus'. Cf. also Ogden, 1997, 93 and 2001, 57 n.62. For Herodotus' hostility towards tyranny because it is in contrast with the blessings of freedom, cf. Waters, 1985, 124; Ferrill, 1978, 387, 392, 394. However, cf. Waters, 1971, 2 and 1985, 131-133; and Gammie, 1986, 195, who argue that he treats tyrants with impartiality, indicating both their positive and negative characteristics.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. Stern, 1989, 15-16.

<sup>141</sup> Gould, 1980, 50-51.

## Conclusion

In the outset of this study, attention was drawn to the relative lack of scholarship with regard to the representation of women in Herodotus. It was pointed out that recent discussions were less concerned with the entire spectrum of women's portrayal than with isolated aspects of it. For the first time, this study gathers scholarship and attempts to investigate the historian's conceptualisation of women as a whole. Particular emphasis was given in the introduction to Dewald's and Gould's remarks. Accordingly, Dewald observed that 'a real effort is made to describe women as they were' by Herodotus, and concluded that 'Herodotus' portrait of women emphasises their full partnership with men in establishing and maintaining social order'. And a few years later, Gould commented that 'there is no single formula which covers the role of women in the *Histories*'. It has been the purpose of this study to show that both Dewald's and Gould's positions are misrepresentations, or at any rate, simplistic contentions.

To start with, women in Herodotus *are*, after all, categorisable. By no means should we take this to mean that it was the historian's grand scheme to install in his narrative hard and fast categories of women. Rather, his representation of women revolves round the commonly Greek associations of barbarian women with power and promiscuity. Once we realise that the vast majority of Herodotean females are non-Greeks, this point becomes immediately obvious. Furthermore, this study has demonstrated that the portrayal of women in the *Histories* *can* largely be subsumed under a single formula -- or at any rate, a formula of overriding importance --, for, above all, they are vital representatives and conservators of culture and *nomos*. In addition, although Dewald's argument does have a point, as, in a number of cases, women are portrayed as working side by side with the men, the historian is not as simple as he is made to appear. He is as capable of irony as he is of admiration. In order to grasp Herodotean representation, we have to build on Dewald's argument, and see beyond the numbers of female appearances in the *Histories*, which often give a false indication of positive portrayal on the historian's part. When dealing with women's conceptualisation in Herodotus, we should rather focus on the historian's

open-minded neutrality. For, although he retains conventional Greek ideas, he does not subject women to moral censure. On the whole, he rather censures the men who allow their women license and power.

Our assessments in the course of this study can be summarised as follows: Our investigation into the Herodotean portrayal of women's association with war argued that the historian respected their ability to survive, and in some cases, to distinguish themselves in the male domain of war. Although the opening chapters of the *Histories* involve women in the Graeco-Persian enmity, the women themselves are not held responsible. What rather lurks in the historian's narrative as the 'true' cause is male vanity and expansionism. Even though there are passages in the *Histories* associating male cowardice with anything female, the women's portrayal when they are caught in the heat of war differs radically. They endure whatever fate or the male has in store for them, and in many cases, they are shown to identify with the war effort. And as far as female warriors are concerned, they display the same values and manly spirit as men.

Our examination of powerful individuals in the world of Herodotus highlighted their abilities and qualities to attain influential positions, proving themselves worthy counterparts of their men and of the power they hold. As powerful queens, -- even those who commit brutal acts, as Candaules' wife and Amestris -- they acquit themselves well, for they are not conceptualised as attaining power by force but because circumstances call for such a political action. They feature as reminders of their men of *nomos* and social order, and act on their behalf. In their capacity as wise advisors, not only is their perception of political and military matters emphasised, but also their ability to analyse significant issues at crucial times and to offer men the best practical solution. In short, their wise decisions express the same morals and valour as men. As passive vehicles of power, they call attention to a paradoxical role. For, in their capacity as heiresses to powerful men, they are seen both as valuable and as a source of anxiety to the male owing to the power they are able to transmit to their husbands and sons.

We reviewed passages in the *Histories* where the female sex appears to be in charge and we concluded that the women are well justified in their actions. In the Herodotean

narrative, they are not chaotic usurpers. Reversals of roles can take place with the aim of protecting life or protesting about its destruction. Topsy-turvy customs do not indicate women's rule as such but a peculiarity of a country's customs. In their portrayal as representatives of culture, their vital role is associated with the responsibility to create and maintain social traditions over time. To put it more simply, whenever Herodotean females are in charge, the emphasis is rather laid on their protective social role owing to the male inability to take matters into their hands. And, paradoxically, this 'anarchy' leads to civilisation, through colonisation, the refoundation of cities or the simple preservation of culture.

We investigated how the ruling character of *nomos* preserves ethnic identity in Herodotus' narrative. Accordingly, female representation in the Herodotean ethnographic context is not one of criticism or condemnation. Despite the fact that he chooses to report garish and odd elements of peoples' customs, mostly associated with promiscuity, the women are not portrayed as wanton. Rather, the suggestion is one of polyandry and ritual consummation. In an examination of customs relating to everyday or to fighting activities, attention was drawn to the equality between the sexes as opposed to female rule. Furthermore, although the Greek city of Sparta does not geographically belong to the Herodotean ethnographies, nevertheless, our investigation led us to conclude that in the world of the *Histories* it certainly is presented in a similar way. And since the Spartan women are the only Greek women to feature quite frequently and extensively in the Herodotean narrative, we argued that they fit in the historian's representation of the female ethnographic 'other'.

