

Bridging Babylon: Queen Nitocris and Imperial Expansion in Herodotus' *Histories*

Abstract Link: [Bridging Babylon](#)

<p>1. Herodotus ἐνεκόλαψε δὲ ἐς τὸν τάφον γράμματα λέγοντα τάδε· (2) Τῶν τις ἐμεῦ ὕστερον γινομένων Βαβυλῶνος βασιλέων ἦν σπανίση χρημάτων, ἀνοίξας τὸν τάφον λαβέτω ὅκόσα βούλεται χρήματα· μὴ μέντοι γε μὴ σπανίσας γε ἄλλως ἀνοίξη· οὐ γὰρ ἄμεινον.</p>	<p><i>Histories, 1.187.1–2¹</i> She engraved writing on the tomb, which said the following: “If any one of those who rule Babylon after me is in need of money, let him open this tomb and take however much money he wants: however, if he is not in need, he must open it under no circumstances: for it will not be for the better.”</p>
<p>2. Herodotus, οὗτος ὁ τάφος ἦν ἀκίνητος μέχρις οὗ ἐς Δαρεῖον περιῆλθε ἡ βασιλείη ... (5) ἀνοίξας δὲ τὸν τάφον εὗρε χρήματα μὲν οὐ, τὸν δὲ νεκρὸν καὶ γράμματα λέγοντα τάδε· Εἰ μὴ ἀπληστός τε ἕας χρημάτων καὶ αἰσχροκερδής, οὐκ ἂν νεκρῶν θήκας ἀνέωγες. αὕτη μὲν νυν ἡ βασιλεία τοιαύτη τις λέγεται γενέσθαι.</p>	<p><i>Histories 1.187.3–5</i> The tomb was untouched until the kingship came to Darius ... Opening the tomb, he found not money, but the corpse and writing saying the following: “If you were not insatiable for money and greedy for gain, you would not have opened the tombs of the dead.” This, then, was the sort of woman this queen was said to be.</p>
<p>3. Herodotus, Σεμίραμις, αὕτη μὲν ἀπεδέξατο χῶματα ἀνὰ τὸ πεδῖον ἔοντα ἀξιοθέητα· πρότερον δὲ ἔωθεε ὁ ποταμὸς ἀνὰ τὸ πεδῖον πᾶν πελαγίζειν.</p>	<p><i>Histories, 1.184</i> Semiramis, it was she who produced dams on the plain, worthy of seeing; before, the river used to flood the entire plain.</p>
<p>4. Herodotus, αὕτη δὲ συνετωτέρη γενομένη τῆς πρότερον ἀρξάσης τοῦτο μὲν μνημόσυνα ἐλίπετο τὰ ἐγὼ ἀπηγήσομαι, τοῦτο δὲ τὴν Μήδων ὄρωσα ἀρχὴν μεγάλην τε καὶ οὐκ ἀτρεμίζουσαν, <ἀλλ’> ἄλλα τε ἀραιρημένα ἄστεα αὐτοῖσι ... προεφυλάξατο ὅσα ἐδύνατο μάλιστα.</p>	<p><i>Histories, 1.185.1</i> This one [Nitocris] was more intelligent than the one [Semiramis] who ruled before; for one, she left behind memorials which I will explain, for another, she saw that the kingdom of the Medes was great and restless, and that other cities had been taken by them ... She put up the utmost guard, as much as she was able.</p>
<p>5. Herodotus, πρῶτα μὲν τὸν Εὐφρήτην ποταμὸν ἔοντα πρότερον ἰθύν, ὃς σφι διὰ τῆς πόλιος μέσης ῥέει, τοῦτον ἄνωθεν διώρυχας ὀρύξασα οὕτω δὴ τι ἐποίησε σκολιὸν ὥστε καὶ τρις ἐς τῶν τινα κωμῶν τῶν ἐν τῇ Ἀσσυρίῃ ἀπικνέεται ῥέων ... καὶ νῦν οἱ ἂν κομίζονται ἀπὸ τῆσδε τῆς θαλάσσης ἐς Βαβυλῶνα, καταπλέοντες {ἐς} τὸν Εὐφρήτην ποταμὸν τρις τε ἐς τὴν αὐτὴν ταύτην κώμην παραγίνονται καὶ ἐν τρισὶ ἡμέρησι. (3) τοῦτο μὲν δὴ τοιοῦτον ἐποίησε, χῶμα δὲ παρέχωσε παρ’ ἐκάτερον τοῦ ποταμοῦ τὸ</p>	<p><i>Histories, 1.185.2–186.1</i> First, by digging canals above it, she made the previously straight Euphrates River, which flows through the middle of the city, so crooked that it comes in its flow three times to one of the villages of Assyria ... And now those coming from our sea into Babylon go past this same village three times in three days as they sail along the Euphrates River. So she made it, and she heaped up dykes on each bank of the river, worthy of wonder in magnitude and height. Far above Babylon, she dug a basin for a lake ... She did this in the part of the country in which</p>

