

**ARTEMISIA OF HALICARNASSUS:  
HERODOTUS' EXCELLENT COUNSEL**

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**ABSTRACT:** Numerous ancient sources attest that Artemisia of Halicarnassus, a 5<sup>th</sup> C. BCE tyrant whose polis came under Persian rule in 524 BCE, figures prominently in Xerxes' naval campaign against Greece. At least since Pompeius Trogus' 1<sup>st</sup> C. BCE *Philippic History*, interpretations of Artemisia have juxtaposed her "virile courage" (*uirilem audaciam*) with Xerxes' "womanish fear" (*muliebrem timorem*) primarily as a means of belittling the effeminate non-Greeks. My paper argues that although Herodotus is aware of such interpretations of Artemisia, he depicts her primarily as an excellent counsel, a woman who is not only brave in battle, but who is a wonder primarily because of her intellectual excellences in deliberative rhetoric and "geo-political" strategy in the Greco-Persian world.

**KEY-WORDS:** Artemisia, Herodotus, Salamis, female intellectual, Persian Wars

**WORD COUNT:** 10,340

## ARTEMISIA OF HALICARNASSUS: HERODOTUS' EXCELLENT COUNSEL

### INTRODUCTION: ARTEMISIA'S VIRILE COURAGE AND PRACTICAL WISDOM

Artemisia of Halicarnassus needs less introduction than most women in antiquity. The 5<sup>th</sup> Century tyrant, whose polis came under Persian rule in 524 BCE, is attested in numerous sources, such as Herodotus, Aristophanes, Pompeius Trogus, Plutarch, Pausanias, and Polyaeus. Scholars have produced a nuanced body of work examining her life and its relevance for understanding gender norms in the 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> Artemisia has even emerged as a figure in popular culture: The French actress Eva Green portrays Artemisia as a starring role in the 2014 film *300: Rise of an Empire*, based on the graphic novels of Frank Miller.<sup>2</sup> Although Artemisia's exploits at the battle of Salamis

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<sup>1</sup> See Weil 1976, Jouanna 1984, Munson 1988, Tourraux 1990, Harrell 2003, Strauss 2004, Sebillotte Cuchet 2008, Sebillotte Cuchet 2015, Penrose 2016, Tank 2019, and Sissa 2021. The “geo-political” status of Halicarnassus (modern day Bodrum), the south-western Anatolian polis of both Artemisia and Herodotus, is as complicated as its tyrant and foremost historian. In the Archaic period Greek colonists established a mixed Greco-Carian city, nominally part of the Lydian empire until the Persian king Cyrus defeated Croesus mid-6<sup>th</sup> century (Hdt. 1.86), after which (and during Artemisia's reign [Hdt. 7.99]) it was part of the Achaemenid Persian empire. According to the *Suda*, in the 5<sup>th</sup> C. Lygdamis II (apparently the grandson of Artemisia) oversaw the incorporation of Halicarnassus into the Delian League, a decision that caused some Halicarnassians—apparently including Herodotus—to revolt against Lygdamis II, and ultimately be sent into exile.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, McCoskey 2020.

have justly established her ancient and modern recognition, most sources in antiquity focus upon her bending of gender stereotypes as a means of disparaging the masculinity of non-Greek Persians. As Justin’s 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE Epitome of the *Philippic History* of Pompeius Trogus puts it, the juxtaposition of Artemisia and Xerxes at the battle of Salamis exhibits “womanish fear in a man, and manly boldness in a woman” (*in uiro muliebrem timorem, ita in muliere uirilem audaciam* [II.12; cf. Hdt 8.103]).<sup>3</sup> On this reading, Xerxes’ generalship and the efforts of his sailors at the battle of Salamis were so poor that *even* a female, such as Artemisia, appears as braver. Such an interpretation casts Artemisia’s sex as something she transcends so that she can exhibit—albeit only as simulacrum—the masculine virtue of courage. Artemisia’s virile courage makes her a virile woman, but never a *vir* within a man’s world.

The Halicarnassian historian Herodotus is well aware of Artemisia’s legend as a brave warrior, but he significantly recasts her as an excellent counsel who possesses practical wisdom, namely a strategic adviser par excellence. Indeed, Herodotus draws a number of complicated parallels between Artemisia and Themistocles, and it seems fair to characterize her in the same language that Herodotus uses to describe Themistocles, namely as a “clever and excellent counsel” (σοφός τε καὶ εὐβουλος [8.110.1]).<sup>4</sup> Herodotus’ juxtaposition of Artemisia’s bravery and

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<sup>3</sup> Yardley 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Translations of Herodotus are my own, based on Wilson 2015, but I have often drawn upon or adapted from Grene 1987 and Waterfield 1998. Parenthetical references within the paper refer to book, paragraph, and subsection within the *Histories* unless otherwise noted. Although Herodotus uses both σοφιστής and σοφός to characterize the sage (e.g., 1.29.1, 2.49.1, 4.95.2; 2.49.2,

intellectual insight suggests that he is aware of, but rejects, the view that Artemisia's true claim to fame is only her gender-bending bravery in battle. In Herodotus' telling, Artemisia is a wise adviser and gifted rhetorician, not unlike Herodotus' contemporary Aspasia, another Ionian Greek woman with a reputation for practical wisdom and rhetorical ability.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, one cannot help but wonder if Herodotus' late 5<sup>th</sup> century audience would have detected echoes of Aspasia in Artemisia.<sup>6</sup>

My paper argues that Herodotus depicts Artemisia as not only a virile woman but primarily as an excellent counsel who possessed rhetorical ability and practical wisdom in their highest forms.<sup>7</sup> In the first part of my paper, I consider the ancient and modern testimony that characterizes

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7.235.2), he also uses the term σοφός to indicate cleverness or practical wisdom (e.g., 1.71.2, 3.85.1, 4.131.2, 5.50.2), like he characterizes Themistocles in 8.110.1 and 8.124.1.

<sup>5</sup> Kennedy 2014: 74–78 surveys recent interpretations of Aspasia and persuasively reconstructs her biography in Athens with a focus upon her non-Athenian status in the aftermath of Pericles' citizenship law of 451 BCE as the source of allegations about her sex-worker status.

<sup>6</sup> Fornara 1971 and Harrison and Irwin 2018 amply ground the claim that Herodotus writes for a general Greek audience (and not only an Athenian one) in the 420s BCE. Herodotus' attitude towards Aspasia is a neglected subject, although given his participation in the pan-Hellenic colony at Thurii that Pericles sponsored, it seems quite plausible to assume that he was familiar with her.

<sup>7</sup> After writing my paper I serendipitously encountered Sissa 2021 which although written independently of my paper, shares several similar claims, including my main thesis that Artemisia's intellectual prowess has been unfairly neglected in scholarship. But whereas Sissa

Artemisia primarily as a brave woman in juxtaposition to Persian effeminacy. In the second part of my paper, I consider Herodotus' testimony that Artemisia is a "wise adviser," including the parallels he draws between Artemisia and Themistocles in their respective roles before and after the battle of Salamis. In the third part of my paper I examine in some detail Artemisia's actual advice through a careful reading of the pre-Salamis speech that she makes to Xerxes. Finally, in the conclusion of my paper I consider the plausibility of Herodotus' depiction of Artemisia as an excellent counsel.

