

# Herodotos, from *The Histories*

*Herodotos wrote his comprehensive history in the fifth century BCE; though it's our main source for the Persian Wars with the Greeks (490-478 BCE), Herodotos's larger purpose was to seek to understand human nature and the elements of civilization by comparing and contrasting anecdotes concerning various events and cultures. Excerpted below are tales concerning the matriarchal Amazons; the admiral-queen Artemesia; Gorgo, daughter and wife of Spartan kings; Candaules and his exhibition of his wife; and the brooch-murdering wives of Athens.<sup>1</sup>*

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## The Amazons

4.110 The history of the Sauromatae is as I will now show. When the Greeks warred with the Amazons (whom the Scythians call Oiorpata, a name signifying in our tongue “killers of men,” for in Scythian a man is *oior*, and to kill is *pata*) after their victory on the Thermodon they sailed away carrying in three ships as many Amazons as they had been able to take alive; and out at sea the Amazons set upon the crews and threw them overboard. But they knew nothing of ships, nor how to use rudder or sail or oar; and the men being thrown overboard they were borne at the mercy of waves and winds, till they came to the Cliffs by the Maeetian lake; this place is in the country of the free Scythians. There the Amazons landed, and set forth on their journey to the inhabited country. But at the beginning of their journey they found a place where horses were reared; and carrying these horses away they raided the Scythian lands on horseback.

4.111 The Scythians could not understand the matter; for they knew not the women's speech nor their dress nor their nation, but wondered whence they had come, and supposed them to be men all of the same age; and they met the Amazons in battle. The end of the fight was, that the Scythians got possession of the dead, and so came to know that their foes were women. Wherefore taking counsel they resolved by no means to slay them as heretofore, but to send to them their youngest men, of a number answering (as they guessed) to the

number of the women. They bade these youths encamp near to the Amazons and to imitate all that they did; if the women pursued them, then not to fight, but to flee; and when the pursuit ceased, to come and encamp near them. This was the plan of the Scythians, for they desired that children should be born of the women. The young men, being sent, did as they were charged.

4.112 When the Amazons perceived that the youths meant them no harm, they let them be; but every day the two camps drew nearer to each other. Now the young men, like the Amazons, had nothing but their arms and their horses, and lived as did the women, by hunting and plunder.

4.113 At midday the Amazons would scatter and go singly or in pairs away from each other, roaming thus apart for greater comfort. The Scythians marked this and did likewise; and as the women wandered alone, a young man laid hold of one of them, and the woman made no resistance but suffered him to do his will; and since they understood not each other's speech and she could not speak to him, she signed with the hand that he should come on the next day to the same place bringing another youth with him (showing by signs that there should be two), and she would bring another woman with her. The youth went away and told his comrades; and the next day he came himself with another to the place, where he found the Amazon and another with her awaiting him. When the rest of the young men learnt of this, they had intercourse with the rest of the Amazons.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Herodotus, and A. D. Godley. 1920. *Herodotus*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

4.114 Presently they joined their camps and dwelt together, each man having for his wife the woman with whom he had had intercourse at first. Now the men could not learn the women's language, but the women mastered the speech of the men; and when they understood each other, the men said to the Amazons, "We have parents and possessions; now therefore let us no longer live as we do, but return to the multitude of our people and consort with them; and we will still have you, and no others, for our wives." To this the women replied, "Nay, we could not dwell with your women; for we and they have not the same customs. We shoot with the bow and throw the javelin and ride, but the crafts of women we have never learned; and your women do none of the things whereof we speak, but abide in their waggons working at women's crafts, and never go abroad a-hunting or for aught else. We and they therefore could never agree. Nay, if you desire to keep us for wives and to have the name of just men, go to your parents and let them give you the allotted share of their possessions, and after that let us go and dwell by ourselves. The young men agreed and did this.

4.115 So when they had been given the allotted share of possessions which fell to them, and returned to the Amazons, the women said to them: "We are in fear and dread, to think how we should dwell in this country; seeing that not only have we bereaved you of your parents, but we have done much hurt to your land. Nay, since you think right to have us for wives, let us all together, we and you, remove out of this country and dwell across the river Tanais."