¹ Text of Herodotus is Wilson’s (2015). Translations are my own.

<p>χειλος ἄξιον θώματος, μέγαθος και ὕψος ὅσον τι ἐστί. (4) κατύπερθε δὲ πολλῶ Βαβυλῶνος ὠρουσε ἔλυτρον λίμνη ... (7) κατὰ τοῦτο δὲ ἐργάζετο τῆς χώρης τῆ αἶ τε ἐσβολαὶ ἦσαν και τὰ σύντομα τῆς ἐκ Μήδων ὁδοῦ, ἵνα μὴ ἐπιμισγόμενοι οἱ Μῆδοι ἐκμανθάνοιεν αὐτῆς τὰ πρηγματα.</p>	<p>the passes are, and the shortest road from Media, so that the Medians could not mix with them and learn her business.</p>
<p>6. Herodotus,</p> <p>τῆς πόλιος ἐούσης δύο φαρσέων, τοῦ δὲ ποταμοῦ μέσον ἔχοντος, ἐπὶ τῶν πρότερον βασιλέων, ὅκως τις ἐθέλοι ἐκ τοῦ ἑτέρου φάρσεος ἐς τοῦτερον διαβῆναι, χρῆν πλοῖω διαβαίνειν, και ἦν, ὡς ἐγὼ δοκέω, ὄχληρόν τοῦτο. αὐτῆ δὲ και τοῦτο προεῖδε· ἐπέιτε γὰρ ὠρουσε τὸ ἔλυτρον τῆ λίμνη, μνημόσυνον τὸδε ἄλλο ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἔργου ἐλίπετο· (2) ἐτάμνετο λίθους περιμήκειας ... τοῦτο δὲ κατὰ μέσῃν και μάλιστα τὴν πόλιν τοῖσι λίθοισι τοὺς ὠρύξατο οἰκοδόμειε γέφυραν, δέουσα τοὺς λίθους σιδήρω τε και μολύβδω. (3) ἐπιτείνεσκον δὲ ἐπ' αὐτήν, ὅκως μὲν ἡμέρη γένοιτο, ξύλα τετραγωνα, ἐπ' ὧν τὴν διάβασιν ἐποιεῦντο οἱ Βαβυλώνιοι· τὰς δὲ νύκτας τὰ ξύλα ταῦτα ἀπαιρέεσκον τοῦδε εἵνεκα, ἵνα μὴ διαφοιτέοντες τὰς νύκτας κλέπτοιεν παρ' ἀλλήλων.</p>	<p>Histories, 1.186.1–3</p> <p>Since the city was in two parts, with the river in the middle, under previous rulers when someone wanted to cross from one side to the other, it was necessary to cross on a boat, and this was, it seems to me, an annoyance. But she also saw to this. For when she dug the reservoir for the lake, she also left the following as another memorial from the same project. She cut very long stones ... And at just about the middle of the city, with the stones she had quarried, she built a bridge, joining the stones with iron and lead. She would lay on this, when each day began, square pieces of wood, on which the Babylonians made their crossing; but at night, she would remove the wood for this reason, so that going back and forth at night people would not steal from each other.</p>
<p>7. Herodotus,</p> <p>a. Cyrus, 1.205.2 Κῦρος δὲ μετὰ τοῦτο ... ἐλάσας ἐπὶ τὸν Ἀράξεια ἐποίεετο ἐκ τοῦ ἐμφανέος ἐπὶ τοὺς Μασσαγέτας στρατηῆν, γεφύρας τε ζευγνύων ἐπὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ διάβασιν τῷ στρατῷ.</p> <p>b. Darius, 3.134.4 ἐγὼ γὰρ βεβούλευμαι ζεύξας γέφυραν ἐκ τῆσδε τῆς ἠπειροῦ ἐς τὴν ἑτέρεν ἠπειρον ἐπὶ Σκύθας στρατεύεσθαι.</p> <p>c. Xerxes 7.8. β1 μέλλω ζεύξας τὸν Ἑλλήσποντον ἐλᾶν στρατὸν διὰ τῆς Εὐρώπης ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα.</p> <p>d. Tomyris warns Cyrus: 1.206, 1.212</p> <p>e. Artabanus warns Darius, 4.83.1 Ἀρτάβανος ὁ Ὑστάσπεος, ἀδελφεὸς ἐὼν Δαρείου, ἐχρήιζε μηδαμῶς αὐτὸν στρατῆν ἐπὶ Σκύθας ποιέεσθαι, καταλέγων τῶν Σκυθέων τὴν ἀπορίην.</p>	<p>Histories</p> <p>After this, Cyrus ... having marched to the Araxes, openly made a campaign against the Massagetae, yoking bridges on the river as a crossing for the army.</p> <p>I have planned to yoke a bridge from this continent to the other continent to attack the Scythians.</p> <p>Yoking the Hellespont, I am about to make a campaign through Europe, against Greece.</p> <p>Artabanus, the son of Hystaspes, being Darius' brother, in no way wanted him to make a campaign against the Scythians, detailing the difficulty of reaching the Scythians.</p>

