

## **Women and culture in Herodotus' *Histories***

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HERODOTUS' PURPOSE, as his proem describes it, is to narrate and explain the great war between the Persians and the Greeks. In the process he displays a rich panorama of sixth- and fifth-century society, both Greek and barbarian, in which women play a prominent role. Many are members of the great families, Greek and barbarian, that form the backbone of the narrative, but a variety of others appears as well — concubines, nurses, bakers, priestesses, and even an occasional oddity like the Egyptian lady sodomist in 2.46.

This essay investigates Herodotus' portrait of women, in the belief that he is an important and generally neglected witness to fifth-century assumptions and attitudes about women in society. In the first place, Herodotus himself was born in Asia Minor and lived at some point in his life both in Athens and in western Greece; many of his sources were oral, and they seem to have been drawn from the whole of the Greek-speaking Mediterranean world. Thus his portrait of women reflects not the narrow anxieties or controversies of a particular state at a given moment, but a composite oral tradition with some claim to representing underlying and broadly Greek beliefs. Furthermore, as the first historian, Herodotus is the first extant Greek author whose stated purpose is to record *ta genomena*, that is, facts and events. As much as he can, he presents his narration stripped of the elements of myth and special pleading. The women who appear in his account are not depicted according to the prior conventions of a genre — as, for

instance, they are in Attic tragedy with its organizing polarities, in which women often signify disruption and disorder, or as in oratory, whose conventional typologies require that women appear as docile homebodies if they belong to the speaker, ubiquitous harridans or worse if they belong to the speaker's opponents.<sup>1</sup> A real effort is made instead to describe women as they were, or at least as Herodotus thinks they must have been. Finally, because Herodotus virtually invented the genre in which he was writing, his narrative structure is a great deal freer than that of his successors, and it is frequently shaped by loose associations of ideas. In the paratactic progression of accounts that winds through the *Histories*, women are not his chief focus of attention. He does not write the *Histories* in order to prove a thesis about them as social actors (as, for instance, Xenophon does in the *Oeconomicus*); they tend instead to occur incidentally, as part of the background of his main narrative themes. His portrait is for that reason likely to reveal aspects of feminine behavior and social values that more aggressively argumentative accounts neglect.

Herodotus mentions women in the *Histories* 375 times. For the main arguments of this essay I have tried to depend principally on the weight and shape of the full range of this data, since I believe it is the accumulation of evidence, and not one or two or ten striking examples, that will reveal Herodotus' habitual assumptions about women.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, as we shall see in discussing several queens whose behavior has often been assimilated to that of the violent and vengeful queens of Attic tragedy, a sense of the dominant lines of Herodotus' interpretation can help us see complex stories in a new light, and women who disrupt their husbands' plans not as wild or irrational forces, but as representatives themselves of social norms their husbands have flouted.

This essay argues that Herodotus' portrait of women emphasizes their full partnership with men in establishing and maintaining social order. When he mentions clichés about women or femininity in the abstract (thirty-five times, or about a tenth of the total), it is usually in order to undercut them.<sup>3</sup> When he portrays women as passive figures in the context of family politics (128 times, or about a third of the total), they indicate the several kinds of

danger that the family confronts: aggression from without, natural causes and political strife from within. When he portrays women as actors who themselves determine the outcome of events (212 times, or well over half the total), they articulate and transmit the conventions of their societies to others and work creatively within the constraints of their individual situations in order to accomplish their goals.

#### I WOMEN WHO DO NOT ACT (128)

Most of the women who do not act are mentioned in a narrative context of fear or danger.<sup>4</sup> Women in groups are depicted as victims of political or military aggression, or their sufferings indicate some disturbance in the society at large, or they are manipulated or victimized by the men of their own culture. Individual passive women, too, are the victims of outside aggression, or they represent in their function as childbearers some of the natural threats the family faces, or, finally, they are involuntary participants in family political crises. When we consider the whole range of passive women in the *Histories*, a twofold conclusion emerges. On the one hand, by continuously juxtaposing the presence of women with a number of threats, internal and external, confronting their societies, Herodotus allows passive women to become a motif repeatedly emphasizing the thin line that in ancient societies separated cultural survival from cultural extinction. On the other hand, it is equally important to recognize that for Herodotus women in this role are not themselves dangerous; they rather mark the importance of the family as a political and social institution.<sup>5</sup>

Acts of external aggression account for a third of the mentions of passive women in the *Histories*. Herodotus uses women in groups 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. Individuals within the family also suffer from enemy men. They either share in a disaster that has befallen the whole family, or they are abducted

from the family unit by outsiders intending them for forcible marriage or concubinage. The persistent possibility of unexpected disaster falling on the family is also illustrated by the passages in which Herodotus mentions a supposedly stable marriage in neutral or positive terms. In all but one, the immediate narrative context includes crisis and danger: impending defeat in war, a mad heir, murder (twice), guileful plots, and the enemy capture of a son.<sup>6</sup>

As this list suggests, danger did not only confront ancient society at the hands of enemy men. All property in a Greek state was passed through the male line; civic and tribal identities (and thus also a city's fighting force) were based on the assumption of family stability and the production of legitimate male descendants in each new generation. Herodotus uses women to describe a number of natural difficulties that affect a family's ability to reproduce itself over time. In groups, women fail to perform their function as childbearers when they are struck with madness or with sterility (9.34, 6.139.1). As individuals, Herodotus mentions women when they have failed to bear the necessary male heir, or when they bear children who will grow up to disappoint the expectations of their families and societies. A number of children in the *Histories* die, or are physically disabled, or grow up themselves to initiate family or civic conflict. Twice, for instance, the infertility of a Spartan queen forces the king to resort to bigamy or polygamy; the consequence, Herodotus makes clear, is fraternal and civic strife in the next generation (5.39, 6.61).<sup>7</sup>

Disasters principally centering on problems of generation, however, are less important than a third set of family-oriented crises in which passive women appear: political crises within the family itself, most often between family members. Thirteen times Herodotus mentions women in the context of successful dynastic politics; more than twice that often the politics of the family, however necessary for its survival or prosperity, explicitly embroils it in new kinds of difficulty and danger. The woman is only twice the victim of familial conflict; most often she is the involuntary spectator or innocent cause of strife between brothers, between relatives by marriage, or within some other more complex domestic political tragedy.

Herodotus' picture of marriage as a political institution in which women form the underlying basis for conflict, without themselves participating in it, is represented particularly clearly in accounts of conflict between relations by marriage. Several accounts describe stress between in-laws from the narrative viewpoint of the husband. When the tyrant of Corinth, Periander, kills his wife, he loses his share in the offspring of his marriage also, because his wife's father, the tyrant of Epidaurus, deliberately turns his adolescent son against him (3.50). A number of other accounts of heiresses or daughters of famous men suggest the anxieties that a powerful marriage connection can pose for a man.<sup>8</sup> The most poignant (and poignantly funny) of these describes the year-long test that the tyrant Cleisthenes of Sicyon imposes on his daughter's suitors (6.126 ff.). One of the front runners, Hippocleides of Athens, cracks under the strain and loses both the noble bride and the lofty alliance by doing a headstand and waving his feet about in time to the music, one evening after supper. "Son of Tisandros, you have certainly danced away your marriage," Cleisthenes remarks; Hippocleides' response, *ou phrontis Hippokleidēi*, "Hippocleides doesn't care," became a Greek byword from that time on for cheerful insouciance in the face of social disapproval.

Several stories relate the anxieties implicit in a marriage connection from the viewpoint of the wife's family. Two explicitly sexual dreams warn Astyages, king of Media, that he will lose his kingdom to his daughter's offspring. He dreams first that his daughter urinates so copiously that all Asia is flooded, and then that a vine growing from her genitals covers all Asia (1.107, 1.108). Despite Astyages' efforts to avert the danger by killing the child, Cyrus does indeed grow up to depose him. The story of the infant Cypselus represents a similar set of anxieties (5.92). Cypselus too grows up to destroy the power of his mother's aristocratic clan, despite their efforts to kill him as a baby. The chest in which Labda hides her child from his would-be murderers is a suggestive equivalent of the uterine imagery in the Cyrus story. Both indicate the mother's involuntary role as the destroyer of her own family heritage.