4.116 To this too the youths consented; and crossing the Tanais they went a three days' journey from the river eastwards, and a three days' journey from the Maeetian lake northwards; and when they came to the region in which they now dwell, they made their abode there. Ever since then the women of the Sauromatae have followed their ancient usage; they ride a-hunting with their men or without them; they go to war, and wear the same dress as the men.

4.117 The language of the Sauromatae is Scythian, but not spoken in its ancient purity, seeing that the Amazons never rightly learnt it. In regard to marriage, it is the custom that no virgin weds till she has slain a man of the enemy; and some of them grow old and die unmarried, because they cannot fulfil the law.

### Artemisia of Halicarnassus

7.99 I name none of the rest of the captains [of the Persian fleet], having no need so to do, save only Artemisia, who moves me to marvel greatly that a woman should have gone with the armament against Hellas; for her husband being dead, she herself had his sovereignty and a young son withal, and followed the host under no stress of necessity, but of mere high-hearted valour. Artemisia was her name; she was daughter to Lygdamis, on her father's side of Halicarnassian lineage, and a Cretan on her mother's. She was the leader of the men of Halicarnassus and Cos and Nisyros and Calydnos, furnishing five ships. Her ships were reputed the best in the whole fleet after the ships of Sidon; and of all his allies she gave the king the best counsels. The cities, whereof I said she was the leader, are all of Dorian stock, as I can show, the Halicarnassians being of Troezen, and the rest of Epidaurus. Here ends what I have said of the fleet.

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8.68 Mardonius went about questioning them, from the Sidonian onwards; and all the rest gave their united voice for offering battle at sea; but Artemisia said: "Tell the king, I pray you, Mardonius, that I who say this have not been the hindmost in courage or in feats of arms in the fights near Euboea. Nay, master, but it is right that I should declare my opinion, even that which I deem best for your cause. And this I say to you — Spare your ships, and offer no battle at sea; for their men are as much stronger by sea than yours, as men are stronger than women. And why must you at all costs imperil yourself by fighting battles on the sea? have you not possession of Athens, for the sake of which you set out on this march, and of the rest of Hellas? no man

stands in your path; they that resisted you have come off in such plight as beseemed them. I will show you now what I think will be the course of your enemies' doings. If you make no haste to fight at sea, but keep your ships here and abide near the land, or even go forward into the Peloponnese, then, my master, you will easily gain that end wherof you have come. For the Greeks are not able to hold out against you for a long time, but you will scatter them, and they will flee each to his city; they have no food in this island, as I am informed, nor, if you lead your army into the Peloponnese, is it likely that those of them who have come from thence will abide unmoved; they will have no mind to fight sea-battles for Athens. But if you make haste to fight at once on sea, I fear lest your fleet take some hurt and thereby harm your army likewise. Moreover, O king, call this to mind — good men's slaves are wont to be evil and bad men's slaves good; and you, who are the best of all men, have evil slaves, that pass for your allies, men of Egypt and Cyprus and Cilicia and Pamphylia, in whom is no usefulness."

8.69 When Artemisia spoke thus to Mardonius, all that were her friends were sorry for her words, thinking that the king would do her some hurt for counselling him against a sea-fight; but they that had ill-will and jealousy against her for the honour in which she was held above all the allies were glad at her answer, thinking it would be her undoing. But when the opinions were reported to Xerxes he was greatly pleased by the opinion of Artemisia; he had ever deemed her a woman of worth and now held her in much higher esteem. Nevertheless he bade the counsel of the more part to be followed; for he thought that off Euboea his men had been slack fighters by reason of his absence, and now he purposed to watch the battle himself. ...