#### PART I: ARTEMISIA AS (ONLY) A VIRILE WOMAN

The Artemisia of 300: Rise of Empire is a highly trained and deadly warrior, able to dispatch Greek marines at ease with her pair of short swords. As McCoskey 2020 notes, the film radically transforms Artemisia's skill with language "from what was advisory and democratic in Herodotus to something domineering and destabilizing" (215). The film retells her story as one of rape-revenge: Artemisia fights the Greeks because they had previously killed her parents and raped her as a young girl. For the same reason, the film depicts her as goading Xerxes into fighting a war with the Greeks, a war that his dying father, Darius (fatally wounded by Themistocles at Marathon), counseled him not to pursue. And, most implausibly, in a sexual tryst with Themistocles, Artemisia forcefully rejects his attempts to mount her and instead insists upon mounting him. No doubt, almost all these details push the envelope of poetic license. Nonetheless,

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emphasizes Artemisia's knowledge about gender, my paper emphasizes her rhetorical and strategic knowledge, demonstrated in the deliberative speeches she makes to Xerxes.

the movie's Artemisia captures a general aspect that is found repeatedly in surviving testimony about Artemisia, namely that her bravery in battle is masculine and that she herself is a virile woman who fights as well as or even better than men.<sup>8</sup>

Table I: Artemisia in the testimonial tradition about the battle of Salamis

| Source of testimony                  | Advice prior to Salamis | Brave fighting at Salamis | Trickery at Salamis | Post-Salamis advice |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Aeschylus, <i>Pers.</i><br>(472 BCE) | No                      | No                        | No                  | No                  |
| Herodotus (c. 425 BCE) <sup>9</sup>  | Yes (8.68)              | Yes (8.87–88)             | Yes (8.87)          | Yes (8.101–103)     |
| Aristophanes                         | No                      | Yes                       | Maybe               | No                  |

<sup>8</sup> Scholars have staked out all sides of the gender ramifications of Artemisia: Tourraix 1990: 378 argues that Artemisia is ambivalently (but not ambiguously) male and female; Munson 1988: 93–94 argues that she is the “representative of a straight male world”; Sebillotte Cuchet 2015: 242 argues that she never abandons her female identity; and Harrell 2003: 88 argues that she is ambiguously male and female. Sebillotte Cuchet 2008: 18–21 surveys the different responses and persuasively argues that Herodotus casts Artemisia in opposition to Athenian binary oppositions such as male/female and Greek/non-Greek (the latter opposition which Herodotus himself straddles [25–29]; see also Penrose 2016: 153–54).

<sup>9</sup> The Anonymous *Tractatus De Mulieribus* (circa 1<sup>st</sup> C. CE) primarily follows Herodotus as a source. Its modern editor, Gera 1997: 209–211, notes that it fails to capture the complexity of Herodotus' account of Artemisia.

| (c. late 5 <sup>th</sup> C. BCE)              |                                   | ( <i>Lys.</i> 672–679)      | ( <i>Th.</i> 1155–1225) |    |
|---|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|----|
| Diodorus Siculus (1 <sup>st</sup> C. BCE)     | No                                | No                          | No                      | No |
| Pompeius Trogus (late 1 <sup>st</sup> C. BCE) | No                                | Yes<br>(2.12.23–24)         | No                      | No |
| Plutarch (early 2 <sup>nd</sup> C. CE)        | Yes ( <i>Mor.</i><br>[869D–870A]) | Yes<br>( <i>Them.</i> [14]) | No                      | No |
| Pausanias (2 <sup>nd</sup> C. CE)             | No                                | Yes<br>(3.11.2–3)           | No                      | No |
| Polyaenus (2 <sup>nd</sup> C. CE)             | No                                | Yes<br>(8.53.2, 5)          | Yes<br>(8.53.1–3)       | No |

Table I shows that testimony about Artemisia has attributed four different actions to her: That she advises Xerxes not to fight at sea prior to the battle of Salamis; that she fights bravely at Salamis; that she uses trickery and sinks a Persian ship during the battle of Salamis; and that she advises Xerxes post-Salamis to withdraw from Greece. Although Aeschylus and Diodorus Siculus fail to mention Artemisia, all other sources attest that Artemisia at Salamis showed remarkable bravery.<sup>10</sup> And yet how to interpret Artemisia’s bravery is a point of disagreement. The testimony of Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* is representative of the view that Artemisia is a threatening virile woman,

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<sup>10</sup> The pseudepigraphic “Ambassadorial speech” (πρεσβευτικὸς λόγος) in the Hippocratic corpus claims that Artemisia sought to conquer the Ionian Greek city of Cos in a despotic rather than brave fashion (27.5–6), although all indications suggest that the work is a literary exercise (see further Smith 1990: 2–3, and Jouanna 1984: 11).

but one who is a curiosity (or even a joke) because of her masculine characteristics.<sup>11</sup> After Lysistrata threatens to symbolically “bury” an Athenian magistrate, the male and female choruses enter into heated debate. Aristophanes has the leader of the men’s chorus claim:

If any man among us gives these women the tiniest thing to grab on to, there’s no limit to what their nimble hands will do. Why, they’ll even be building frigates and launching naval attacks, cruising against us like Artemisia. And if they turn to horsemanship, you can scratch our cavalry: there’s nothing like a woman when it comes to mounting and riding; even riding hard she won’t slip off. (*Lys.* 692–699)<sup>12</sup>

Aristophanes’ play, performed in 411 BCE, makes clear that by the late 5<sup>th</sup> century Artemisia is a legendary but threatening force.<sup>13</sup> And yet, like those “cavalry women” who won’t slip off (presumably while mounting a man during sexual intercourse), Aristophanes presents her as

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<sup>11</sup> Sebillotte Cuchet 2008: 22–24 persuasively argues that Aristophanes represents an Athenian view of bipolar sexuality that Herodotus himself calls into question throughout his treatment of women in the *Histories*.

<sup>12</sup> Translation Henderson 1996.

<sup>13</sup> In the closing lines of his *Women at the Thesmophoria*, Aristophanes has Euripides pretend to be Artemisia (1155–1225). The immediate context implies trickery and cunning more than bravery, although the scene is rather enigmatic. See further Karamanou 2013: 161, which argues that “though some critics have seen the presence of Artemisia in the scene as reflecting her courage, her resourcefulness and trickery are more to the point.”



something humorous and curious—a bit of a circus freak.<sup>14</sup> Artemisia’s virile courage here seems more an object of humor than esteem.

Herodotus is clearly familiar with the reputation of Artemisia as a norm-bending individual and makes her gender identity a central motif of his depiction of her. But unlike Aristophanes and others for whom virile courage is hardly a compliment, I suggest that Herodotus marvels at Artemisia for reasons deeper than her curious combination of male and female aspects. When Herodotus first introduces Artemisia into his narrative, at the end of his account of the Persian forces in Xerxes army and navy, he claims that

I do find occasion for admiration (θῶμα) in Artemisia, that she, a woman, served in the expedition against the Greeks.<sup>15</sup> Her husband had died, and she took over the tyranny (although she had a grown son), and yet commanded out of resolution and manly-courage (ὑπὸ λήματός τε καὶ ἀνδρηίης ἐστρατεύετο), with no compulsion on her part to do so (οὐδεμιῆς οἱ ἐούσης ἀναγκαίης). (7.99)

That Herodotus sought to compile an account of the “admirable” or “wonderful” (θωμάσιον, τὸ θῶμα) is a goal he establishes in the first paragraph of the *Histories* and repeatedly carries out

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<sup>14</sup> Penrose 2016: 162 notes that Aristophanes likens Artemisia to Amazons, and as his sexual jokes suggest, such a likeness projects hyper-sexuality back on to Artemisia.