The fullest statement of the threat to the family that marriage

can pose occurs in book five, and its consequences are traced in the later books of the *Histories*. A group of Persian grandees visiting the Macedonian court drunkenly propose to enjoy the women of the Macedonians as part of the lord/vassal relationship they have come to establish (5.18). Alexander of Macedon, the heir apparent, resists the attempted rape of "our mothers and sisters" by disguising Macedonian youths as women and murdering the Persian visitors. A casual sexual transgression against the family is thus defeated, but the continuation of the narrative makes it clear that the ultimate cost to Alexander is a much deeper political bondage to Persia, in the form of marriage. Alexander must marry his own sister to the Persian investigator who comes to inquire about the disappearance of the earlier ambassadors, in order to avoid further investigation about the incident. Mardonius, commander-in-chief of the Persian army in Greece, later uses Alexander as the mouthpiece of his promises and threats to Athens during the war, in large part because of this connection by marriage (8.136). Alexander's sense of his own oppression is made clear in his last appearance in the *Histories*. On the eve of the battle of Plataea, he betrays his Persian overlords by warning the Greek army of an impending attack (9.45); he begs them to remember to free him also from slavery. Herodotus does not imply that Alexander should have ignored the initial affront. 5.18 and its sequels do, however, suggest one sense in which rape is less threatening to the family than marriage. It is marriage that binds the unwilling Alexander to the Persian court; Herodotus ironically implies that Alexander becomes so deeply embroiled in his servitude precisely because he has refused to abandon his female relatives to a night of drunken revelry.

## II WOMEN WHO ACT (212)

Despite all the social tensions connected with family, marriage, and procreation that Herodotus describes in the context of passive family women, he pointedly does not allow this sense of vulnerability and danger to affect his portrait of women who act. Active women do not exacerbate the strains implicit in the way marriage

and society work but rather are depicted working themselves to guarantee the stability of both family and culture. They are almost without exception passionately loyal to the family into which they have married. Perhaps most important for our understanding of their social role as Herodotus portrays it, women in the *Histories* are shown not only teaching the conventions of their cultures to their children but reminding male peers as well of the rules within which the whole society is supposed to act.

Five types of active women are portrayed in the *Histories*: groups of women who act within the context of a *polis*; women described as part of an ethnography; individual women defined by the role they play within the family; women who act in the public sphere; and, finally, priestesses. We shall begin with the women who act in groups, since these sketch the most general outlines of the balance between men and women that Herodotus thinks essential for creating and maintaining a healthy society. When we turn to individual women, we shall see the more innovative and idiosyncratic ways in which women work to maintain social order even when they protest and thwart the objectives of their menfolk.

### A. Groups of women within a *polis* (12)

Herodotus occasionally depicts groups of women acting together with men, but more frequently they band together to achieve some goal of their own, as women. Herodotus almost always emphasizes their positive and protective social role.

Several accounts show them in a narrow sense acting to preserve human life or to protest its destruction. Lacedaemonian women rescue their Lemnian husbands from death by playing a clever trick on the murderers, their own Lacedaemonian brothers and fathers (4.146). When Scythian women have children by their slaves while their men are gone on campaign, the emphasis of the account falls on the twenty-eight-year absence of the army. The motives of the women are not immoral (the slaves, after all, are domesticated and blind) but deeply conservative; they are trying to guarantee the survival of their culture by continuing to produce children despite the long absence of their husbands (4.1).

Once, after a disastrous Athenian raid on Aegina from which one Athenian man returns home alive, the new-made widows take out their brooches and stab the survivor to death, each woman asking, as she stabs, where her own husband is. The Athenians, more upset at the murder than at the raid itself, change their women's style of dress so that in future they will have no brooches (5.87). This account springs from a complex of misogynous folk motifs, including the Pentheus motif, groups of maddened women attacking a defenseless male. In the form in which Herodotus tells it, however, the women are not mad but grief-stricken; their response is a political one against the destructive effects of war. The account is grimly humorous, but some of the humor lies in the contrast between the seriousness of the women's position and the triviality of the fearful and repressive reaction of the men. The women's action also suggests the extent to which Herodotus sees men and women alike reflecting a single set of social values; the violence of war here infects a whole culture and not just its male sector. The same point is made much later in the *Histories* too. When Athenian men stone to death the one councillor advocating submission to Persia, Athenian women on Salamis run to his house in order to stone to death his wife and children (9.5). In each account, Herodotus presents female violence as the complement and mirror of male violence, not as its antithesis. When violence pervades a culture, both men and women reflect its presence.

Women do not only passively reflect the values of their cultures; in Herodotus' eyes, they are actively responsible both for creating social conventions and for maintaining them over time. In 1.146, Ionian men abduct Carian women after killing their Carian men-folk in battle. The captive women, Herodotus tells us, make a *nomos*, a custom, which they themselves observe under oath and which they hand down to their daughters after them, to maintain a state of passive unresponsiveness toward their new Ionian husbands. Herodotus tells the story principally to mock Ionian racial pretensions. Contemporary Ionians pride themselves, he sarcastically remarks, on being true-blooded Athenians, but the briefest look at their traditions shows them to be half-Carian. He implies that the custom handed down from mother to daughter still exists

in his own time; in any case, it testifies to the power of women to change the conventions of the society into which they have been forcibly integrated, despite their own loss of home, family, and culture, and their subject status. The same point is made more darkly in another abduction account, in which Lemnian men abduct Attic women to be their concubines and proceed to have children by them (6.138). Although, again, the women do not overtly resist their captors, they bring their sons up "in the Attic manner" — so much so that the Lemnian men take counsel and decide to kill both mothers and children, to avoid the threat to their own culture that the half-Attic children pose.

Herodotus' resistance to traditional fantasies of gynocracy, groups of women banding together in order to assert control over men, is particularly evident here, as well as his sense of symmetry between male and female activity within a given culture. A "Lemnian deed" popularly indicated any unspeakable atrocity committed by women against men, taking its name from an episode in Greek myth in which the women of Lemnos kill their husbands. Herodotus narrates instead an account of Lemnian men murdering women and children and adds in conclusion that this story "as well as the earlier one in which women killed their husbands . . ." forms the source of the traditional saying. In other words, he pointedly isolates murder of blood kin as a "Lemnian" tendency, not a male or female one.<sup>9</sup> The most important point both of this account and of the account of the Carian women in 1.146, however, remains the persistent loyalty that the women display to the culture of their birth, and their ability to transmit the sense of that culture to their children, although they are now in a foreign land and their children also the children of their captors. In both 6.138 and 1.146 it is the mothers and their *nomoi* to which the children give their loyalty.<sup>10</sup>

Women do not create culture by themselves, but they are depicted as its representatives. They reflect its values even in the face of male opposition, and they transmit it to their children. The fullest statement of the kind of cultural reciprocity that exists, in Herodotus' eyes, between women and men occurs in the foundation account of the Sauromatae in 4.110-117; it can almost be

used, because of the fullness of the detail included, as a model that sets out Herodotus' idea of how societies begin and are enabled to endure over time.<sup>11</sup> Some Amazons are captured by the Greeks after the battle of Thermidion and are put on board ship as prisoners of war. The Amazons overpower and kill the Greek crew but, since they do not themselves know the art of sailing, they are forced to put ashore wherever the winds and currents have taken them. As chance has it, they come ashore in the country of the Scythians and are met and courted by Scythian young men. Together the Amazon women and Scythian men remove to a nearby uninhabited area to found a new people that will exhibit a blend of Scythian and Amazonian qualities; Herodotus implicitly accepts the account as a historical one since he derives some current Sauromatian peculiarities from details narrated in the romantic story.

The courtship is structured as a comedy of mutual response and adaptation between the sexes. The women accept the advances of the men partly because the men (the youngest of their own tribe) have already changed their ways to do everything as the Amazons do. The Amazons learn Scythian (with an accent and some peculiar idioms) but draw the line at becoming ordinary Scythian women. What is particularly interesting is that neither the women nor the men dominate the process of assimilation. Herodotus describes it first as a matter of Scythian policy (the Scythians admire the women and want to gain such fine specimens for their own people), then as one of sexual attraction, and finally as one of reasoned discussion, with the Amazons, it is true, doing most of the talking. Throughout the account the actors, male and female alike, avoid acts of defiance or enmity toward each other. Instead there is continuous responsiveness on both sides and an emphasis on the gradual adjustments that will allow men and women from such culturally different backgrounds to live together satisfactorily.<sup>12</sup>

The foundation account of the Sauromatae can be read in two ways, either as a true story from the past, or as a mythic account that cloaks in a temporal mode truths Herodotus understands as timeless. In either case, it presents some useful generalizations about the nature of the social reciprocity, stripped to its essentials,

that exists in the *Histories* between men and women. For one thing, the Sauromatian account implicitly rejects the notion that any particular social role played by women (or by men) is a natural rather than a cultural phenomenon. It does not isolate a particular set of activities as male or female but, instead, isolates as truly natural the requirement of a mutually satisfactory division of function between the sexes. Herodotus implies that this alone will assure the cultural stability sufficient for providing food, raising children, and resisting external aggression. The Sauromatian pattern, as the Amazons and Scythians work it out, is an unusual one, but Herodotus gives no sign that the resulting culture is inadequate. As a story of origins, it shows in an extreme form what is implied in the other accounts in which groups of women play an active role: culture is, and must be, a construct of both men and women. Both reflect its values; both contribute to the creation of those values.