Persian women in the world of the *Histories* were scrutinised and we resolved that although some of them enjoy certain privileges, on the whole, they are not allowed unlimited freedom. For instance, passages indicating financial independence do point to a privileged life. Nonetheless, despite the historian's effort to develop an effeminate portrait of Persian kings, Persian women are not represented as all-powerful rulers. Only the king's mother and wife enjoyed influence and power over the king, a fact which highlights that Persian female mightiness is rather determined only by their position at the royal court and their relationship with the king. In the vast majority of cases, Persian women are just pawns in Persian imperialism.

In the representation of concubines, prostitutes and slaves, we argued that Herodotus does not apply to them the low status and loose morals conventionally associated with such women. In their vast majority, they are respectable women or members of royal houses. There is no indication in the historian's narrative that they actually enjoyed these roles. They are rather portrayed as 'fighters', adjusting to the demeaning or unfortunate fate that the male, custom or war imposed upon them.

Finally, in our study of women's association with religion we concluded that the Herodotean world does not question or criticise women's involvement (and why should he?) in this public sphere of the *polis*. Their participation is rather taken for granted and portrayed as an inseparable part of religious activities, whether they are mere participants in festivals, cult founders or priestesses. Moreover, and in close connection with religion, we assessed the female association with the miraculous, the divine and the world of the dead, and argued that supernatural female figures are not represented as appalling or with harmful intent. They appear only when called upon or in times of crisis.

It goes without saying that Herodotus did not set out to prove a thesis regarding women when he wrote his *Histories*. Although there are occasions when they dominate the narrative, they are not Herodotus' primary focus. Indeed, there can be no such question as *why* there is an abundance of women in the Herodotean world. As has already been pointed out in the introduction, this is rather obvious in a pre-Thucydidean world. Paradoxically, though, the two historians did not differ radically in their representation of women. Given the twenty years or so that intervened between the times that the two historians published, their style reflects a change of approach and not of opinion. Thus, much rather, the question should be why there are so many non-Greek women and no more conventionally Greek ones in the narrative of the *Histories*. It is noteworthy that out of the six categories under which we have analysed the women in Herodotus' narrative, only the theme of religion actually relates to a 'proper' female role in Greek eyes. The rest are chiefly concerned with female power and rule, women's involvement in the male domain of war, concubinage/prostitution, and the odd customs of women in ethnographies. Clearly, Greek women do not fit into this context, as their chief virtue lay in their anonymity and their seclusion in the Greek *oikos*. In fact, as pointed out in this study, Greek, and

especially Athenian women, are underrepresented in the *Histories*. When they are included in the historian's narrative, they are always associated with garish customs and, consequently, with their non-Greek counterparts. It seems as if his open-mindedness was restricted to his representation of non-Greek women. For, when it came to Greek women, it appears that he did not disavow Greek standards. In this light, Herodotus surprisingly anticipates Thucydides.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> However, it should be noted that Herodotus has wider sympathies and a greater interest than Thucydides, which is largely due to the nature of his subject matter.



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<i>AJPh</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology</i> (Baltimore)
<i>AncSoc</i>	<i>Ancient Society</i> (Louvain)
<i>BICS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies</i> (London)
<i>BSA</i>	<i>Annual of the British School at Athens</i> (Oxford)
<i>CA</i>	<i>Classical Antiquity</i> (Berkeley)
<i>CAH</i>	<i>The Cambridge Ancient History</i> (Cambridge)
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Classical Journal</i> (Gainesville)
<i>CPh</i>	<i>Classical Philology</i> (Chicago)
<i>CQ</i>	<i>The Classical Quarterly</i> (Oxford)
<i>CR</i>	<i>The Classical Review</i> (London)
<i>Annales ESC</i>	<i>Annales: Economies, sociétés, civilisations</i> (Paris)
<i>FgrH</i>	Jacoby, 1923-1958
<i>FHG</i>	Muller, C., and T., 1953-70
<i>G&amp;R</i>	<i>Greece and Rome</i> (Oxford)
<i>GRBS</i>	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i> (Durham)
<i>HSCP</i>	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i> (Cambridge)
<i>HThR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i> (Cambridge)
<i>JEA</i>	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i> (London)
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i> (London)
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>KP</i>	Ziegler and Sontheimer, 1964-1975
<i>RE</i>	Pauly and Wissowa, 1894-1972
<i>REA</i>	<i>Revue des études anciennes</i> (Bordeaux)
<i>REG</i>	<i>Revue des études grecques</i> (Paris)
<i>RFIC</i>	<i>Rivista di filologia e di istruzione classica</i> (Turin)
<i>RhM</i>	<i>Rheinisches Museum</i> (Frankfurt am Main)
<i>Sstor</i>	<i>Studi Storici</i> (Bari, Italy)
<i>TAPA</i>	<i>Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association</i> (Cleveland)

*YCS*                    *Yale Classical Studies* (New Haven)  
*ZPE*                    *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* (Bonn)  
*JESHO*                *Journal of the economic and social history of the orient*

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