

## When Women Speak in Herodotus' *Histories*

This paper focuses on the female characters presented in the *Histories* to whom Herodotus gives a voice. Although Herodotus presents his audience with a wide variety of female characters from both the Greek and barbarian worlds throughout the *Histories*, few of these women are afforded the power of wielding speech. Most women instead play a silent role in the narrative, moving in and out of their episodes without ever uttering a single word. The small sub-set of speaking female characters in the *Histories* that this paper explores includes the barbarian wives of Kandules and Intaphrenes (1.8-12 and 3.119), the Massegetai queen Tomyris (1.211-214), the young Spartan Gorgo, daughter of king Kleomenes (5.51), and the liminal figure Artemisia, a unique Greek woman with the ear of the Persian king (8.68-69 and 8.101-103). This paper examines their stories to help illuminate the singular place that each of these women occupy in the *Histories*.

Other important studies have considered the individual role that some of these women and their speeches play in the *Histories*, such as the extended discourse between Artemisia and Xerxes surrounding the battle of Salamis (Munson 1988), or the nameless identity of the wives of Kandules and Intaphrenes (Larson 2006). This current project, however, examines these loquacious women as members of a greater whole. Despite the many differences in when or where these women are living, there are noteworthy unifying elements to their episodes that may suggest that Herodotus saw these particular women as part of a larger program in the *Histories*. Not only do all of these women use their voices to address male characters in the *Histories*, but most of their speeches also seem to be employed with an aim at advising or persuading their addressees. Furthermore, the ethnic identities of both speaker and recipient seem to be an

important element in determining the effectiveness of these attempts of female persuasion upon male subjects.

This overarching pattern of female representation in the *Histories* suggests that Herodotus may have crafted each of these narratives with all the others in mind. Although these speaking women collectively occupy a relatively small portion of the *Histories*, it seems possible that Herodotus considered these women and the parallels in their stories as serving an important function in his overall work.

Finally, this paper also considers the role that Herodotus' primarily Greek male audience may have had in shaping these episodes of speaking women in the *Histories*. It is suggested that Herodotus employs certain narrative strategies, particularly with the nameless wives of Kandaules and Intaphrenes and Artemisia's advice to Xerxes, in order to help mitigate the persuasive powers of these successful female characters.

#### Bibliography

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