#### B. Groups of women in ethnographic accounts (76)

When we go on to look at groups of women who are not presented in a historical context but as part of a timeless description of the manners and customs of exotic peoples, we see this same set of assumptions repeated in almost every context. In the first four books of the *Histories*, Herodotus inserts into the historical account of the various peoples the Persians encounter a number of more or less lengthy descriptions of native customs. These serve several purposes; most obviously, they are part of the unusual and remarkable, the *thōmata*, whose record Herodotus considers it his responsibility to preserve. He is rarely interested, however, in wonders that are simply bizarre. He almost always attempts to report habits that seem odd to Greek eyes in a large cultural context that makes sense of them.<sup>13</sup>

One of his most consistent ethnographic interests is the relation between the sexes and the variety of relationships that different cultures offer. He mentions details of feminine dress or appearance only six times, while fifteen times he discusses family customs (courtship, marriage, children); twenty-three times he describes

sexual adaptations; twenty-one times he describes the participation of women in religious cult; and, finally, eleven times he describes women as part of the public or social sphere that in Greece was usually reserved for men. A brief overview of several of these categories reveals the extent to which, stripped of diachronic details, Herodotus perceives culture in its timeless essentials to be an intricate set of complementary institutions. No particular pattern is necessarily better than another; in each, however, men and women together provide for the essential requirements of a stable society. For instance, in discussing family organization, Herodotus principally emphasizes how customs of courtship and marriage are integrated into larger structures of behavior and belief, either within a single culture or in comparison with Greek custom. Thus three observations about Lycian matrilineality all explore the legal ramifications of a system where legitimacy is transferred through the female line (1.173); a prohibition against marrying one's daughter to a swineherd is set in the context of a society that abominates pigs (2.47). The ethnographic description of contemporary Sauromatian customs includes the provision that girls must kill an enemy before they can marry (4.117), a comment that the preceding historical narrative of the courtship of the Amazons is partly designed to introduce and explain.

When he describes sexual customs, Herodotus' attention is chiefly directed to sexual customs that combine aspects of culture kept separate in Greece and, in general, that contrast with Greek sexual norms. Four times he describes a degree of sexual propriety that exceeds normal Greek standards. He also describes cultures in which sexual intercourse is combined with religious cult, or with the production of the dowry, or with the marriage ceremony itself — habits that would have seemed odd indeed to a Greek reader. Finally, he reports some customs because they virtually reverse Greek categories of thought. The Thracians, he says, keep their married women carefully guarded but allow complete freedom to unmarried girls.<sup>14</sup>

As Pembroke indicates, ethnography is an ideal medium in which to convey the hidden fears and fantasies of one's own culture.<sup>15</sup> In reports of exotic sexual customs, if anywhere, one

would expect some of the darker aspects of Greek folk culture to assert themselves. Here, however, Herodotus once more pointedly avoids the theme of gynocracy, female domination of the male. Although some of the habits reported are strange and even shocking in the context of Greek custom, in Herodotus' ethnographies women never threaten the men of their own society or arrogate to themselves a power not rightfully theirs. In every culture except for the two that are nearly bestial at the edges of the world, sexual customs are presented as a set of limits and controls, with an emphasis placed on the boundaries that integrate sex into other aspects of society. In societies that are virtually promiscuous but have marriage (1.216, 4.172), access to the woman is regulated to guarantee privacy. Where there is complete promiscuity, Herodotus in one culture describes it as a choice the men have made in order to encourage communal cohesiveness (4.104); in another, he describes how one of its major drawbacks in Greek eyes is overcome: the men gather to decide the paternity of the child when it is old enough to resemble its father (4.180).<sup>16</sup>

Finally, when Herodotus describes women as part of the public life of their societies, he repeatedly displays a set of assumptions we have already noted in the context of women in the *polis*. When women participate in the public and political life of the community, their behavior parallels that of their menfolk. The women of the Zaukes participate in warfare by driving their husbands' chariots for them (4.193); both men and women in Asia plead with the Persian king for irrigation water (3.117); men, women, and children together among the Caunians hold drinking parties, choosing their companions on the basis of age and friendship (1.172). Although these customs too must have seemed strange to a Greek, in no instance does Herodotus use them to suggest the spectre of women seizing power from men or in combat with men over the distribution of power. The emphasis throughout lies on mutual adaptation and reciprocity between the sexes. Herodotus seems chiefly concerned to show the enormous variety of such adaptations that work to guarantee cultural stability.

Feminist anthropologists have recently argued that societal and sexual conflict seem least pronounced among peoples who have

managed to maintain similar functions and similar spheres of work for women and men alike.<sup>17</sup> Herodotus twice explicitly assimilates women and men. Among the Argippeans, women resemble men physically, since both sexes are bald, snub-nosed, and bearded from birth (4.23). Among the Issedones, women presumably perform similar functions in society, since he calls them *isokrateis*, equal in power (4.26). These two cultures, Herodotus takes special pains to emphasize, are renowned among their neighbors for their justice and for their skill in solving disputes and protecting exiles fairly. No causal connection is overtly drawn between their reputation and the roles their women play; clearly, however, Herodotus does emphasize the possibility that societies in which the roles of men and women are virtually symmetrical can meet basic cultural requirements in a fully satisfactory fashion.

Herodotus marvels at the divine *pronoia*, forethought and planning, exhibited in the fact that timid animals, who are naturally the prey of others, give birth to great numbers of offspring, while fierce and predatory animals bear few young (3.108). Similarly, in geography, while he mocks cartographers who insist on an absolute and rigid symmetry between the lands north and south of the Mediterranean, he accepts as reasonable a certain balance and correspondence, both between the north and south and between the qualities found at the ends of the earth and those found at its center (2.33, 3.106, 4.36). In his schematic descriptions of the customs of exotic peoples, or unusual customs among the Greeks themselves, he again emphasizes elements illustrating the principles of balance and complementarity, both within the individual culture and between the culture as a whole and those that surround it.<sup>18</sup> It is in the light of this general principle that we are to interpret Herodotus' descriptions of women in society. Women in the *polis* guarantee the survival of their cultures both by preserving life and by transmitting the *nomoi* of the culture to the next generation. The ethnographic descriptions show that Herodotus does not consider any particular distribution of social function between the sexes to be the right one, but tries instead to show that each viable culture embodies a balance of its own.

### C. Individual women who act in a family context (40)

The first part of this essay described the tensions created by family politics. Nevertheless, when individual women act in a family context, Herodotus lays emphasis on their positive and protective motives. Mothers shape the views of their sons or defend the lives and honor of their children; daughters act as their fathers' agents in the public sphere and defend family interests when they are threatened; wives generally support the political objectives of their husbands and work to maintain family stability and status.<sup>19</sup>

Especially striking in Herodotus' portrait of active family women is the clear connection between their role as prudent defenders of family status and authority and the resistance they display to the wishes of their menfolk. When a woman comes in conflict with a male relative, her role is to remind her son, father, brother, or husband of prudential considerations or of social norms that he is in danger of ignoring. The mother of the Egyptian thief threatens to betray her son to the king if he does not regain and provide a decent burial for his brother's body (2.121g); Poly-crates' daughter warns her father that a political enemy will kill him (3.124); two sisters chastize their brothers for outrageous or immoral behavior (2.135.6, 3.32); eight-year-old Gorgo tells her father, the king of Lacedaemon, that if he listens to Aristagoras the crafty Ionian he will be corrupted (5.51).

Herodotus develops the implications of the social role of family women most sharply, however, in the context of crisis between husband and wife; here occur the most pointed examples of women working to resist male aggression and check male excess. In most accounts of marital crisis, the wife does not directly confront her husband but manipulates her situation in order both to protect herself and placate her husband at the same time.<sup>20</sup> Twice, however, the conflict is overt. Candaules at the very beginning of the *Histories* and Xerxes at its very end abuse their position as husbands by considering their queens' honor and status negligible in the face of their own sexual desires. In each account, the wife gains the upper hand because she does not act according to her

husband's vision of reality but takes steps independently to defend her own honor and social status. It is the blindness of both monarchs to the possibility of such independence that brings them down.