<sup>15</sup> Carney 2005 notes that Caria had a history of abiding by female (or joint male and female) rule. By contrast, Herodotus depicts Persians as repeatedly expressing misogynistic views about female inferiority (see, e.g., 8.88, 9.20, 9.107), which, as Boedeker 2011: 219 notes, rarely correspond with the depiction of non-Greek elite women in Herodotus.

throughout the entire work.<sup>16</sup> Many commentators have thought that Herodotus' admiration for Artemisia consists in recognition that she, a woman, is a naval commander. But in her groundbreaking study, Munson 1988 noted that Herodotus focuses instead upon her autonomy, namely that unlike everyone else in Xerxes' armed forces, Artemisia served due to her own choice or resolution rather than from compulsion or necessity (7.99.1). Whereas previous scholars had thought that Herodotus admired her ἀνδρηίη, as it were, Munson helps us see that Herodotus admires her because she commands ὑπὸ λήματός τε καὶ ἀνδρηίης, namely from “both her resolution and her manly-courage.” Although Herodotus uses the term λῆμα to indicate courage, in this instance it means something like “resolution” or “drive”, which better captures the autonomy that Herodotus attributes to Artemisia.<sup>17</sup>

Herodotus highlights Artemisia's autonomy in his account of how she self-appropriates her gender identity for strategic purposes. Whereas Aristophanes' Artemisia is an Amazon-like

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<sup>16</sup> Herodotus begins the *Histories* by asserting that he will preserve “those great and wonderful deeds” (ἔργα μεγάλα τε καὶ θωμαστά [1.1]) produced by both Greeks and non-Greeks. Examples range from Arion's safe carriage on the back of a dolphin (1.23) to the wonders of Egypt (which are greater than any country in the world [2.35]). Munson 2001: 232–265 surveys the range and use of Herodotus' term.

<sup>17</sup> Powell 2013: 25 notes that Herodotus' use of the term ἀνδρηίη is unique in the *Histories*, although its adjectival form (ἀνδρήιος) often means male or manly (e.g. 7.153.4, 1.17.1). By contrast, his use of the term λῆμα usually conveys a notion of courage or being valiant (e.g. 5.72.4, 5.11.1, 9.62.3), but to interpret λῆμα as courage in 7.99 would make the term redundant with ἀνδρηίη.

curiosity whom men laugh at because they find her mix of male and female characteristics curious, Herodotus' Artemisia empowers her gender cleverly in her invocation of the male/female opposition in her pre-battle advice at Salamis. As I will discuss below in Part III of my paper, Artemisia faces a very difficult challenge. On the one hand, based on her own combat experience at Artemisium, she thinks that the Greek navy is superior to the Persian navy. But on the other hand, she knows that impugning the Persian navy may be perceived as an insult by the King. Thus, Artemisia tells Mardonius to tell Xerxes that he should "spare your ships and do not fight this sea battle. For these men, your adversaries, are at sea, as much better than yours as men are than women" (8.68). Artemisia's advice, of course, is eerily prophetic: the Persian fleet is bested by Athenian men and Xerxes subsequently agrees that "My men have become women, and my women men" (8.88.3). But Artemisia's invocation of the male/female gender difference is not something ascribed to her, but rather something that she interjects into her advice to Xerxes. Artemisia is not passively characterized as female; it is she her (female) self who seizes upon gender differences in order to advise her Persian (male) King about the (femaleness) of his fleet, at least in comparison to the (male) Greek fleet. That Artemisia chose to command ships in Xerxes' navy, that she chose to tell Xerxes that his navy was weak, and that she chose to attack an allied vessel during the battle of Salamis, of course, shows bravery; but those action also show autonomy and initiative, and Herodotus highlights both in his admiration of Artemisia.

After recognizing the martial prowess of the Athenian captain Aminias, whose pursuit of Artemisia caused her to sink one of her squadron's ship, Herodotus notes that

If he had known that Artemisia was sailing on that ship, he would never have stopped until he had captured her or lost his own vessel. For the Athenian triarchs had been given special instructions, and, besides, a prize of ten thousand drachmas

had been added, for whoever should capture her alive; for they regarded it as a terrible thing (δεινὸν τι) that a woman should make war upon Athens. (8.93)

No doubt, 10,000 drachma positively incentivized all the Athenian naval captains. But I also suspect that Herodotus' eye for detail calls into question rather than endorses Athenian attitudes towards women.<sup>18</sup> Athenians see in Artemisia something so terrifying (δεινὸν τι) that they command their navy to capture her alive to remove her from the battlefield. Herodotus sees in Artemisia something so admirable that he, according to his critic Plutarch, "uses more words about Artemisia than he does in his whole narrative of the naval battle" (*Malice of Herodotus*, 43). Herodotus clearly attributes to Artemisia a sort of initiative in action and autonomy that he finds uncharacteristic of women. But he is neither threatened by such a vision nor is it exhaustive of Artemisia's admirable qualities.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Sebillotte Cuchet 2015: 241–42 notes that since the battle of Salamis ultimately resulted in the establishment of the Delian League, an empire that Herodotus' contemporary non-Athenian readers loathed, the subtext of his depiction of Artemisia is "mockery" of the Athenian failure to catch Artemisia. By contrast, Ackert 2017 argues that Herodotus depicts Artemisia as a simulacrum of Athens (and thus a criticism of Athenian xenophobia).

<sup>19</sup> Dewald 1980: 13–4 notes that although there is diversity in Herodotus' depiction of women (some are primitive, some sophisticated; some are wise, and some are dangerous), he regularly (like in the case of Artemisia) depicts women as "public actors in positions of power who act more wisely and virtuously than their male counterparts." Penrose 2016: 153–55 persuasively argues that such a perspective may stem from the "hybridity" present in Halicarnassus, one familiar to the

## PART II: ARTEMISIA AS AN EXCELLENT COUNSEL

Although the testimony tradition concerning Artemisia makes clear that she has virile courage, Herodotus also attributes to her practical wisdom, a form of excellence she demonstrates by advising Xerxes before and after the battle of Salamis.<sup>20</sup> Herodotus highlights her deliberative ability in three different ways. First, Herodotus presents Artemisia as the Persian foil to the Athenian Themistocles, underscoring both of their deliberative and rhetorical abilities (and potential for trickery and cleverness).<sup>21</sup> Herodotus quotes at length (and thus invites comparison between) the pre-Salamis deliberative speeches of both Themistocles and Artemisia (8.60–62,

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sailors who served under Artemisia but also to Herodotus, who was raised in such a mix of Greek, Persian, and local customs.

<sup>20</sup> Munson 1988: 102–06, Gera 1997: 207, Pelling 2007: 103–21, Strauss 2004: 180–87, and McCoskey 2020: 213 depict Artemisia as not just brave but also wise. But Sissa 2021, more than any other work, has tried to re-establish the intellectual credentials of Artemisia, attributing to her knowledge of tactics, geo-politics, and ultimately, the nature of gender and courage in the Greek and non-Greek parts of the world (knowledge which is crucial to her advice on the battle of Salamis).