8.87 Now as touching some of the others I cannot with exactness say how they fought severally, foreigners or Greeks; but what befel Artemisia made her to be esteemed by the king even more than before. The king's side being now in dire confusion, Artemisia's ship was at this time being pursued by a ship of Attica; and she could not

escape, for other friendly ships were in her way, and it chanced that she was the nearest to the enemy; wherefore she resolved that she would do that which afterwards tended to her advantage, and as she fled pursued by the Athenian she charged a friendly ship that bore men of Calyndus and the king himself of that place, Damasithymus. It may be that she had had some quarrel with him while they were still at the Hellespont, but if her deed was done of set purpose, or if the Calyndian met her by crossing her path at haphazard, I cannot say. But having charged and sunk the ship, she had the good luck to work for herself a double advantage. For when the Attic captain saw her charge a ship of foreigners, he supposed that Artemisia's ship was Greek or a deserter from the foreigners fighting for the Greeks, and he turned aside to deal with others.

8.88 By this happy chance it came about that she escaped and avoided destruction; and moreover the upshot was that the very harm which she had done won her great favour in Xerxes' eyes. For the king (it is said) saw her charge the ship as he viewed the battle, and one of the bystanders said, "Sire, see you Artemisia, how well she fights, and how she has sunk an enemy ship?" Xerxes then asking if it were truly Artemisia that had done the deed, they affirmed it, knowing well the ensign of his ship; and they supposed that the ship she had sunk was an enemy; for the luckiest chance of all which had (as I have said) befallen her was, that not one from the Calyndian ship was saved alive to be her accuser. Hearing what they told him, Xerxes is reported to have said, "My men have become women, and my women men"; such, they say, were his words.

## Gorgo of Sparta

5.48 Such, then, was the manner of Dorieus' death. Had he endured Cleomenes' rule and stayed at Sparta, he would have been king of Lacedaemon; for Cleomenes reigned no long time, and died leaving no son but one only daughter, whose name was Gorgo.

5.49 I return to my story. It was in the reign of Cleomenes that Aristagoras the despot of Miletus

came to Sparta; and when he had audience of the king (so the Lacedaemonians say) he brought with him a bronze tablet on which the map of all the earth was engraved, and all the sea and all the rivers. ...

5.50 Thus far they advanced at that hearing. But when on the day appointed for the answer they came to the place whereon they had agreed, Cleomenes asked Aristagoras how many days' journey it was from the Ionian sea to the king. Till now, Aristagoras had been cunning and fooled the Spartan right well; but here he made a false step; for if he desired to bring the Spartans away into Asia he should never have told the truth; but he did tell it, and said that it was a three months' journey inland. At that, Cleomenes cut short all the rest that Aristagoras began to tell him about the journey, and bade his Milesian guest depart from Sparta before sunset; for never (he said) would the Lacedaemonians listen to the plan, if Aristagoras desired to lead them a three month's journey from the sea.

5.51 Having thus spoken Cleomenes went to his house; but Aristagoras took a suppliant's garb and followed him thither, and entering in he used a suppliant's right to beseech Cleomenes to hear him, but first send the child away; for Cleomenes' daughter, whose name was Gorgo, was standing by him; she was his only child, and was about eight or nine years of age. Cleomenes bade him say what he would and not let the child's presence hinder him. Then Aristagoras began to promise Cleomenes from ten talents upwards, if he would grant his request. Cleomenes refusing, Aristagoras offered him ever more and yet more, till when he promised fifty talents the child cried out, "Father, the stranger will corrupt you, unless you leave him and go away." Cleomenes was pleased with the child's counsel and went into another room; and Aristagoras departed clean out of Sparta, and could find no occasion for telling further of the journey inland to the king's place.