The story of Candaules' wife is the first episode in the *Histories* that Herodotus narrates in detail; in it, the queen of Lydia is displayed naked, at her husband's command, to his favorite bodyguard (1.8 ff.). The queen hides her knowledge of the outrage and waits until she can confront the guard, Gyges, privately. She then gives Gyges the choice of killing Candaules, who plotted the deed (*ton tauta bouleusanta*), or of dying himself as its executor (*poiēsanta ou nomizomena*). The line she founds with her new husband lasts five generations and rises to real greatness in Croesus, its final heir. In the other account of marital conflict in the *Histories*, Xerxes' head wife, Amestris, is openly humiliated by her daughter-in-law, whom Xerxes has taken as mistress (9.108 ff.). Biding her time, Amestris waits until Xerxes' birthday when, by Persian convention, the king must grant any request made of him. Amestris asks and receives complete power over the girl's mother and tortures the woman brutally before releasing her back to her husband, an act resulting ultimately in the death of the girl's whole family.

Herodotus abstains from overt moral judgment upon either Amestris or Candaules' wife. The reflection sometimes cited as his, that what Amestris proposed to do was a "perverse and terrible deed" (9.110), is in fact Xerxes' reported thought as he abandons Masistes' wife to the savage mutilation Amestris intends to inflict on her.<sup>21</sup> Neither account, to be sure, is structured so that we entirely approve of the wife's vengeful action. Reacting to male abuses of cultural convention, Amestris and Candaules' wife exhibit the same kinds of shortcomings as their royal husbands. Yet, because they are aware of the limits within which they must act and the nature of the conventions their husbands have flouted, they are more lethally efficient in obtaining their goals.

Thus, although Herodotus does not present Amestris and the wife of Candaules as innocent and outraged heroines, he does depict them as serious social actors and their actions as serious

responses to issues of social authority and status. The fact that the whole narrative of the *Histories* is sandwiched between the two accounts gives them a programmatic weight at odds with the domestic and frivolous light in which they are often read. Moreover, one of the basic motifs in the *Histories* is the divine retribution that attends wrongdoing. Both Amestris and Candaules' wife survive to a vigorous and authority-filled old age; this in itself suggests that Herodotus is not here concerned principally with stories of wifely misbehavior or Clytemnestra-like revenge. On the contrary, the emphasis in both accounts falls on a causal sequence that shows what happens when royal husbands forget that wifely obedience is a voluntary and contingent affair, one based on the premise of certain standards of husbandly behavior.<sup>22</sup>

Herodotus does not advance these stories, or others in which wives ward off husbandly aggression, as an argument for a more symmetrical sharing of political power between men and women. "Custom is king of all," Pindar says, and Herodotus agrees with him (3.38). What he does implicitly argue, here as in the ethnographies and portraits of women in the *polis*, is that any society functions because of the reciprocity that exists between women and men. When a wife is ignored as an independent and responsible member of her society, she acts on her own behalf to rectify the imbalance. Unless we read it in from tragedy, even in these extreme accounts we do not find a portrait of women in revolt, overturning the conventions of their cultures, behaving in short as wild and irrational forces that need to be contained. In Herodotus, the family women who scheme do so to protect their own position and authority in response to male outrage. Because of their sensitivity to convention and its limits, they are more successful than men in achieving their objectives.

#### D. Individual women in the public sphere (22)

This fourth category represents women in extreme situations, that is, unconstrained by the opinions and wishes of male family members. Nonetheless, they continue, like the other women we have examined, to defend human life and conserve and articulate

the values of their societies.<sup>23</sup> The mother of Sataspes requests her nephew, the king, to commute the death sentence of her son into a command to circumnavigate Africa (4.43). Two queens are great builders to cities; three more use their royal power to avenge the murders of brother, husband, and son.<sup>24</sup>

Women in the public sphere continue frequently to articulate the social values that underlie their actions. Cyno, a slave herself and married to a cowherd, saves the life of the infant Cyrus and thus sets in motion the events that will destroy Astyages' kingdom (1.110 ff.). The whole account of the birth of Cyrus is structured to emphasize an improper devolution of authority: Astyages, when he has decided to murder his daughter's child, entrusts the execution to his vizier, Harpagus; Harpagus in turn entrusts it to the cowherd; the cowherd, finally, allows his wife to have the deciding voice in the child's fate. Cyno is the only actor in the entire account who is willing both to give voice to the full range of practical and moral considerations that, in her opinion, govern the situation and to accept responsibility for acting on them. She substitutes her own dead child for the baby her husband is to murder, telling him: "for thus neither will you be caught outraging the overlords nor will we have committed acts evilly conceived. For the dead child will gain a kingly burial and the survivor will not lose his life" (1.112).

Cyno represents a form of behavior characteristic both of family women and of women in the public sphere. As we have seen, feminine activity in the *Histories* is usually depicted as a creative manipulation of the constraints of the situation in which the woman finds herself, while males frequently ignore such limitations and are brought low in consequence by some factor they have not anticipated.<sup>25</sup> Women in Herodotus are often shown choosing carefully between difficult courses of action. Among family women, Polycrates' daughter would choose to remain unmarried if she could thereby save her father (3.124); Sesostris' wife chooses to sacrifice two sons to the flames to save the rest of the family (2.107); Intaphrenes' wife, allowed to save one male relative, saves her own brother rather than a husband or son (3.119). Sometimes the woman cleverly obviates the necessity for

choice: a queen of Sparta gains the throne for both her sons by refusing to choose between them (6.52); Candaules' wife, seen naked by Gyges, forces the choice of vengeance upon Gyges himself (1.8 ff.). This element of clear-sighted choice, choice made by considering the constraints of the situation and the rules that the society lives by, is what gives women, Herodotus implies, their unusual success in attaining their goals.

Tomyris and Artemisia are the female rulers described in most detail in the *Histories*. They are particularly striking examples of a number of the themes we have developed here. Tomyris presides over the death of Cyrus in book one (1.205 ff.), and Artemisia presides over Xerxes' defeat in the last books of the *Histories*. Both of these queens, like other women we have noted, 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.

Tomyris is a noble savage; she conducts her military campaign in a Homerically irreproachable fashion. Herodotus emphasizes the odd disjunction between her speech and actions at the end of the account, as Tomyris proclaims her noble, almost Achillean, scorn of Cyrus' deviousness while pushing his severed head into a skin filled with human blood (1.214). Appearances here are deceptive; Tomyris, the rude savage, is not only more civilized but more manly than her enemies. Cyrus' advisor in the ignoble stratagem that undoes him is Croesus, a man who himself lost his former kingdom and deliberately unmanned his former subjects (1.155). Another set of deliberate inversions of traditional sex roles occurs in the account of Artemisia in books seven and eight. Herodotus singles out Artemisia as the only commander in Xerxes' fleet attending through *andreia*, manly courage, rather than compulsion (7.99). She alone of Xerxes' advisors gives advice with an eye to the military situation rather than to her own standing at court (8.68). Unlike Tomyris, she saves herself and her ship by extremely unconventional military behavior; she sinks an allied ship so that the Athenians pursuing her turn their attention elsewhere, thinking that she is on their side (8.87).<sup>26</sup>

Artemisia and Tomyris are successful military leaders, as generals unusual in the extent to which they articulate the moral and political basis of their actions and in their correct perception of Persian ambition overreaching itself. These portraits set the capstone on the interpretation of women as actors I am advancing here. Women in Herodotus act to preserve themselves and those in their care; they also act as responsible members of the societies in which they live. They reflect the same social values as the men of their cultures but they differ from most men in their willingness to analyze these values within a given context. Cyno, eight-year-old Gorgo, the mother of the Egyptian thief, Demaratus' mother, Cambyses' sister, Polycrates' daughter, Intaphrenes' wife, and a number of other women as well share with the great queens this capacity. They generally see society for what it is, a series of moral conventions and constraints within which everyone must act.

