

Gendered Verbs of Seeing in Herodotus

In this paper I expand upon the statement by Emily Katz Anhaly that verbs of seeing in Herodotus' *Histories* may be used in a gendered way. Her statement is based on the observation that in the story of the dethronement and death of Candaules, the verb θεάομαι is used to describe the gazes of Gyges and Candaules, while the verb ὀράω describes the gaze of Candaules' wife (2008: 272-3). In this episode (1.8-11), Candaules, king of Lydia, convinces his spear bearer Gyges to observe the queen in the private act of undressing for the night, a scheme meant to prove her supreme beauty. Candaules assures Gyges that he can do so unseen, but Candaules' wife sees Gyges leaving the room and rightly deduces that her husband is behind this action. She then compels Gyges to either kill himself or kill Candaules and marry her, as a woman may only be seen naked by her husband.

While all 49 instances of θεάομαι in Herodotus describe the gaze of men, ὀράω is both more frequent, with hundreds of instances including compounds, and more diverse. Consequently, I focus on passages where both verbs are used in close proximity to one another (within 50 words or less) and emphasize the difference between the gazes of men and women. As a result, I strengthen Anhaly's point by adding two stories in which the use of θεάομαι and ὀράω follows the same gendered pattern. The first of these concerns the death of the Persian king Cambyses' sister-wife (3.32). Amidst Cambyses' descent into madness, he puts on a spectacle, a fight between a lion cub and a puppy, during which a second puppy comes to help its sibling. Cambyses' wife begins to weep, saying it reminds her of their own dead brother, Smerdis, and the fact that Cambyses no longer has a brother to help him. As Cambyses was responsible for his brother's death, this angers him, and he puts her to death. In this scene, Cambyses' gaze is

described with θεάομαι (3.32.2: θεώμενον), while his sister-wife's observation of the spectacle as similar to their family's woes is described with ὀράω (3.32.2: ἰδοῦσα). The second case is the death of Polycrates, the tyrant of Samos (3.120-125). Determined to kill him, the governor of Sardis, Oroetes, tries to lure him to Sardis with the promise of an alliance and a large sum of money. In response, Polycrates sends his secretary, Meandrius, to inspect the offered money. Meandrius reports back that there are eight chests full of gold, though all of them have actually been filled with stones covered by a thin layer of gold. While the greedy Polycrates prepares his visit, his daughter has a prophetic dream that she interprets correctly: her father will die during his visit to Sardis. He refuses to listen, goes to Sardis, and is brutally murdered. In this story, Meandrius' gaze is described with θεάομαι (3.123.2: θεησάμενος), and Polycrates' daughter's gaze in her dream with ὀράω (3.124.1: ἰδούσης). In all three stories, the gaze of the female character is proven correct – Candaules' wife knows that her husband is behind the plot (1.10), Cambyses later regrets his killing of his brother (3.65), and the vision of Polycrates' daughter accurately foretells the future (1.124-125).

My analysis of gendered viewing in these three passages complements the existing scholarship on sight in Herodotus. Work has been published which argues that the gaze in Herodotus may function both as a means of showcasing that seeing should not always lead to believing (Miltisios 2016), and, by extension, as a metanarrative which illustrates the importance of the historian's role. Rosie Harman argues that the gaze in Herodotus is an invitation for the reader to also see through a character's eyes; this may lead to the reader falling victim to the same deceptions as the figures in the story (Harman 2018: 271-279, 286-287). With this idea in mind, these three instances of gendered viewing raise an interesting question regarding the

theory that the characters' gaze directs the readers', considering that the original readers would have been predominantly male.

Bibliography

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