<p>f. Coes warns Darius not to demolish the bridge, 4.97.3–4 σύ νυν γέφυραν ταύτην ἔα κατὰ χώρην ἑστάναι, φυλάκους αὐτῆς λιπῶν τούτους οἱ περὶ μιν ἔζευξαν. (4) καὶ ἦν τε κατὰ νόον πρήξωμεν εὐρόντες Σκύθας, ἔστι ἄποδος ἡμῖν, ἦν τε καὶ μὴ σφεας εὐρεῖν δυνώμεθα, ἢ γε ἄποδος ἡμῖν ἀσφαλῆς.</p> <p>g. Artabanus warns Xerxes, 7.10B–C ζεύξας φῆς τὸν Ἑλλήσποντον ἑλᾶν στρατὸν διὰ τῆς Εὐρώπης ἐς τὴν Ἑλλάδα. καὶ δὴ {καὶ} συνήνεικε ἦτοι κατὰ γῆν ἢ καὶ κατὰ θάλασσαν ἑσσωθῆναι, ἢ καὶ κατ' ἀμφοτέρω ... (2) ἀλλ' ἦν τῆσι νηυσὶ ἐμβάλωσι καὶ νικήσαντες ναυμαχίῃ πλέωσι ἐς τὸν Ἑλλήσποντον καὶ ἔπειτα λύσωσι τὴν γέφυραν, τοῦτο δὴ, βασιλεῦ, γίνεται δεινόν ... (γ) ἀλλ' οἷον κοτε ἡμέας ὀλίγου ἐδέησε καταλαβεῖν πάθος, ὅτε πατήρ σὸς ζεύξας <μὲν> Βόσπορον τὸν Θρηάκιον, γεφυρώσας δὲ ποταμὸν Ἴστρον διέβη ἐπὶ Σκύθας. τότε παντοῖοι ἐγένοντο Σκύθαι δεόμενοι Ἰώνων λῦσαι τὸν πόρον.</p>	<p>Now, allow the bridge to stand in its place, leaving as guards for it the ones who yoked it. And if finding the Scythians we achieve what we have in mind, return is possible for us. And even if we are unable to find them, at least the return is safe for us.</p> <p>You say you will yoke the Hellespont and thus make a campaign through Europe against Greece. It might happen that you are actually defeated on land or at sea, or even both... But if they make an attack with ships, and, conquering you in a naval battle, they sail to the Hellespont and then destroy the bridge, this indeed is the danger, King ... Which sort of trouble almost overtook us once, when your father, yoking the Bosphorus in Thrace, and bridging the river Ister, crossed against the Scythians. At that time all the Scythians were begging the Ionians to dismantle the bridge.</p>
--	--