#### E. Priestesses and founders of religious cults (62)

Four accounts describe women as the heroines of religious foundation stories, as part of the aetiology of a cult. Like the Athenian and Carian women taken from their homelands by enemy men, women who found cults in the *Histories* involuntarily must renounce their own cultures, but they nonetheless manage to bring with them their conventions, and to establish new religious rites in a new land, among new people. Thus two Egyptian women abducted from Egyptian Thebes found oracles in Libya and Dodona (2.54). Like the Amazons who become Sauromatian, moreover, they exhibit considerable ingenuity in learning a new language and integrating themselves into their new circumstances while preserving the essence of their former cultural role. The daughters of Danaus bring the festival of Demeter to Greece (2.171) and found a temple of Athena in Lindus (2.182); two pairs of Hyperborean girls, finally, enrich the rites of Apollo in Delos (4.33-35). The emphasis is on great distances of time and space: women in the distant past travelling great voyages to transmit religious belief and ritual from one culture to another.<sup>27</sup>

Priestesses in a more contemporary context also resemble other

active women. If we were to count number of appearances as the principal criterion, the Pythia would be the most important woman in the *Histories*; she appears in every book but the second and on forty-five occasions advises kings, tyrants, aristocrats, and commoners, both Greek and barbarian.<sup>28</sup> She predicts the outcome of war and directs the foundation of colonies, sometimes extremely persistently (4.150 ff.). The Pythia represents the intersection of politics and morality for those who consult her. She seeks to resolve conflict and correct misbehavior; as the representative of one of the few Greek institutions open to all Greek cities alike, she works for the benefit of the society as a whole rather than in the narrow self-interest of an individual *polis*. In all these ways, the Pythia can be viewed as a stunning and extreme example of the nomothetic woman, setting out the cultural limits and controls within which Greek society will thrive, beyond which it will perish.<sup>29</sup>

In a most important respect, however, the Pythia resembles not the other active women in the *Histories* but the passive women in a family context with which this essay began. The advice she gives is not her own but, in Herodotus' eyes, the god's: she is Apollo's intermediary. Like passive family women, she represents limits, but while passive family women represent the mortal and finite nature of family security, and the family's vulnerability to human strife and natural disaster, the Pythia at the other end of the spectrum of human experience represents the limits that divine order places on mankind. Herodotus makes it clear, by the extensive use he makes of the Pythia and other oracles in the *Histories*, that he sees human experience as a continuum, an unbroken spectrum comprised first of nature, then of culture, and finally, at its upper limit, of the moral and causal patterns imposed by divinity. When men and women act in the *Histories*, they do so in the middle range of experience represented by society and culture: the nexus of rules and common assumptions that allows people to live together in human communities. Passive women on one end of the spectrum and priestesses on the other, however, represent natural and religious aspects of human life that are, in the *Histories*, as real and as important as the cultural sphere. It is because we cannot as

men and women fully understand them that we do not experience them rationally but instead suffer them as a series of inexplicable constraints.

The Pythia represents the relationship between humanity and the cosmic order that controls and patterns the world: events do have a shape and a meaning that can be defined in moral and causal terms. These terms the god conveys through the Pythia but, because of our own limited perception of the sphere of reality she stands for, we understand her only faintly and through the distractions of our own desires. Thus we perceive her advice as a series of injunctions rather than as indication of the pattern that reality takes. Herodotus shows in the Solon-Croesus episode (1.30-33) that the problem lies partly in the fact that we must live through time ourselves and are thus subject to its limitations. We cannot begin to understand what the Pythia darkly and ambiguously conveys to us until, like the historian himself, we look back upon it later.<sup>30</sup>

In 1913 Jacoby demonstrated that a relatively straightforward, sequential account of Persian military aggression provides the overall narrative structure of the *Histories*.<sup>31</sup> Herodotus describes each new culture at that point in the narrative when it must confront the advance of the Persian army. Within the theme of Persian expansionism, women are rarely the principal actors, although the women who do enter the political and military spheres — Nitocris, Artemisia, Tomyris, even, until her moral downfall, Pheretime — acquit themselves well. Instead, as we have seen, women in the *Histories*, presented in an astonishing number of settings and often depicted as idiosyncratic and creative social actors, generally occur in the context of a subtler motif that acts as a counterpoint to the record of Persian military success. In hundreds of brief passages throughout the *Histories* Herodotus' women, active and passive, build up a picture of the kinds of balance, control, and limits that define Herodotus' understanding of culture itself. Passively, women represent the mortal threats that family and society face and the constraints that the gods impose on humankind; actively, they observe the conventions of their cultures, transmit them to

the next generation, and remind their menfolk of them as well.

Throughout the *Histories*, Persians habitually violate the limits that women stand for. In more than a score of passages, they demonstrate their inability to distinguish between sex and politics, and they abuse women in consequence.<sup>32</sup> Herodotus depicts this as one aspect of a larger Persian inability to accept diversity and balance as principles governing culture and society: they deny the notion of balance and reciprocity between the sexes, the separation of the marital and the political spheres, and, finally, the distinction between one's own territory and the territory that belongs to others. Their very military progress shows them intent upon subordinating everything, male and female, foreign and Persian, to a single structure of absolute royal authority. It is the quality of Herodotus' vision of society and culture, with women as essential elements of both, that makes us understand why the Persians ultimately meet defeat.

Herodotus was almost certainly an exceptional witness to his world. He travelled more widely than most Greeks, and his freedom from narrow ethnocentrism is reflected on almost every page. Moreover, the breadth and originality of his literary achievement alone would suggest that the portrait of women he has given us is not a naive reflection of his culture's clichés but a distillation that reflects his own passionate intellectual achievement. On the other hand, Herodotus' picture of women forms part of the first extant Greek attempt to look seriously at human culture for its own sake and on its own terms. It deserves incorporation into our larger picture of Greek society and the relations of women and men within it.

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## Notes

1. For women in tragedy, see M. Shaw, "The Female Intruder: Women in Fifth-Century Drama," *CP* 70 (1975) 255-266 and F. Zeitlin, "The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Mythmaking in the *Oresteia*," *Arethusa* 11 (1978) 166-169. For women in oratory, see W.K. Lacey, *The Family in Classical Greece* (Ithaca 1968) 158-162.
2. An Appendix at the end of this essay sets out the evidence topically arranged. The present discussion loosely follows the order of the outline given in the Appendix, and the reader is encouraged to consult it for examples beyond those given in the text and notes. Recent studies considering individual aspects of Herodotus' views of women include A. Tourraix, "La femme et le pouvoir chez Hérodote," *DHA* 2 (1976) 369-386; J. Annequin's critique of Tourraix in the same volume, 378-390; M. Rosellini and S. Saïd, "Usages de femmes et autres *nomoi* chez les 'sauvages' d'Hérodote: essai de lecture structurale," *Annali della Scuola Normale di Pisa* 8 (1978) 949-1005; R. Weil, "Artémise ou le monde à l'envers" in *Recueil Plassart* (Paris 1976) 215-224; and a forthcoming article in *Hermes* by M. Cain, kindly sent me in xerox by the author.
3. This essay does not consider the passages where femininity is used as an abstraction or a metaphor. Seventeen such passages concern a geographical phenomenon that is either named after a woman or is named metaphorically as the mother, wife, sister, or daughter of something else. Herodotus generally ignores the myth and once, in 4.45, explicitly questions the whole habit, declaring that he accepts it only because convention makes it convenient to do so. Another eighteen times Herodotus either uses the concept of the feminine neutrally (1.17, a treble flute is "feminine") or, if female is contrasted unfavorably to male, the context makes it clear that he is reporting a character's thoughts (often in the context of military insult: 1.189, 2.102, 9.20, 9.107). If Herodotus uses antonymous clichés himself, he generally uses the context to undercut them. In 7.153 he emphasizes that Telines, the founder of a great Sicilian dynasty and obviously a resourceful and ambitious man, was also soft and effeminate by nature. For the complete list of such passages, see the Appendix, Section III.
4. Ninety-three of 128, or 73%, reflect a direct threat or danger. Most of the remaining thirty-five reflect another, subtler kind of threat. Herodotus does not use female lineage to describe family accumulation of power; instead, he mentions female genealogies either to indicate the inappropriate confusion of family and political power practiced in the Persian royal family, or to indicate the inappropriate confusion of history and myth at the point in stories about the past where women begin marrying gods and heroes.
5. Many passages that do not mention women convey the same theme, of course: the Lampsacenes are terrified when they learn what Croesus' threat to destroy them like a pine tree means — a pine leaves no shoots behind to spring up after it has been cut (6.37); Egyptian soldiers, kept on border duty too long, revolt and declare with a somewhat desperate bravado that wherever their genitals are, there will also be wives and children. The point is their absolute need for women and children, family structures, even if they have to found a new nation to get them (2.30). The theme of the family's importance to society is found throughout Greek literature, from the *Iliad* through Aristotle's *Politics* (1252 b9). To our eyes, Herodotus is perhaps unusual in the extent to which he discusses family affairs as part of a larger overtly political context — to the Greeks, Thucydides' inclination to consider only the superstructure of the *polis* and decisions reached by civic deliberation probably seemed much more radical, severe, and strange.
6. 1.51.5b, 2.1, 2.110, 2.111.4, 3.130, 6.41.2. Only 7.69, Darius' fondness for Artystone, is not mentioned in the context of threatening change.
7. Passages only concerned with difficulties of generation are listed in Section I.A.2 in the Appendix. A number of them are set in Sparta, since the kingship there was hereditary. The account of Demaratus (6.61) is the most striking of these, since it is Demaratus' doubtful paternity that ultimately loses him the kingship and exiles him to Persia, where he becomes Xerxes' chief advisor on things Greek (7.101 ff., 7.234 ff.). Many other passages with more complex aspects as well could be added here, such as the accounts concerning heiresses (Section I.A.3.b.3), and a number of births of great men (not only 1.59 and 5.67, but also 6.131.1, 1.107, and 5.92g). Children who are disabled are mentioned in 1.34, 5.92b, 3.51 and 53, 3.145, 4.161, 4.155, 3.33, and 6.75. Cf. also Dorieus' disappointed assumption in 5.42 that his physical and mental superiority over Cleomenes would win him in Spartan kingship.
8. Atossa as the daughter of Cyrus (7.2-3) and perhaps Pheretima as the daughter of Battus (4.205) show the kinds of power available to a woman because of a powerful father. Herodotus, however, does not depict women wielding the power of their own lineages over their husbands; see below, p. 107 and note 19. An *epiklēros*, or heiress, creates additional kinds of tension. In herself, she represents the failure of her father to produce a male heir; Herodotus twice uses the word *apais*, childless, to mean "left with only female issue" (5.48, 5.67). She also represents the inversion of normal marriage patterns, and a consequent dislocation of family structure. See Lacey (*op. cit.*, note 1) 139, 145 and J.-P. Vernant, "Hestia-Hermès. Sur l'expression religieuse de l'espace et du mouvement chez les Grecs," *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs* I (Paris 1971) 144-147. The anxieties of a powerful female lineage are well summed up by Lycophron's sister in 3.53: "Many men prefer the reasonable to the just, and many before now seeking their maternal inheritance have thrown away their paternal one."
9. For the traditional portrait of the "Lemnian deed," see, for instance, Aeschylus, *Libation Bearers* (631-634). For the Greek concept of *gynaikokratia*, see Aristotle, *Politics* 1313 b33-34 and 1269 b40, where he defines it as women "getting out of hand," *anesis* (the translation of