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7.239 I return now to that place in my history where it lately left off. The Lacedaemonians were the first to be informed that the king was equipping himself to attack Hellas; with this knowledge it was that they sent to the oracle at Delphi, where they received the answer whereof I spoke a little while ago; and the way of their being so informed was strange. Demaratus son of Ariston, being an exile among the Medes, was, as I suppose (reason being also my ally), no friend to the Lacedaemonians, and I leave it to be imagined whether what he did was done out of goodwill or spiteful triumph. Xerxes being resolved to march against Hellas, Demaratus, who was then at Susa and had knowledge of this, desired to send word of it to the Lacedaemonians. But he feared to be detected, and had no other way of acquainting them than this trick: — taking a double tablet, he scraped away the wax from it, and then wrote the king's intent on the wood; which done, he melted the wax back again over the writing, so that the bearer of the tablet thus left blank might not be troubled by the way-wardens. When the tablet came to Lacedaemon, the Lacedaemonians could not guess its meaning, till at last (as I have been told) Gorgo, Cleomenes' daughter and Leonidas' wife, discovered the trick of herself and advised them to scrape the wax away, when they would find writing on the wood. So doing, they found and read the message, and presently sent it to the rest of the Greeks. This is the story, as it is told.

## Candaules of Sardis

1.6 Croesus was by birth a Lydian, son of Alyattes, and monarch of all the nations west of the river Halys, which flows from the south between Syria and Paphlagonia, and issues northward into the sea called Euxinus. This Croesus was as far as we know the first foreigner who subdued Greeks and took tribute of them, and won the friendship of others, — the former being the Ionians, the Aeolians, and the Dorians of Asia, and the latter the Lacedaemonians. Before the reign of Croesus all Greeks were free: for the Cimmerian host which

invaded Ionia before his time did not subdue the cities but rather raided and robbed them.

1.7 Now the sovereign power, which belonged to the descendants of Heracles, fell to the family of Croesus — the Mermnadae as they were called — in the following way. Candaules, whom the Greeks call Myrsilus, was the ruler of Sardis; he was descended from Alcaeus, son of Heracles; Agron, son of Ninus, son of Belus, son of Alcaeus, was the first Heraclid king of Sardis, and Candaules, son of Myrsus, was the last. The kings of this country before Agron were descendants of Lydus, son of Atys, from whom all this Lydian district took its name; before that it was called the land of the Meii. From these the Heraclidae, descendants of Heracles and a female slave of Iardanus, received the sovereignty and held it in charge, by reason of an oracle; and they ruled for two and twenty generations, or 505 years, son succeeding father, down to Candaules, son of Myrsus.

1.8 This Candaules, then, fell in love with his own wife, so much that he supposed her to be by far the fairest woman in the world; and being persuaded of this, he raved of her beauty to Gyges, son of Dascylus, who was his favourite among his bodyguard; for it was to Gyges that he entrusted all his weightiest secrets. Then after a little while Candaules, being doomed to ill-fortune, spoke thus to Gyges: "I think, Gyges, that you do not believe what I tell you of the beauty of my wife; men trust their ears less than their eyes; do you, then, so contrive that you may see her naked." Gyges exclaimed loudly at this. "Master," said he, "what a pestilent command is this that you lay upon me! that I should see her who is my mistress naked! with the stripping off of her tunic a woman is stripped of the honour due to her. Men have long ago made wise rules for our learning; one of these is, that we, and none other, should see what is our own. As for me, I fully believe that your queen is the fairest of all women; ask not lawless acts of me, I entreat you."

1.9 Thus speaking Gyges sought to turn the king's purpose, for he feared lest some ill to himself

should come of it: but this was Candaules' answer: Take courage, Gyges: fear not that I say this to put you to the proof, nor that my wife will do you any harm. I will so contrive the whole business that she shall never know that you have seen her. I will bring you into the chamber where she and I lie and set you behind the open door; and after I have entered, my wife too will come to her bed. There is a chair set near the entrance of the room: on this she will lay each part of her raiment as she takes it off, and you will be able to gaze upon her at your leisure. Then, when she goes from the chair to the bed, turning her back upon you, do you look to it that she does not see you going out through the doorway."

1.10 As Gyges could not escape, he consented. Candaules, when he judged it to be bed time, brought Gyges into the chamber, his wife presently followed, and when she had come in and was laying aside her garments Gyges beheld her; and when she turned her back upon him, going to her bed, he slipped privily from the room. The woman saw him as he passed out, and perceived what her husband had done. But shamed though she was she never cried out nor let it be seen that she had perceived aught, for she had it in mind to punish Candaules; seeing that among the Lydians and most of the foreign peoples it is held great shame that even a man should be seen naked.