<sup>21</sup> Themistocles and Artemisia first intersect, as it were, when the former has inscriptions carved in the rocks of Artemisium to encourage Ionian and Carian contingents in Xerxes' navy to desert or fail to fight bravely (8.19–22). Although the effort was largely unsuccessful (8.85), the effort illustrates the possible connections between the two counsels and generals, a theme that the 2014 film *300: Rise of an Empire* exploits with much poetic license (which Herodotus only alludes to).

8.68). Herodotus credits Themistocles' counsel and superior judgment (γνώμη) in persuading Athens to build a navy that can serve as a "wall of wood" (7.143.2, 7.144.1); he also notes that, after the Greek victory, Themistocles was recognized as most worthy of a prize and honored by the Spartans for his wisdom (σοφία [8.123, 8.124]). Following the battle of Salamis, Themistocles' fellow Athenians viewed him as a "truly clever and excellent counsel" (σοφός τε καὶ εὐβουλος [8.110.1]), judgements similar to those that Xerxes will make about Artemisia (8.103).

Herodotus also draws parallels between Themistocles and Artemisia because of the potential for self-interested action their cleverness makes possible. As I noted in the first part of my paper, Artemisia's bravery at the battle of Salamis is complicated. As Herodotus notes, by her decision to ram one of the ships in her squadron (that of Damasithymus, king of the Calyndians) and leave no survivors "she gained doubly by what she had done" (8.87). On the one hand, her action convinced the Athenian triarch in her pursuit that Artemisia's ship was "either Greek itself or must be deserting from the non-Greek to the Greek side", a stratagem that saved her own life and that of her sailors (8.87). On the other hand, although Artemisia had sunk a ship in the Persian fleet, one of Xerxes' courtiers assured him that the destroyed vessel was Greek, thus raising the king's esteem for her. Crucial to the "double advantage" was the fact that Artemisia made sure that not a single Calyndian sailor survived her attack (lest Xerxes learn the truth of her attack on a Persian ship). However much one may justify Artemisia's duplicitous act amid threats to her own ship, Herodotus' clearly highlights that the event was ultimately to her own self-interest and benefit while at the cost of other Persian sailors.

Herodotus' depiction of Themistocles carries a similar ambiguity about his actions following Xerxes' defeat, precisely at the point that his fellow Athenians judged him a truly clever

and excellent counsel.<sup>22</sup> Originally Themistocles counseled the Greek generals that following the Persian defeat at Salamis, they should destroy Persian bridges at the Hellespont and destroy Xerxes' army before it was able to return to Asia. After the Greek generals rejected his advice, he counseled his fellow Athenians to do the opposite and instead, rebuild Athens and postpone an attack on Xerxes' forces, apparently providing the Persians with the opportunity for escape (8.109). But following his citation of Themistocles' deliberative speech, Herodotus notes that Themistocles

intended that this speech should be a reserve to his credit with the Persians, that he might have a refuge if, one day, trouble overtook him at the hands of the Athenians—which is indeed what took place.<sup>23</sup> With such words Themistocles deceived them (ταῦτα λέγων διέβαλλε), but the Athenians were convinced. They had judged him before to be a clever man (σοφός), but now he appeared as truly a

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<sup>22</sup> Herodotus also depicts Themistocles several times as susceptible to bribery and even that he suffered from “insatiable greed” (πλεονεκτέων [8.112.1]) that made him liable to double-dealing (8.5, 8.112; cf. 8.57). Since Herodotus fails to characterize Artemisia in such negative terms, she appears as a superior excellent counsel in juxtaposition with Themistocles.

<sup>23</sup> Herodotus alludes to the ostracism of Themistocles, which took place apparently in 472 or 471 BCE, after the completion of the events he chronicles in his *Histories*. If Plutarch is to be believed, Themistocles was ostracized in part “by constructing the shrine of Artemis, giving her the name Aristoboule, the Best Counselor, and so intimating that he was the best counselor Athens and the Greeks had” (ἄριστα τῇ πόλει καὶ τοῖς Ἑλλησι βουλευσάμενος [Plutarch, *Them.* 22]). See also Thuc. 1.135.3, 138.3.

clever man and excellent counselor (ἐφάνη ἐὼν ἀληθέως σοφός τε καὶ εὐβουλος),  
and they were ready to listen to anything he said. (8.109.5–8.110.1)

As I will discuss further in the next part of my paper, Xerxes elevated Artemisia to the status of counselor following her advice and bravery at the battle of Salamis, even though her bravery in part was based on self-interested deceit and killing of her own squadron members. But Herodotus' characterization of Themistocles follows a similar pattern. Themistocles is not only the source of the trickery towards Xerxes that ultimately won the battle of Salamis (namely, his false report that the Greek ships planned to flee in the dark [8.75]); he also presents advice to Athenians with the goal to better his own position with Xerxes (8.110). For both Artemisia and Themistocles, Herodotus illustrates a tight connection between deliberative excellence and cunning self-interest. It is hard to imagine that such similarities are mere coincidences.

A second way that Herodotus highlights Artemisia's deliberative excellence is his depiction of her as a "wise adviser," a trope that runs throughout the *Histories* and includes important sages and counsels, who give advice to leading figures in the narrative. Lattimore classified such individuals as "tragic warners" when their advice is ignored and "practical advisers" when their advice offers "a method of coping with a situation" that ultimately leads to success.<sup>24</sup> Artemisia's advice falls into both categories: as a "tragic warner" she unsuccessfully warns against the naval battle at Salamis (8.68) and as a "practical adviser" she successfully advises Xerxes to withdraw from Greece and transfer his command to Mardonius (8.102).

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<sup>24</sup> Lattimore 1939: 24–25. Lattimore self-consciously built upon the earlier work of H. Bischoff, but his classification has become a universally accepted interpretive lens.



There are a number of reasons why Artemisia's role as a wise adviser supports the claim that Herodotus depicts her as an excellent counsel and not merely a brave sailor. First, in the testimony tradition on Artemisia, Herodotus is almost unique in highlighting her intellectual abilities. As Table I above shows, almost all other testimony sources (save Plutarch) fail to report that Artemisia serves as an adviser to Xerxes; rather, for the most part they only report her prowess in battle, not unlike her depiction in *300: Rise of an Empire*. But, secondly, the overall structure of the Artemisia logos suggests that Herodotus is aware of her reputation for both characteristics, but that he wants to highlight her practical wisdom. Although Herodotus' account of the actual fighting at Salamis (8.84–88) focuses almost entirely on Artemisia's exploits, the Artemisia logos begins with an account of her pre-Salamis advice (8.68–69) and concludes with an account of her post-Salamis advice (8.101–103). Thus, of the seven paragraphs that Herodotus devotes to Artemisia, only two concern her brave deeds whereas five concern her wise advice. Further, the examples of her wise advice “sandwich,” as it were, her brave actions. Herodotus' account clearly privileges Artemisia's intellectual attributes over her actions in battle.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Artemisia's conduct at Salamis is itself somewhat ambiguously brave. Although she makes the best of a bad situation (the battlefield, Salamis bay, was too crowded to allow any maneuvering), Xerxes' courtiers misinterpret her attack on her ally's ship (8.88.2) and Herodotus suggests she may have a simmering feud with one of her co-commanders (8.87.3). Munson 1988: 99–102 may be correct to argue that Artemisia was justified in pursuing her self-interest in the battle, but that hardly makes her actions exemplars of bravery. Tank 2019: 82–83 and Gera 1997: 212 claim that Artemisia is not brave.

