

## CHAPTER TEN

### WOMEN IN HERODOTUS' *HISTORIES*

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#### *Introduction: the importance of women in the Histories*

Herodotus' *Histories* offer the reader a view of a wide-ranging historical process which involved nearly the whole inhabited world. By situating the Greco-Persian war in this context, Herodotus conferred a special meaning on the immense conflict that still governed the actual political conditions of the eastern Mediterranean and deeply influenced the Greeks' perceptions of themselves and the world. Women play a salient role in the historical world as Herodotus portrays it. They partake in all activities that form the body of the *Histories*: they rule kingdoms, produce or nurture royal children, take vital decisions, found oracles, serve in simple jobs, fall victim to war, take revenge, and participate in warfare. Women perform some of these activities on a smaller scale than men, notably in the fields of politics and military action; in others they outdo the men's contribution, particularly when taking responsibility for religious observance and the preservation of social stability. In the words of John Gould,

(...) what is most striking throughout is what I would call the visibility of women in the world as Herodotus presents it, and their often paramount role in determining what happens; this is in stark contrast to the way in which the public world of political action appears elsewhere in Greek literature. (Gould (1989) 130–1)

Women's participation in the narrated historical events is thoroughly intertwined with all other aspects of the *Histories*. Herodotus' work strikes the modern reader as holistic in the strong interdependence of its subject matter, sources, selection, synthesis, explanation, and presentation—the elements that constitute any major historical work. Among the much-debated questions evoked by the *Histories* and the craft of their author, there are few themes that are not in some way

connected with the role of women as a group with distinct functions in society, or with gender as a fundamental category of historical understanding.

The significance of women in the historical narrative of the *Histories* is often demonstrated by enumerating when and how women are mentioned, notably by contrast to Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Dewald (1981: 92) notes 375 references to women in Herodotus (Cartledge (1993) 128 mentions 381), as against Lateiner's finding only six in Thucydides ((1989) 265; cf. Gould (1989) 129–30). These six are the only individual women who are mentioned by name;<sup>1</sup> Loraux counts about twenty instances where Thucydides mentions 'women and children' or other anonymous collectives that included women (Loraux (1995)). Of course, numbers reflect conceptions of history here. In writing the history of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides bestowed upon war the quality of being—or revealing—the essence of history, simultaneously presenting this view as the objective truth (Loraux (1986a); Hornblower (1991<sup>2</sup>) 59–66). As a consequence, he considered the more or less rational behaviour and decisions of those who were politically and strategically responsible to be the decisive factors in the historical process and hence the things really worth knowing. His approach inevitably produced a historiography in which women could not be expected to figure as historical agents. Instead they were conceived of as being subject to their feminine nature (*phusis*) which, by representing the vulnerable *oikos* side of the warring states, could only feature as a backdrop to what was historically significant (Loraux (1995); cf. Wiedemann (1983); Harvey (1985); Cartledge (1993)). Moreover, in dealing with a war that was fought among the Greeks themselves, Thucydides was not compelled to take into account cultural difference—one of the formative factors in Herodotus' historiography that induced the latter to recognize women as important agents.

However, the differences between their conceptions of history obviously cannot be reduced to the demands inherent in the subject matter of their respective works. Neither will it do to assume their

<sup>1</sup> The priestess of Argos, Chrysis, and her successor Phaeinis (2.2.1 and 4.133.2–3, both serving chronological purposes); Archedice and Myrrhine, the daughter and wife of Hippias (6.59.3, 55.1); the mythical Procne (2.29.3), and the savage Thracian Brauro, who took part in killing her husband, the Edonian king (4.107.3); see Lateiner (1989) 265.