1.11 For the nonce she made no sign and held her peace. But as soon as it was day, she assured herself of those of her household whom she perceived to be most faithful to her, and called Gyges: who, supposing that she knew nothing of what had been done, came at call; for he had always been wont to attend the queen whenever she bade him. So when he came, the lady thus addressed him: "Now, Gyges, you have two roads before you; choose which you will follow. You must either kill Candaules and take me for your own and the throne of Lydia, or yourself be killed now without more ado; that will prevent you from obeying all Candaules' commands in the future and seeing what you should not see. One of you must die: either he, the contriver of this plot, or you, who have outraged all

usage by looking on me unclad." At this Gyges stood awhile astonished: presently he entreated her not to compel him to such a choice; but when he could not move her, and saw that dire necessity was in very truth upon him either to kill his master or himself be killed by others, he chose his own life. Then he asked the queen to tell him, since she forced him against his will to slay his master, how they were to attack the king: and she replied, "You shall come at him from the same place whence he made you see me naked; attack him in his sleep."

1.12 So when they had made ready this plot, and night had fallen, Gyges followed the lady into the chamber (for he could not get free or by any means escape, but either he or Candaules must die), and she gave him a dagger and hid him behind the same door; and presently he stole out and slew Candaules as he slept, and thus made himself master of the king's wife and sovereignty. He is mentioned in the iambic verses of Archilochus of Parus who lived about the same time.

1.13 So he took possession of the sovereign power, and was confirmed therein by the Delphic oracle. For when the Lydians were much angered by the fate of Candaules, and took up arms, the faction of Gyges and the rest of the people came to an agreement that if the oracle should ordain him to be king of the Lydians, then he should reign: but if not, then he should render back the kingship to the Heraclidae. The oracle did so ordain: and Gyges thus became king. Howbeit the Pythian priestess declared that Heraclidae should have vengeance on Gyges' posterity in the fifth generation: an utterance of which the Lydians and their kings took no account, till it was fulfilled.

### The brooches of Athens

5.87 This, then, is the story told by the Argives and Aeginetans, and the Athenians too acknowledge that it was only one man of them who came safe back to Attica [from the disastrous raid at Aegina];

but the Argives say that it was they, and the Athenians say that it was divine power, that destroyed the Attic army when this one man was saved alive; albeit even this one (say the Athenians) was not saved alive but perished as here related. It would seem that he made his way to Athens and told of the mishap; and when this was known (it is said) to the wives of the men who had gone to attack Aegina, they were very wroth that he alone should be safe out of all, and they gathered round him and stabbed him with the brooch-pins of their garments, each asking him "where her man was."

5.88 Thus was this man done to death; and this deed of their women seemed to the Athenians to be yet more dreadful than their misfortune. They could find, it is said, no other way to punish the women; but they changed their dress to the Ionian fashion; for till then the Athenian women had worn Dorian dress, very like to the Corinthian; it was changed, therefore, to the linen tunic, that so they might have no brooch-pins to use. But if the truth be told, this dress is not in its origin Ionian, but Carian; for in Hellas itself all the women's dress in ancient times was the same as that which we now call Dorian. As for the Argives and Aeginetans, this was the reason of their even making a law for each of their nations that their brooch pins should be made half as long again as the measure then customary, and that brooch-pins in especial should be dedicated by their women in the temple of those goddesses; and that neither aught else Attic should be brought to the temple, nor earthenware, but that it be the law to drink there from vessels of the country.

5.89 So then the women of Argolis and Aegina ever since that day wore brooch-pins longer than before, by reason of the feud with the Athenians, and so they did even to my time; and the enmity of the Athenians against the Aeginetans began as I have told. And now at the Thebans' call the Aeginetans came readily to the aid of the Boeotians, remembering the business of the images.