A third way that Herodotus highlights Artemisia's deliberative excellence is his depiction of her as an expert at using deliberative rhetoric. As Thomas persuasively argues, the currents of late 5<sup>th</sup> century intellectual life included extended reflection on argumentation, proof, persuasion, and rhetoric and the *Histories* need to be understood within the framework of that intellectual climate.<sup>26</sup> Thomas herself does not consider directly the examples of Artemisia's set speeches, but it seems quite natural to situate Artemisia, the deliberative rhetorician, as an excellent counsel alongside other intellectuals of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Herodotus' depiction of Artemisia as an excellent rhetorician likens her to Aspasia of Miletus, whom numerous sources depict as an expert on deliberative rhetoric.<sup>28</sup> An examination of Artemisia's actual deliberative rhetoric (which the

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas 2002 is primarily interested in showing how such philosophy of language influenced Herodotus' patterns of explanation and argumentation in his own writing and she discusses much less briefly (e.g., Thomas 2002: 109–11) patterns of deliberative rhetoric in the *Histories*.

<sup>27</sup> Weil 1976: 223–224 and Munson 1988: 103–04 also detects evidence of sophistic elements in Artemisia's depiction.

<sup>28</sup> Might Herodotus' audience have detected allusions to Aspasia in his depiction of Artemisia? There is no evidence that Aspasia exhibited bravery, much less martial excellence, during Athens' military conflicts of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, As Penrose 2016: 155 notes Aspasia "may have exercised indirect control over military affairs through her influence over Pericles, but [unlike Artemisia] would never have been allowed to command troops." Rather, as both Plutarch and Plato attest, Aspasia was noteworthy for her rhetorical ability (Plutarch, *Life of Pericles*, 24; Plato, *Menexenus* 236a–b. See further Waithe 1987: 78–81). Artemisia, I hope to show in the next section of my paper, should also be recognized for her rhetorical ability. But whereas Aspasia is

next section of my paper provides) conclusively shows that Herodotus depicts her as a prominent and impressive strategic thinker.

### PART III: ARTEMISIA IN STRATEGIC ACTION COUNSELING XERXES

Although Herodotus clearly depicts Artemisia not only as a brave warrior but also as a wise adviser, the strongest evidence to support the claim that Herodotus depicts her as an excellent counsel comes from a careful examination of her actual advice (and its argumentative support). In slightly fewer than 250 words, Herodotus depicts Artemisia as a careful, rhetorically brilliant, experience-based, utterly heterodox excellent counsel. Several themes run throughout her pre-Salami advice speech. First, the speech repeatedly balances frankness with caution. As the sequel of the speech makes clear, Artemisia must be enormously careful; those who envy and wish malice towards her are convinced the speech will be her undoing.<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, Artemisia meets the challenge, especially in how she objectively evaluates the weakness of the Persian navy. Secondly, Artemisia repeatedly grounds her argument in data she has compiled both at first-hand (during her previous naval engagement at Artemisium) and at second-hand (from an intelligence network on Salamis). Finally, the advice she offers is truly radical indeed: Artemisia not only goes against the “majority view” of Xerxes’ other commanders about whether he should fight at Salamis; she also calls into question the very purpose or mission of his European invasion. That these themes re-

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represented as a teacher of rhetoric who has theorized the nature of the polis, Herodotus depicts Artemisia as a “geo-political” strategic thinker.

<sup>29</sup> As Garland 2017: 7 puts it, the king’s advisers form “an echo-chamber for the king’s policies.”

occur throughout the beginning, middle, and end of the speech makes clear that Artemisia's words are hardly ad hoc, off the cuff comments.

Mardonius solicits advice from Xerxes' naval commanders prior to the battle of Salamis, beginning with the king of Sidon, who represented the largest and most reputable contingent in the Persian navy (7.99.3); like all the other commanders, he recommended attacking the Greek fleet bottled up in the bay of Salamis (8.68.1). Herodotus has Artemisia argue against the consensus view in a well-organized, carefully argued speech (which I have organized into sub-parts and sub-arguments for analytical purposes):

[PREFACE] Mardonius, tell the king that I have this to say, I who have not been the worst (οὔτε κακίστη) in his fights in Euboea, nor were my exploits the least (οὔτε ἐλάχιστα). Master, it is but just (δίκαιον) that I should declare my advice (γνώμη), those thoughts (τὰ φρονέουσα) that I find will serve your purposes best.

[ADVICE 1] And so I say to you: spare your ships and do not fight this sea battle.

[ARGUMENT 1.1] For these men, your adversaries, are at sea, as much better than yours as men are than women.

[ARGUMENT 1.2] Why must you put all at risk in sea fights? Have you not Athens, which is why you set out to make the war? Have you not all the rest of Greece? No one stands against you; those who have done so have come off as befitted them.

[ADVICE 2a and 2b] Let me tell you how I think the fortunes of your adversaries will turn out. If you are not so hasty (μὴ ἐπειχθῆς) as to fight at sea but [2a] keep your ships here, near the land, or [2b] even advance into the Peloponnese, you will easily compass, my master, all that you have come for.

[ARGUMENT 2.1a] For the Greeks are not able to hold out against you for any length of time; you will scatter them, and they will fly to their several cities. For they have no food in this island of theirs, as I learn (ὥς ἐγὼ πυνθάνομαι), and [ARGUMENT 2.1b] it is not likely (οἰκός), once you drive with your land army toward the Peloponnese, that those who came here from that Peloponnese should stand firm and care to fight at sea to save Athens.

[ARGUMENT 2.2] But if here and now you are in such haste (ἐπειχθῆς) to fight at sea, I fear lest damaging your fleet will bring mischief upon your army as well.

[ARGUMENT 1.3] Besides, King, lay this up in your heart: how good masters are wont to have bad slaves and bad masters good slaves. You are the best of men, and you have had bad slaves who are reckoned as your allies—these Egyptians and Cypriots and Cilicians and Pamphylans; they are no good (ὄφελος ἐστὶ οὐδέν).

(VIII.68.1–2)

Let me analyze the various parts and subparts of Artemisia's speech to show the deliberative and rhetorical excellence of an excellent counsel in action.

PREFACE: Artemisia uses the preface—in a self-deprecating but rhetorically elegant fashion—to distinguish herself from the other naval commanders in two ways. First, she reminds the King of

her own achievements at the recent battle of Artemisium and the hands-on experience it provides her about the respective abilities of the Greek and Persian fleets.<sup>30</sup> Secondly, she declares that her advice is grounded in justice, which consists in what is advantageous to the king, rather than the court politics or self-interest of Xerxes' other commanders.

ADVICE 1: Artemisia expresses her advice—that Xerxes should forgo naval combat with the Greek forces at Salamis—in terms of material, rather than human, costs (viz., that the battle of Salamis will result in lost ships—she makes no mention of the potential catastrophic loss of life). She thus assumes the King's perspective (reiterated several times) that those who fight for him are his subjects and, indeed, his slaves—extensions of himself when they are victorious, and of “no account” when their lives are lost in defeat (8.68.2, 8.102.2).