- S. Pembroke, "Women in Charge: the Function of Alternatives in Early Greek Tradition and the Ancient Idea of Matriarchy," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute* 30 [1967] 20). The fear of female insubordination and resulting loss of control by men is visible in Greek thought from the Homeric Hymns and Hesiod onward. M.B. Arthur, "Early Greece: The Origins of the Western Attitude toward Women," *Arethusa* 6 (1973) 24-26 and 48-50 relates the fear of female domination to more complex questions of developing political ideologies; P. Vidal-Naquet, "Esclavage et gynécocratie dans la tradition, le mythe, l'utopie" in C. Nicolet, ed., *Recherches sur les structures sociales dans l'antiquité classique* (Paris 1970) 63-80 relates it to the structures of Greek marriage and inheritance patterns and the continuous possibility that women might provide descent without the aid of "citizen" males (cf., in Herodotus, 6.83 and 4.1).
10. Both abduction accounts show that a whole society suffers when men ignore the part played by women in the establishment and maintenance of cultural conventions. Herodotus makes the same point ironically in 3.159, where he implies that the Babylonians effectively destroy their own culture by killing most of their women, in their zeal to win independence from Persia. (Babylonians in the *Histories* seem habitually to misjudge the relationship of means and ends; cf. 1.191, 3.157, and 1.196. In every case the innovation undercuts the purpose for which it was intended.)
  11. See W.K.C. Guthrie, *The Sophists* (Cambridge 1971) 60 ff. for the prevalence of such rationalized "myths of origin" among Herodotus' contemporaries and the role of such myths in developing theories of nature and society. Another foundation story in which men and women play complementary roles, Herodotus explicitly introduces as myth (4.8-10).
  12. It is interesting that commentators often seize on a straightforward description of linguistic adaptation in 4.114 and 4.117 in order somewhere in the account to find evidence of latent contrast or opposition between the sexes. I do not find, with R.W. Macan, the Scythian men displaying "their characteristic stupidity" (*Herodotus. The Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Books* [1895; rpt. New York 1973] 82 note 115.4) or, with W.W. How and J. Wells, that "[t]he greater aptness of the Amazons is a delightful touch of nature; but they were inaccurate . . . as lady linguists often are" (*Commentary on Herodotus* [1912; rpt. Oxford 1936] I, 341 note 114). It is true that the account begins with the etymology of the Scythian word for Amazon as "man-killer," and with a battle between the Amazons and their new neighbors, but that only underlines the absence of hostility from the rest of the story.
  13. The articles by Rosellini and Said (*op. cit.*, note 2) and Pembroke (*op. cit.*, note 9) have especially helped my thinking in this section.
  14. Propriety: 1.198 (twice), 2.41, 2.64; sex and religion: 1.181, 1.182 (twice), 1.199 (twice); sex and the dowry: 1.93, 1.196; sex and the wedding ceremony: 4.168, 4.172; reversal: 5.6.
  15. Pembroke (*op. cit.*, note 9) 34-35.
  16. As these passages indicate, Herodotus continues to assume male control of sexuality, even in exotic contexts. A vivid illustration of this assumption occurs in 4.176, where the number of a woman's anklets testifies to her sexual prowess; if the point of the passage had been the woman's control over her sexual activity (as, for instance, Aristophanes fantasizes at the end of the *Ecclesiazusae* [1000 ff.]), the anklets would not have indicated excellence but merely appetite.
  17. M.Z. Rosaldo, "Woman, Culture, and Society: A Theoretical Overview," in Rosaldo and L. Lamphere, eds., *Woman, Culture, and Society* (Stanford 1974) 41.
  18. See G.E.R. Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy. Two Types of Argumentation in Early Greek Thought* (Cambridge 1966) 341-344 for Herodotus' use of balance and symmetry in geographical description. See J.L. Myres, *Herodotus, Father of History* (Oxford 1953) 49-50 for lists of other passages that translate this idea of balance and order into the human and moral sphere, especially 1.32: "now it is impossible for one who is human to have all these blessings, just as no land is self-sufficient, producing everything for itself, but one thing it has, and another it lacks."
  19. The section on passive family women above describes a number of tensions that surround marriage as a social institution. Given such tensions, the strength of the marriage bond in the portrait of active women in the *Histories* is quite striking. Three women alone betray the marriage connection, and for all of them Herodotus presents extenuating circumstances. In 1.61 and 3.119 the husband will not or cannot behave like a husband; for 1.8, see below, pp. 108-109. (In two others, the wife implicitly contests her husband's will; for 9.108 ff., see below, pp. 108-109, while in 4.154, Herodotus remarks that a woman behaves like "a true stepmother" in wishing to murder her husband's daughter.)
  20. The wife of Amasis, blamed for her husband's temporary impotence, saves herself from death and relieves her husband from his condition by dedicating a statue to Aphrodite in Cyrene (2.181); Melissa, murdered by her husband, nonetheless agrees to help him with his necromancy if he will rectify her improper burial rites (5.92); Isagoras' wife wins Spartan support for her husband's political ambitions by granting her favors to the Spartan king (5.70); Atossa supports Darius' political ambitions and at the same time fulfills the oath she has privately sworn to her physician (3.134).
  21. Amestris is seen again in 7.114, burying Persian children alive as a grateful tribute to the god of the underworld. There Herodotus explicitly cites her behavior not as a personal aberration but as proof that live burial was a Persian custom, *Persikon de to zōontas katorussein*. In 9.108 ff. also, her behavior can be interpreted as nasty but clever politics. She holds the mother *aitiēn*, responsible, as in a very indirect and innocent way she was. Had Amestris merely tortured or humiliated the girl, she would have left intact and hostile to her the second most powerful family in Persia. By immediately destroying Masistes' wife, she throws the whole family into confusion and forces them to react

