

## Crossing Boundaries and Preserving Social Order: Women Who Advise Persian and Greek

### Leaders in Herodotus' *Histories*

Dewald (1980, 15) states that in Herodotus' *Histories* women act within the νόμοι of their culture and that they work to preserve social order. One way women do this is by advising men in positions of power. While the intent of their advise may be consistent across cultural lines, the topics differ based on the ethnicity of the advisee. In this paper, I will examine the women who advise Persian men (Atossa [3.133-134], Tomyris [1.205-214], and Artemisia [7.99, 8.68-69, 8.88]) and women who advise Greek men (Gorgo [5.51] and Timo [6.134-135]). I will show that the Persian advisees are characterized by a lack of manliness, because they ineffectively rule within the male sphere of military conflict. This impotence in military matters precipitates the arrival of women advisors, who are forced to cross into the male sphere to preserve social order. On the other hand, women advise Greek rulers on matters of religion and the morality of the οἶκος, traditionally feminine realms. In Herodotus' *Histories*, the advise women give to men uncovers more about manliness in the men, than in the women.

Of the three examples of Persians advised by women the most well-known is that of Xerxes and Artemisia. Each time she appears in the *Histories* she is set apart from the crowd as a courageous woman. At 7.99 Herodotus marvels at her because she is a woman fighting against the Greeks (ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα στρατευσαμένης γυναικός). He also mentions that she gives the best advice to the king (γνώμας ἀρίστας βασιλεῖ ἀπεδέξατο, 7.99). Herodotus admires Artemisia for her manliness (ἀνδρηίης, 7.99) and her willingness to lead the Halicarnassians after her husband's death. In the absence of a fit male leader, a woman will step in to fill the void. When Artemisia advises Xerxes not to engage with the Greeks in a naval battle (8.68), again, she steps in where there is an absence of male leadership. Xerxes and his court of advisors show that they

do not possess the proper manliness (ἀνδρηίη) to act as military commanders. There is no indication by Herodotus that Artemisia speaks out of turn as a woman giving advise on military matters, however her advice that seeks to preserve social order reflects more on the manliness of Xerxes and his kowtowing advisors. Herodotus continuously reminds his audience that Artemisia crosses gender boundaries (7.99, 8.68, 8.88, and 8.93), yet she is not cast in a negative light, rather Xerxes is portrayed as a poor commander. I will also discuss the similar dynamic between Tomyris and Cyrus (1.205-214), in addition to the advice given to Darius by Atossa.

Earlier in the *Histories*, Gorgo advises her father Cleomenes, the Spartan King, on Aristagoras' plea to aid the Ionians. However, Gorgo's advice is given not as a military commander, but as a defender of the morality of her father, and so her οἰκός. Dewald (1981, 105) notes, "daughters act as their fathers' agents in the public sphere and defend family interests when they are threatened." Lattimore (1939, 29) also sees Gorgo's advice as regarding moral corruption, not military maneuvers. It is also important to note the physical space in which she gives her advice. Cleomenes tries to end his business with Aristagoras by going into the house, but Aristagoras follows him inside, where Gorgo stands beside her father (5.51). She does not advise him outside the οἶκός, literally or figuratively. Cleomenes is an effective military leader, and so Gorgo does not need to transgress into the masculine realm to preserve social order. The gender boundaries are clear. I will also discuss the example of Timo and Miltiades (6.134-135), in which a woman advises a Greek leader in religious matters, a feminine sphere.

By looking at the three examples of a Persian advised by a woman (Tomyris and Cyrus, Artemisia and Xerxes, and Atossa and Darius) and the two examples of a Greek advised by a woman (Gorgo and Cleomenes and Timo and Miltiades) we can see the contrast between the types of advice given to Persian and Greek leaders, and what this means in terms of their

manliness. For the Persians, the traditionally male sphere of military command lacks effective leadership, and so women cross this boundary in attempts to preserve social order. For the Greeks, however, women can remain securely in their own spheres.

### Bibliography

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