ARGUMENT 1.1: As noted in Part II of my paper, it is Artemisia herself who actively plays the “gender card” in her oration and it is hard to imagine any Persian commander, except for a woman whom Xerxes esteems already (7.99), arguing to the King that his navy fights like women. As

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<sup>30</sup> According to Herodotus, Greek and Persian fleets fought indecisively for two days at Artemisium, but on the third day their forces were equal in size and the Greeks bested the Persians (in part because the Persian fleet was so large that it “was its own destroyer,” viz. that their ships lacked sufficient room to navigate without collisions within the narrow straights between mainland Greece and Euboea [8.16]). If Artemisia was successful (or at least “not the worst”) at Artemisium, then she was perfectly suited to provide Xerxes first-hand advice about Salamis and the strengths of the Greek navy when fighting in a narrow body of water.

anticipated by the Preface of her speech, Artemisia's advice is grounded in her own experience at Artemisium: its first argument (1.1) boldly asserts the relative weakness of the Persian navy and its closing argument (1.3) provides an explanation, based on Artemisia's first-hand experience, for why the "Persian navy" is in fact a conglomeration of ships from different contingents that vary greatly in quality and loyalty to the King.

ARGUMENT 1.2: That some of the members of Xerxes' court thought that Artemisia's speech "would be the end of her" (ἀπολεομένης αὐτῆς [8.69.1]) underscores the tightrope she must walk in giving truthful advice. Thus, Artemisia counter-balances her claim about the inferiority of the Persian navy with three short rhetorical questions, two of which reaffirm Xerxes' success, including the question "Have you not Athens, which is why you set out to make the war?" But such an affirmation requires a redefinition of the purpose behind Xerxes' invasion of Greece. Argument 1.2 defines the goal of Xerxes invasion of Greece solely in terms of the destruction of Athens (8.68.2; cf. 8.102.3). Although Xerxes, like his father Darius, identified his Greek invasion in terms of vengeance against the Athenians for participating in the destruction of Sardis during the Ionian revolution (5.99–102), he also defined his mission in terms of the territorial expansion of the Persian empire—that it have "the same limit as Zeus' sky" (7.8.a)—and the subjugation of the continents of Asia and Europe under a single yoke.<sup>31</sup> Artemisia, by contrast, re-defines the

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<sup>31</sup> Xerxes convenes a council of nobles to debate the European invasion (7.8.1) and some, such as Artabantus, caution him against such imperialism (7.10). But Xerxes' own opinion, initially (7.8), at the conclusion of the debate (7.10), and following three successive dreams (7.19) is that the mission of his invasion is that "all the earth and that all mankind should be slaves to Xerxes"

purpose of Xerxes' invasion solely in terms of vengeance against Athens, which Xerxes had indeed accomplished in his destruction of the physical city prior to the engagement at Salamis (8.52–54). Rather subtly, her advice speech is thus another piece of Herodotus' more general critique of Persian (and perhaps Periclean) imperialism.<sup>32</sup>

ADVICE 2: Artemisia's second piece of advice consists in the proposal that Xerxes pursue an alternative course of action to a sea battle, namely that he *either* [2.a] delay his naval battle *or* [2.b] that he use his navy in support of a land attack upon the Peloponnesus.<sup>33</sup> Artemisia also interjects—ever so subtly—a hypothetical criticism of the Great King, namely that her advice requires that he be “not so hasty (μὴ ἐπειχθῆς [8.68.2]) as to fight at sea” (a point she will repeat in Argument 2.2). Whereas Argument 1.1 insulted the Persian navy, Advice 2 and Argument 2.2 potentially insult the Great King, suggesting that if he does not follow Artemisia's advice, he will be acting rashly.

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(7.19). Xerxes' arguments about the necessity of empire echo those of Pericles and Cleon during the Peloponnesian Wars (Thuc. 2.63, 3.37).

<sup>32</sup> An anonymous referee for the journal insightfully points out that Herodotus has the Massagetae queen Tomyris prophetically warn Cyrus about the dangers of imperialism (1.206), a warning that Cyrus ignores—to his own destruction (1.214). The speech clearly prefigures Artemisia's anti-imperialism warnings to Xerxes.

<sup>33</sup> As Tourraix 1990: 382 notes, Artemisia offers rather sophisticated advice: She presents Xerxes with not one but two different options, and she walks Xerxes through the advantages and disadvantages of each option.



ARGUMENT 2.1a: In support of the proposal that Xerxes delay a naval battle at Salamis, Artemisia claims that, “based on what I learn” (ὥς ἐγὼ πυνθάνομαι [8.68]), the Greek forces on Salamis lack food; thus, resource exhaustion favors Xerxes rather than the Greeks. Artemisia implies that she has some sort of intelligence network on the island of Salamis that is able to evaluate whether Athens was able to transfer sufficient resources to the island during the evacuation of the city. Given the chaotic evacuation of Athens in the aftermath of the defeat at Thermopylae, several commentators suspect that Artemisia’s intelligence was accurate and that the over-populated Salamis island could not long sustain its own inhabitants, Athenian war refugees, and the massive number of sailors that staff 200+ triremes.<sup>34</sup> Artemisia’s intelligence network on Salamis shows that she offers counsel based on evidence and investigation rather than bravado.

ARGUMENT 2.1b: Artemisia’s argument in support of her second proposal (viz., to march on the Peloponnesus) invokes the language of likelihood (οἰκός) and goes to the heart of the most-difficult “geopolitical” question of her age: Will the Hellenic League survive as an alliance if Xerxes can separate Athens and Sparta? It is impossible for me to rehearse all the details that speak to that question, except to note that Artemisia’s judgment coincides with that of Herodotus himself. Earlier in the war narrative Herodotus claims that the Athenians were the “saviors of Greece” because in the absence of their navy, the various Spartan and Peloponnesian land forces massed at

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<sup>34</sup> See Garland 2017: 48, 51, and Strauss 2004: 168. A trireme is outfitted with 170 rowers plus archers, marines, a pilot, and a captain (Strauss 2004: xix). Thus, the island of Salamis would need to feed and support approximately an additional 40,000 men while Xerxes delayed an attack.

the Corinthian Isthmus would ultimately fall prey to Xerxes' overwhelming land forces (7.139). A land attack on the Peloponnesus, Artemisia reasons, would likely dissolve the Hellenic League and leave both Athens and Sparta vulnerable to being divided and conquered.

ARGUMENT 2.2: Artemisia reasserts that an immediate naval attack on the Greek fleet at Salamis would be a hasty decision, one that reflects poorly on he who makes such a choice. Yet Artemisia also makes explicit an assumed premise, one already encountered in Argument 1.2: Persia's military strength and civic identity lies not, in the words of Mardonius, in successful contests of "wood, but of men and of horses" (8.100). If Xerxes' navy is defeated at Salamis, such a loss jeopardizes his army also, the force that Xerxes clearly privileges and identifies as the backbone of his empire (both militarily and politically). Although 5<sup>th</sup> century "super-powers" possessed both naval and land forces, state-identity often privileged one of those forces (or even a branch of it, for instance its heavy infantry or its cavalry). Even though Artemisia is a naval commander, she astutely recognizes and reminds Xerxes that his naval escapades may have unanticipated consequences for its land forces, the heart of Persia's military self-identity.