- while disorganized and unprepared for conflict.
22. E. Wolff, "Das Weib des Masistes," *Hermes* 92 (1964) 51-58 also considers the programmatic placement of the two "Harems-Liebesgeschichten" at the beginning and end of the *Histories*. Both he sets in the context of a larger Persian royal tragedy, one that culminates many years after the final episode narrated in the *Histories* in the death of Xerxes himself at the hands of the son to whom he had married Masistes' daughter.
  23. Eight women in the public sphere are mentioned principally because they occur in the context of some unusual event: 1.51.5a, 1.60, 2.2, 2.46, 2.131.2b, 2.134, 2.135.5, and 6.61.3a. They are servants, or courtesans, and usually perform an individual striking action.
  24. 1.184, 1.185, 2.100, 4.160, 4.202. One of these, Pheretima (4.202), oversteps conventional limits, and the gods punish her for it with a horrible death — not, however, because she has adopted a role inappropriate for a woman, but because she has transgressed the limits set by the gods on human vengeance (*hōs ara anthrōpoisi hai liēn ischurai timōriai pros theōn epiphthonoi ginontai*, 4.205). Once more, she is part of an account full of acts of cruelty and excess. Her son incinerates his political enemies, despite the warning of the Pythia (4.164); her Persian general captures Barca through an act of brutal treachery (4.201).
  25. H. Bischoff, *Der Warner bei Herodot* (Marburg 1932) discusses the number of times in the *Histories* that actors, almost all male, ignore good advice — advice, that is, that correctly points out the limitations of their circumstances. (Selections are reprinted in W. Marg, *Herodotus* [Darmstadt 1962] 302-319.) See also H.-P. Stahl, "Learning through suffering? Croesus' conversations in the history of Herodotus," *YCS* 24 (1975) 1-36.
  26. The reversals and ironies in the account of Artemisia are well developed by R. Weil (*op. cit.*, note 2). I argue that she is depicted successfully manipulating an extremely difficult situation; she emerges personally victorious, despite Xerxes' blindness and vanity and despite the fact that she is on the losing side of the war. Herodotus emphasizes her prudence and intelligence at a number of points; she is last seen counselling retreat for Xerxes and escorting his bastard children to safety (8.102-103). In 8.103, Herodotus sarcastically distinguishes between Artemisia's merit in giving the advice to retreat and Xerxes' cowardice in taking it.
  27. Thematically, the women who found religious cults remind us also of the four mythic rapes that begin the *Histories*. Although the tone of 1.1-1.5 is amused and skeptical (myths, whether Greek or barbarian, are not for Herodotus history), the cumulation of stories suggests on a plane deeper than that of historical fact one sense in which culture is defined by the dislocation and exchange of women. It is through myth, after all, that cultures define their own past, and each of the myths told at the beginning of the *Histories* involves a foreign woman who is brought in and helps thereafter to identify the culture to which she is brought.
- Io in Greek myth becomes an Egyptian goddess and mother of a god; Medea names the Medes; Europe has a continent named after her; and, finally, Helen is the mythic cause of the first open military split between East and West. In Herodotus' carefully indirect account, it is the act of exchanging women back and forth that causes East and West to define themselves, and to define their differences with each other. This is, perhaps, the essence of exogamy itself as the Greeks understood it, but practiced on a cultural rather than a narrowly familial scale.
28. Herodotus does not imply that the Pythia spoke unintelligibly or through male intermediaries (5.92b). See J. Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle* (Berkeley 1978) ch. 7 for a complete evaluation of the evidence. For the general independence of women serving their religious functions, see 6.16.2 and the interpretation of the sacerdotal functions of the women in the *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes by H. Foley, "The Female Intruder' Reconsidered: Women in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazusae*," to appear in *CP*.
  29. The Pythia is not perfect; twice she is suborned (5.63, 6.66), and once some Athenian ambassadors argue with her and receive a more hopeful response (7.141). See also the openly political engagement of other priestesses in 5.72 and 6.134.
  30. J. Kirchberg, *Die Funktion der Orakel im Werke Herodots* (Göttingen 1965) 116-120 points out several parallels between the function of oracles in the text and the role of the historian himself, arranging and interpreting his material. For a more general understanding of Herodotus' sense of religion and history, see W. Schadewaldt, "Das Religiös-Humane als Grundlage der geschichtlichen Objektivität bei Herodot," in Marg, ed. (*op. cit.*, note 25), 185-200. Two women have been added to the list of priestesses in the Appendix because, like religious women, they represent aspects both of Herodotus' portrait of passive women and of his active women. The mother of Cleobis and Biton in 1.31 symbolizes at once the mysterious functions of nature and divinity (she brings her sons life; she brings them, by her prayers, death) and, in her actions, an entirely proper sphere of social activity. The snake-lady of 4.8 ff. represents both the chthonic and natural component to which Heracles brings culture and, in her actions, a reasonable human being. She bargains, stands by her bargain, and it is she who actually brings the sons up according to the rules Heracles gives her.
  31. F. Jacoby, "Herodotus," in *RE*, Supplementband 2 (Stuttgart 1913) 347 ff., rpt. in *Griechische Historiker* (Stuttgart 1956) 78 ff.
  32. See, for instance, Cambyses' incest in 3.32, Artayctes' use of the temple of Protesilaus for sexual intercourse in 9.116, the problems of Darius' succession and jealousy between sons of different wives in 7.3; Darius' overpersuasion by Atossa in 3.134; the Persian assumption that the women of the Macedonians are at their disposal in 5.18, and, of course, the scene of domestic and political chaos at Sardis in 9.108 ff. with which Herodotus' account of Persian royal politics ends.
  33. Good studies of other, more military, aspects of "Persian expansionism" occur in H.R. Immerwahr, "Historical Action in Herodotus," *TAPA* 85

(1954) 14-45, and "Aspects of Historical Causation in Herodotus," *TAPA* 87 (1956) 241-280. D. Lateiner's unpublished study, *Herodotus' Histories. An Invention in History* contains excellent observations on the broader, non-Persian implications of boundary transgression in Herodotus.

## Appendix

### I. PASSIVE WOMEN (128)

#### A. Individual passive women presented in a family context (97)

1. External aggression (25)
  - a. Against whole family: 3.14, 3.68, 7.107.2a, 7.107.2b, 8.106.
  - b. Abduction: 1.1, 1.2a, 1.2b, 1.3, 2.112 ff., 4.43.2, 5.18.3, 5.21, 5.94.2, 6.62, 6.65, 8.136, 9.73.
  - c. Instability of marriage: 1.51.5b, 2.1, 2.110, 2.111.4, 3.130, 6.41.2 (7.69).
2. Family and difficulties of generation (9): 1.34, 1.59, 5.39, 5.40, 5.67.1, 6.61a, 6.61b, 6.71a, 6.71b. (cross ref: 1.107, 5.92b, 6.52, 6.131 and section I.A.3.b.3 below [heiresses].)
3. Family politics (39)
  - a. Successful dynastic marriage: 1.74, 3.88a, 3.88b, 3.88c, 3.88d, 5.67.3, 5.94.1, 6.38, 6.39, 6.41.4, 7.165. (cross ref: 3.137, 6.126.)
  - b. Family crisis
    1. Between brothers: 1.92.3a, 1.92.3b, 1.173.2, 3.30, 7.2.2a, 7.2.2b.
    2. Between in-laws: 1.75, 1.107 ff., 3.50 ff., 4.147, 5.30.
    3. Daughters of famous men and heiresses: 3.137, 5.48, 5.67.4, 6.126, 7.205, 7.224. (cross ref: 4.205, 7.2.)
    4. Other: 2.111, 3.31.6, 3.118, 4.78.2, 4.78.5, 4.80.1, 4.154.1, 4.164, 5.32, 5.47, 9.111. (italics = woman victim.)
4. Genealogies (24)
  - a. Persian: 5.116a, 5.116b, 5.116c, 6.43, 7.5, 7.61.2, 7.64,

- 7.73, 7.78, 7.82, 7.97a, 7.97b.
- b. Mythological: 1.7, 1.84, 2.98.2, 2.145.4a, 2.145.4b, 2.145.4c, 6.53, 7.61.3a, 7.61.3b.
- c. Other: 5.118, 6.103, 7.166.

#### B. Passive women in groups (31)

1. Political or military aggression: 1.164, 3.45, 3.97, 4.121, 4.145.2, 4.202, 5.15, 5.98, 6.16, 6.19, 6.32, 6.137, 7.114.1, 8.33, 8.36, 8.40, 8.142.
2. Indication of disturbance in society: 3.159, 6.139.1, 7.33, 7.83, 7.187, 9.34, 9.81, 9.116.
3. Coerced by men of own society: 1.176, 3.150, 4.145.5, 5.87.3, 5.88, 5.92e.1.

### II. ACTIVE WOMEN (212)

#### A. Groups of women within a polis (12)

1. Activities complementary to male activities: 1.31.3, 3.48, 5.83.3a, 5.83.3b, 9.5.
2. Independent of male control: 1.146.3a, 4.1, 4.110 ff., 4.146, 5.87.2, 6.138.2, 6.138.4.