Select Bibliography

- Asheri, David, Alan B. Lloyd, Aldo Corcella, Oswyn Murray, and Alfonso Moreno. 2007. *A Commentary on Herodotus Books I-IV*. Oxford.
- Baragwanath, Emily. 2008. *Motivation and Narrative in Herodotus*. Oxford.
- Blok, Josine. 2002. "Women in Herodotus' Histories." In *Brill's Companion to Herodotus*, edd. Egbert J. Bakker, Irene J. F. de Jong, and Hans van Wees, 225–22. Leiden.
- David, Jonathan. 2006. *Building kleos: Objects, Inquiry, and Memory in Herodotus' Early logoi*. Diss. Pennsylvania State University.
- Dewald, Carolyn. 1981. "Women and Culture in Herodotus' Histories." *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 8.1–2: 93–127.
- Dillery, John. 1992. "Darius and the Tomb of Nitocris." *CP* 87.1: 30–38.
- Forsdyke, Sara. 2006. "Herodotus, Political History and Political Thought." In *The Cambridge Companion to Herodotus*, edd. Carolyn Dewald and John Marincola, 224–41. Cambridge.
- Hazewindus, M. W. 2004. *When Women Interfere: Studies in the Role of Women in Herodotus' Histories*. Amsterdam.
- Immerwahr, Henry R. 1960. "Ergon: History as a Monument in Herodotus and Thucydides." *AJP* 81.3: 261–90.
- Katsifarakis, K. L. and I. Avgoloupis. 2013. "A New Approach to the Description of a Babylonian Hydraulic Work by Herodotus." *CQ* 63.2: 888–91.
- Lateiner, Donald. 1984. "Herodotean Historiographical Patterning: The Constitutional Debate," *QS* 15.20: 257–84.
- . 1989. *The Historical Method of Herodotus*. Toronto.
- MacGinnis, John. 1986. "Herodotus' Description of Babylon." *BICS* 33.1: 67–86.
- Mash, Mark Christopher. 2010. *Humor and Ethnography in Herodotus' Histories*. Diss. Univ. of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- Munson, Rosaria Vignolo. 2001. *Telling Wonders: Ethnographic and Political Discourse in the Work of Herodotus*. Ann Arbor.
- Romm, James. 2006. "Herodotus and the Natural World." In *The Cambridge Companion to Herodotus*, edd. Carolyn Dewald and John Marincola. 178–91. Cambridge.
- Tourraix, Alexandre. 1996. "L'apatè de Nitocris (Hdt 1187)." *DHA* 22.2: 109–25.
- West, Stephanie. 1985. "Herodotus' Epigraphical Interests." *CQ* 35.2: 278–305.
- Wilson, N.G. 2015. *Herodoti Historiae*, vols. I–II. Oxford.