ARGUMENT 1.3: The final argument provides first-hand evidence in support of the claim (found in Argument 1.1) that the Persian Navy is inferior to the Greek navy.<sup>35</sup> Xerxes' naval forces are composed of different contributions from different conquered communities and exhibit varying degrees of quality and loyalty. Artemisia's own contingent is a good example: although her five

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<sup>35</sup> Artemisia's invocation of "good masters having bad slaves" in 1.3 also separates criticism of the Persian forces from criticisms of the Persian King.

ships, drawn from different cities in southwestern Anatolia, are reputed to be the best in the fleet (7.99), Herodotus hints that Artemisia and Damasithymus, king of Calyndus and commander of their vessel in Artemisia's squadron, are at odds with each other (8.87.3). The contingents that Artemisia explicitly criticizes—those from Egypt, Cyprus, Cilicia, and Pamphylia—faced challenges of both loyalty and naval competence.<sup>36</sup> Artemisia's accurate appraisal of Xerxes' naval forces is the first-hand basis for her accurate prediction about the outcome at Salamis.<sup>37</sup>

Following Xerxes' defeat at Salamis, he turns once again to Artemisia for counsel. But Herodotus linguistically marks that Xerxes elevates her status and explicitly discusses her as a counsel. Pre-Salamis, Herodotus reports four times that Artemisia offers "advice," each time using the Greek term γνώμη (8.68–69). But post-Salamis, Xerxes repeatedly (seven times in three paragraphs) refers to the "counseling with" (συμβουλίη or συμβουλεύομαι) that he and Artemisia undertake (although he continues to describe what Mardonius suggests, post-Salamis, as "advice,"

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<sup>36</sup> As Strauss 2004: 105 notes, the Cypriots were part of the Ionian Revolt of 499 BCE and the Egyptians had revolted from the Empire in 486 BCE. The Cilician squadron had been defeated at Artemisium (8.14), although the Egyptians were recognized as the best Persian squadron in that battle (8.17).

<sup>37</sup> Plutarch claims that Herodotus puts "Sibylline" words in Artemisia's mouth when she predicts the outcome of the battle at Salamis (870A). Sissa 2021: 56 notes that Plutarch is paradoxically right: Artemisia is as wise as a prophet, but for empirical rather than prophetic reasons. Plutarch ignores that Artemisia is offering advice based on her first-hand experience of the strengths and weaknesses of that force at Artemisium.

i.e., γνώμη).<sup>38</sup> Thus, following her first unsuccessful speech, Xerxes appears to elevate Artemisia to the status of a “wise adviser” (whose advice Mardonius conveys to him) to his “co-counselor” (with whom he meets in private), one whom Xerxes claims knows exactly what he himself is thinking (αὐτὸς ἐνόεε [8.103]).

Artemisia’s post-Salamis counsel is far less complicated and does not require the detailed analysis I provided above. Rather, she endorses Mardonius’ advice that Xerxes should return home and argues that whether Mardonius wins or loses, Xerxes has still achieved his goals. She reasons (using a rhetorically splendid μὲν/δὲ construction) that

if (τοῦτο μὲν γὰρ ἦν) he subdues these people as he claims he will do, and if his plans go as he hopes, it will, my lord, still be your act (σὸν τὸ ἔργον); for it will be your slaves who have done it. But if (τοῦτο δὲ ἦν) things go opposite to Mardonius’ advice, there will be no great disaster as regards your survival and that of your house (περὶ οἶκον τὸν σόν). (8.102.)

Echoing argument 1.2 (and thus reinforcing the claim across both pre- and post-Salamis advice-speeches), Artemisia claims that Xerxes’ goal is simply the burning of Athens in response to Athenian complicity in the burning of Sardis (8.102; cf. 8.68.2). And yet her advice may also be based in her accurate reading of her audience. Herodotus concludes the Artemisia logos by noting that

Xerxes was delighted with her counsel, for she really said exactly what he thought himself. For if all the men and women (πάντες καὶ πᾶσαι) in the world had

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<sup>38</sup> For the range of the term σύμβουλος (and cognates), see Landauer 219: 6–10.

counseled him to remain in Greece, I personally believe that he would not have done so, he was so completely in the grip of fear (καταρρωδήκεε). But he praised Artemisia and sent her off to take his children to Ephesus. (8.103; cf. 8.107)

Herodotus' πάντες καὶ πᾶσαι—asserting that an advisee's stubbornness is a gender-neutral limitation on an adviser's wisdom—is a nice touch. But might Artemisia's rhetorically brilliant and strategically wise counsel call into question the historicity of Herodotus' Artemisia story?

#### CONCLUSION: THE HISTORICITY OF HERODOTUS' ARTEMISIA

Given the numerous testimonial accounts of Artemisia's presence at the battle of Salamis, the question of her historical existence seems fundamentally unlike that of say Diotima, who appears only in Plato's *Symposium*. Nonetheless, already in antiquity, the 2<sup>nd</sup> C. CE scholar Plutarch called into question whether or not Herodotus had embellished Artemisia's intellectual accomplishments in order to slight those of Themistocles. Indeed, as noted in the second part of my paper, clearly Herodotus draws attention to the parallels and similarities that exist between Artemisia and Themistocles and Plutarch's criticisms of Herodotus reinforce the attribution of such parallels. Plutarch never denies the historical existence of Artemisia (and indeed, he refers to her in his *Life of Themistocles* [14]), but he denies the plausibility of a woman, by her own intelligence, providing such wise counsel to Xerxes. By means of conclusion, I would like to examine Plutarch's criticisms of Herodotus' account of Artemisia and the plausibility of Herodotus' favorable depiction of her in contrast to his depiction of Themistocles.

Plutarch's short essay *On the Malice of Herodotus* claims not only that Herodotus is guilty of lies and fabrications (ψεύσματα καὶ πλάσματα [854F]), but that those lies and falsehoods are

made with malice in order to slight specific historical individuals or fail to give them their credit.<sup>39</sup> What he has in mind are literary techniques such as describing an historical person in severe rather than mild terms. For instance, Plutarch juxtaposes calling the Athenian general Nicias “fanatic” (θειασμός) rather than “someone overly inclined to divination” (θεόληπτος [855B]) or ascribing disreputable and contestable motives to historical actors (for instance, saying that Pericles went to war because of the nefarious control of Aspasia rather than to check Spartan arrogance [856A]).

In sections 37–38, Plutarch claims that “our clever historian does everything in his power to obscure the part played by Themistocles and to transfer the credit to another” (869D). His evidence is two-fold. First, in his account of the Greek debate over whether to make a stand at Salamis, Herodotus reports that it was an Athenian named Mnesiphilus who had the insight that

If the Greeks draw off the ships from Salamis, you will never again fight for any fatherland at all; everyone will run off, each one to his own city, and neither Eurybiades nor any other man will be able to keep the army from scattering. Greece will be lost, and all through sheer folly. (7.57)

In the immediate sequel, Herodotus claims that Themistocles presents Mnesiphilus’ view “as though it were his own idea” (7.58). According to Plutarch, Herodotus maliciously implies that Themistocles is a dishonest man who lacks the insight to propose such advice.

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<sup>39</sup> Plutarch stands at the beginning of the “Liar School” of interpretation that calls into question whether Herodotus intended to give us factual history at all. Fehling 1989 is its most recent iteration.

But secondly, Plutarch claims that Herodotus puts Mnesiphilus' insight into Artemisia's mouth, in what I have identified as Argument 2.1a (namely, 8.68.2) in the third part of my paper, namely her insight into the stability of the Hellenic League. According to Plutarch, Herodotus is not content with saying that Themistocles never recognized what ought to be done and that it escaped his notice—this man who was nicknamed Odysseus for his cleverness. Artemisia, who was of the same city with Herodotus, without being taught by anyone (μηδενὸς διδάξαντος), but by her own wisdom (διὰ τὴν φρόνησιν), thus warned Xerxes....All that Herodotus needs here is verse to present Artemisia as a Sibyl, so accurately does she predict the future. (869F–870D)

As Plutarch puts the point in the sequel, Herodotus tells the story of the battle of Salamis as if it were nothing but the story of Artemisia, his fellow Halicarnassian (873F). Plutarch thinks that it is implausible that Artemisia would understand the vulnerabilities of the Hellenic League better than its author Themistocles and that Herodotus maligns Themistocles so that he can praise his fellow countryperson.