#### B. Groups of women within ethnographic accounts (76)

1. Dress and appearance: 1.82, 2.35.3b, 2.36, 4.23, 4.168.1, 4.189.1.
2. Family: 1.135, 1.136, 1.137, 1.146.3b, 1.173.4, 1.173.5a, 1.173.5b, 1.196.1a, 1.196.1b, 2.35.4b, 2.47, 2.92, 4.117b, 5.16, 6.57.
3. Sex: 1.93, 1.181.5, 1.182.2a, 1.182.2b, 1.196.5, 1.198a, 1.198b, 1.199.1, 1.199.5, 1.203, 1.216.1a, 1.216.1b, 2.41, 2.64, 3.101, 4.104, 4.168.2, 4.172.2a, 4.172.2b, 4.172.2c, 4.176, 4.180.5, 5.6.
4. Religion: 2.35.4a, 2.48, 2.60, 2.61, 2.65.3, 2.65.4, 2.85, 2.89, 3.99, 4.33.5, 4.34, 4.35.3, 4.71, 4.180.2, 4.186.2a, 4.186.2b, 4.189.3, 5.5.1a, 5.5.1b, 6.58.1, 6.58.3.
5. Society: 1.172, 2.35.2, 2.35.3a, 2.98.1, 3.117, 4.26, 4.69, 4.75, 4.191, 4.193, 4.195.

**C. Individual women who act in a family context (40)**

1. Daughters: 1.5, 1.61.1, 2.121e, 2.126, 2.129, 3.1, 3.53, 3.69, 3.119, 3.124, 5.51, 9.76.
2. Mothers: 2.91, 2.121g, 3.3, 4.78.1, 4.162, 4.165, 5.92d, 6.52.2, 6.68.
3. Wives: 1.8, 1.61.2, 1.109, 2.107, 2.131.2a, 2.181, 3.133, 4.154.2, 5.70, 5.92e.2, 6.131, 7.3, 8.137, 9.108.1a, 9.108.1b, 9.109.
4. Sisters: 2.135.6, 3.32, 5.12.

**D. Individual women in the public sphere (22):**

1.51.5a, 1.60, 1.110, 1.184, 1.185, 1.205 ff., 2.2, 2.46, 2.100, 2.131.2b, 2.134, 2.135.5, 4.43.1, 4.160, 4.202, 6.61.3a, 7.99, 7.114.2, 8.68, 8.87, 8.101, 8.103b.

**E. Priestesses (62)**

1. Founders of cults: 2.54a, 2.54b, 2.171, 2.182, 4.33.3a, 4.33.3b, 4.35.1a, 4.35.1b.
2. Pythia: 1.13, 1.19, 1.47, 1.55, 1.65, 1.66, 1.67, 1.85, 1.91, 1.167, 1.174, 3.57, 4.15, 4.150, 4.151, 4.155, 4.156, 4.157, 4.159, 4.161, 4.163, 5.43, 5.63, 5.66, 5.67.2, 5.79, 5.82, 5.90, 5.92b, 6.34, 6.36, 6.52.5, 6.66, 6.75, 6.77, 6.86, 6.123, 6.135, 6.139.2, 7.140, 7.148, 7.169, 7.220, 8.51, 9.33.
3. Other priestesses: 1.175, 2.55.3a, 2.55.3b, 2.55.3c, 5.72, 6.134, 7.111.
4. Women in mixed structures: 1.31.2, 4.8 ff.

**III. THE FEMININE AS AN ABSTRACTION (35)****A. Geographical phenomena:**

2.29, 4.5, 4.45.1, 4.45.3a, 4.45.3b, 4.52, 4.86, 4.180.5, 5.80, 6.61.3b, 7.58, 7.62, 7.178, 7.189, 8.31, 8.53, 9.51.

**B. Distinction into male and female:**

1.17, 1.105, 1.189, 2.30, 2.102, 3.66, 3.84, 4.67, 5.13, 5.18.2, 7.120, 7.153, 8.103a, 9.20, 9.107.

**C. Female dreams or visions:**

6.61.4, 6.107, 8.84.

**Notes to Appendix**

In this study, I have been concerned chiefly to measure the degree to which Herodotus presents women as independent actors, with initiative of their own and an opportunity to influence events. The categories adopted here reflect this interest; in investigating other kinds of concern, other criteria of organization might be more valid.

Each separate mention of a woman or a group of women, or the concept of the feminine is counted. A woman is categorized according to the greatest degree of independent activity she achieves within a single continuous narrative. Thus, for instance, Candaules' wife is not first counted as a passive object of attention (1.8) and then as an actor (1.10). Rather, the whole narrative account in which she eventually acts is considered under the heading of II.C.3, "wife," since her greatest degree of independent action occurs in response to an act of her husband's.

If a single woman (or group) appears within several different narrative accounts, she is counted in each according to the degree of independent activity she there displays. Thus Demaratus' mother is counted once in 6.62 as a woman abducted from her husband (I.A.1.b'), and once in 6.68 as a mother explaining events to her son (II.C.2). Apart from the Pythia, the extreme case of a single woman appearing in multiple accounts is Artemisia. She appears in 7.99, 8.68, 8.87, 8.101, and 8.103b. (The Pythia, we should note, is an institution rather than an individual person; she is not named unless something odd diverts her from her priestly function [6.66].)

No effort is made here to distinguish between narrative accounts Herodotus expressly accepts and those he narrates with reservation (e.g., 2.131, 3.3). First, it is often difficult to determine the degree of belief Herodotus intends us to feel; Herodotus is an extremely ironic author and it is difficult to know what he

believes about many things he reports. See L. Pearson, "Credulity and Scepticism in Herodotus," *TAPA* 72 (1941) 335-355. More importantly, the point of this study is not the historicity of Herodotus' account, whether women really did the things he reports, but the range of activities he is willing to report for them — his assumptions about the kinds of things they might do. For this reason I have also not distinguished between women who figure within long speeches that virtually continue the narrative (2.121, 5.92) and women whom Herodotus himself describes.

In family contexts, it is sometimes difficult to determine whether a woman is actually mentioned or not. Family situations, or other situations implicitly involving women, do not figure here unless the woman's presence is expressly indicated. 6.83 must have involved Argive women (cf. 4.2 ff.) but, because Herodotus does not say so, it is not counted. Similarly, conflicts between brothers are ignored unless a woman (wife or mother) is explicitly mentioned in the account. I have, however, perhaps erred on the side of completeness by including in discussions of family politics all words like *gambros* (son- or brother-in-law), *mêtrōs* (maternal uncle), *thugatrideos* (daughter's son), and *mêtropatōr* (mother's father) since they signify relationships established only through women.

Women mentioned within reported speech are generally not considered in this study unless the comment directly affects the action in the surrounding narrative. Thus, Masistes' insult in 9.107 almost leads to murder and is included, but many picturesque comments made by a number of characters, female and male, are not. Some of the more striking examples of the mention of women or the concept of the feminine in reported speech in the *Histories* include: 1.35, 1.91a, 1.91b, 1.155, 3.53, 3.65, 3.80, 3.134, 4.80, 4.114, 6.19, 6.77, 7.11, 7.39, 7.51, 7.52, 7.141, 7.150, 7.169, 8.60, 8.68-69, 8.88, 8.96, 9.27.

Female animals and divinities (e.g., 2.66, 4.180.5a, 8.65) are not included in this study unless they occur incidentally in the context of geography or quasi-mythic genealogies (Sections III.A and I.A.4.b). They would be relevant to a larger study, but they raise issues of natural science and the constraints imposed by

traditional myth that are not directly relevant to Herodotus' views about human women.

6.122, 7.239, and 8.104 are not counted largely because the consensus of most editors omits them (6.122 and 7.239 as interpolations, 8.104 as a repetition of 1.175). It is worth noting that 6.122 and 7.239 contain kinds of women not found elsewhere in Herodotus — Greek girls allowed to choose their own husbands, the wife as wise woman, solving the mystery of the blank tablet. The implicit ideas are not inherently un-Herodotean — the interest in the unusual, the interest in intelligent women — but the tone is unusual. Wise women in Herodotus, as we have noted, generally reflect on matters of ethical or political choice; they do not solve tricks. 8.104 is a more difficult case. The bearded priestess of Pedasa is relevant in a suggestive way to the story of Hermotimus the eunuch that she introduces. She is one of three characters from the area just around Halicarnassus whose actions display some degree of sexual inversion or, at least, of unexpected sexual characteristics. The priestess of Pedasa grows a beard in times of trouble; Artemisia the queen of Halicarnassus is more "manly" than Xerxes' male commanders and repeatedly displays her intelligent *andreia*; Hermotimus the eunuch in 8.104 ff. takes what Herodotus characterizes as the most complete revenge known to him, by playing on his enemy's assumptions about eunuchs. All three, in other words, disappoint normal sexual expectations; all three are presented in a neutral or positive light. What this says about Herodotus' sense of Halicarnassus I do not know. As we have seen, in a number of accounts he undercuts sexual assumptions or sexually oriented clichés; the appearance in one brief stretch of book eight of three characters from the area of Halicarnassus who embody this theme may be coincidental.