On some level, it is impossible to adjudicate between Herodotus and Plutarch on the historicity and characteristics of Artemisia. Herodotus uses Artemisia as a central character in his story about Xerxes' invasion of Greece and it is impossible to know how closely that character corresponds with the actual historical person of Artemisia (not to mention how Herodotus would have had access to what transpired during the private conference between Xerxes and Artemisia [8.102–103]). I have argued that Herodotus clearly chooses to depict his character Artemisia as an excellent counsel and I think it is fair to ask whether such a depiction is implausible, as Plutarch claims. Nonetheless, two problems call into question Plutarch's criticisms of Herodotus. First, an underlying principle of Plutarch's essay is that praise in historical circumstances is a zero-sum

situation (854F). If Herodotus depicts Artemisia in a flattering light, then he must at the same time be disparaging someone else (namely, Themistocles), or at least failing to give proper credit. Although it is true that Herodotus disparages Themistocles as misrepresenting another's opinion as his own, the main reason Plutarch dismisses Artemisia's speech as Sibylline prophecy is because he assumes that Themistocles and Artemisia could not both recognize the instabilities facing the Hellenic League. But the notion that Greco-Persian political insight is a zero-sum situation seems unlikely. Nothing precludes both Artemisia and Themistocles recognizing the weaknesses and potential pit falls of the Hellenic League, especially since (as I noted in part III of my paper) Artemisia appears to have had an intelligence network on Salamis and thus could have been quite well aware of how the various Greek naval contingents were leaning.

But secondly, Plutarch gives evidence of his own malice in his evaluation of Artemisia. Earlier in his essay, he writes that

Herodotus had no right to be so very severe even towards the Greeks who medized.

After all, though some regard him as a citizen of Thurii, his attachment is really to the Halicarnassians, those Dorians who took their harem (γυναικωνίτιδος) with them on the expedition against Greece. (868A)

That Herodotus possessed sympathies for the former ruler of the Greek city from which he was exiled is, of course, quite possible and often mentioned as a reason for his extended treatment of Artemisia.<sup>40</sup> But likening her leadership of the Carian fleet to taking the segregated living quarters

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<sup>40</sup> Since Plutarch, authors have attributed Herodotus' treatment of Artemisia to pride in his fellow Halicarnassian. Munson 1988: 91–92 and Tourraix 1990: 385–86 question whether such pride is sufficient to explain why Herodotus labels Artemisia as a “wonder.”



(or “harem”) of women on tour seems to dismiss the very notion of female leadership.<sup>41</sup> When Plutarch introduces Artemisia, he describes her as someone who offers advice to Xerxes “without being taught by any one (μηδενὸς διδάξαντος), but by her own wisdom” (διὰ τὴν φρόνησιν [869F]). Plutarch implies that it is implausible for an untrained woman to arrive at geopolitical insight on her own and one seems forced to accept that his criticisms of Herodotus’ depiction of Artemisia are based on the fact that she is female.<sup>42</sup> By contrast, numerous modern commentators

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<sup>41</sup> Plutarch also sarcastically dismisses Artemisia’s post-Salamis promotion to the position of overseeing the children of Xerxes (8.103, 8.107; 870A). Although Romm 1998 takes Artemisia’s position as “royal nanny” to be dismissive, most commentators recognize that her role as supervisor of the royal children is a position of honor (e.g., Strauss 2004: 56–57, 233; Harrell 2003: 77). Weil 1976 suggests that « Plutarque ne voulait pas se laisser duper par un récit sophistique » (223).

<sup>42</sup> In fairness to Plutarch, he did compile testimony in a treatise entitled the *Virtues of Women*, in which he claims that “man’s virtue and woman’s virtue are one and the same” (242F–243E). But most of his female examples of virtue consist in instances of bravery or endurance rather than deliberative excellence. For instance, he identifies one Aretaphila of Cyrene (c. 50 BCE) to whom he attributes “political cleverness” (πολιτικὴ δεινότης [255E]) that is exhibited in numerous domestic plots to unseat the tyrant Nicocrates. When the plots are successful, her fellow citizens invited her to share in Cyrene’s government, but Aretaphila instead withdrew to the women’s quarters and spent the rest of her life at the loom (257E). It is hard to imagine a less “political” version of Artemisia.

have contrasted Herodotus' depiction of women positively to those of his late 5<sup>th</sup> century Athenian counterparts, most noticeably Thucydides.<sup>43</sup>

Herodotus attributes extraordinary intellectual excellence to Artemisia, before, during, and after the battle of Salamis. Numerous later sources omit discussion of Artemisia's role as an excellent counselor and focus upon her bravery. Plutarch, the only other source who considers Artemisia's role as a counselor, dismisses Herodotus' account on the grounds that he is partial to his fellow Halicarnassian, that he fails to do justice to Themistocles' strategic insight, and that it is implausible that a woman, more suited to residential segregation and taking care of children, could give a spotless geo-political speech without the teaching and training of (presumably) male teachers. Indeed, Herodotus appears to put into Artemisia's mouth several of his own self-professed beliefs, for instance about the strategic foolishness of fighting at Salamis (rather than on the Corinthian Isthmus) and more generally about the futility of empire.<sup>44</sup> But Herodotus'

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<sup>43</sup> As Dewald 1980: 13 notes, Herodotus' depictions of public women (like Tomyris and Artemisia) "provide the most dramatic illustration of a general tendency found in all of Herodotus' active women. They conduct their affairs rationally and frequently analyze the situation that confronts them from both a moral and a political point of view; further, they succeed in their objectives more often and more efficiently than the men who oppose them." Herodotus' treatment of women (found in roughly 375 passages) is both more substantive and more complimentary than that of Thucydides, who mentions women in his *History* approximately 20 times (and names specific women only eight times). See further Blok 2002: 225–27.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. 7.139, 7.10, and 8.68. Herodotus begins his account of Artemisia by saying that "I do not mention the other [Persian] captains, as being not so obliged (ὥς οὐκ ἀναγκαζόμενος [7.99.1])."

depiction of Artemisia as an excellent counsel is implausible only to one who share's Plutarch's assumptions about the limitations of the intellectual potential of women. Herodotus' choice to depict Artemisia as an excellent counsel fits quite well with his treatment of female characters throughout his *Histories* and makes his work a foundational text for women in the history of western political thought.<sup>45</sup>

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Munson 2001: 257–58 notes Herodotus' play on the use of his terms for “necessity” and suggests that Artemisia is an analogy for Herodotus the historian (viz., both are free to do what they wish, Artemisia in combat and Herodotus in his story telling).

<sup>45</sup> I had the honor of presenting an earlier version of this paper at the Women Intellectuals in Antiquity conference at Keble College (Oxford), in February 2020, at which time my paper received spirited discussion. I am grateful to Giulia Sissa, Denise Eileen McCoskey, Helen Tank, Peter Adamson, and Deborah Boedeker for sharing with me versions of their work that touch upon aspects of Artemisia, especially amid the shutdown of libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic. I am also grateful for written comments on the paper from Walter Penrose, Carol Atack, and two perceptive referees for the journal.

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