thoroughly distinct social environments as an explanation of these differences.<sup>2</sup> Whatever the reasons for his particular standpoint, Herodotus presents a view of the world in which women played a central role in all cultural and social relations. Like Thucydides, he often mentions circumstances in which it was necessary for the men to bring 'the women and children' of a community into a state of safety,<sup>3</sup> but the context of the *Histories* gives a different meaning to the same kind of event. Herodotus never attributes the characteristics of people as a group to nature (*phusis*). Instead, his emphasis on *nomos* (a custom of such impact as to function as a natural law within a community) as the governing force in people's behaviour is articulated in an ethnography in which gender-relations, and women's activities in particular, are among the cardinal criteria of description and evaluation (Rossellini and Saïd (1978)). For instance, Herodotus indicates the topsy-turvy nature of the Egyptian world by observations to the effect that in Egypt the roles of men and women were exactly the reverse of those of the Greeks (2.35); and the successful resistance of the Scythians against the Persian kings is set against the background of their *nomoi*, a nomad way of life, while in the case of tribes such as the Massagetae and the Sauromatae the women are shown to be as valiant and independent as the men (1.205–16; 4.110–17).<sup>4</sup> Although he can only use Greek practices as a norm, often implicitly, his aim is clearly to demonstrate that what is considered normal varies from one society to another.

Women represent a kind of seismograph of the general condition of a civilization or society. They are essential indicators of normality (Lateiner (1989) 135, 140) and, consequently, of transgressions of that normality. The notion of normality includes a moral aspect and an idea of tradition; it refers to *nomos* in its practical and in its prescriptive sense. In the *Histories*, women who act in a positive way often defend the *nomos* against irresponsible transgressions by men,

<sup>2</sup> Fehling (1989) 243–5 thinks that Herodotus was not at all the upper-class figure he is usually taken to have been. I do not think that this argument is of any help in understanding the structure of the *Histories*; a dependence on different kinds of literary genre seems to be more to the point.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., 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; cf. Dewald (1981) 121.

<sup>4</sup> I have argued elsewhere that Herodotus uses the Greek myth of the Amazons to explain the *nomoi* of the Sauromatae, rather than to identify the Scythians as the origin of the Amazons, which is the usual interpretation of this passage (Blok (1995) 86–9). See also Ch. 9 in this volume.

as when Cyno the servant woman saves the royal child Cyrus from destruction by his own grandfather (1.110–13). Cyno's role in fact provides an example of Herodotus' tendency to illuminate important people and events by focussing on small and apparently insignificant ones (van der Veen (1996) 23–52). Conversely, women whose agency is destructive, or who are cast in a negative light, indicate that something is rotten in the society to which they belong (Pheretima fulfilling a long tradition of strife and murder in Cyrene and Barce, 4.160–2, 202–5, and the unpredictable power of the Persian queens, a component of dynastic autocracy; cf. Lateiner (1989) 139). The individuals who take fundamental decisions in the *Histories* are situated within this cultural context, moulded by Herodotus' understanding of it.

This assessment of the historical perspective created in the *Histories* forms one strand of this essay. The published contributions that I shall discuss are mainly those that take this structural coherence of Herodotus' historiography as a starting point. My aim is to elucidate what the analysis of women's role in Herodotus' work has contributed to our understanding of the *Histories*. The debate on the relationship between narrative and historical 'reality' in the *Histories*, which seems to have become the overarching question in Herodotean scholarship,<sup>5</sup> has been stimulated by discussions on the representations of women. Among the factors contributing to this interest are Herodotus' stories about the power and sexual freedom of women in faraway societies. These stories have fanned the imagination of readers from antiquity to the present, but, simultaneously, they have recurrently evoked doubts, and hence questions, about the truth of it all. Since Herodotus' account of Babylon—the Babylonian queens Semiramis and Nitocris (1.184–5), and the practice in the same city of selling and prostituting the daughters of citizens (1.196)—is clearly unreliable,<sup>6</sup> why should one believe his narrative about the battle of Salamis?<sup>7</sup> Another such factor is the discrepancy between Herodotus'

<sup>5</sup> In the *Arethusa* volume on Herodotus (1987), the emphasis has shifted almost entirely towards the narrative side of the *Histories*. The contributors to the volume discuss specific episodes using cautionary phrases such as 'whatever may really have happened, Herodotus tells that . . .'. Yet any assessment of *historical* narrative is ultimately concerned with a narrative *about* something, an assumption which is implicitly taken for granted in much of the *Arethusa* volume.

<sup>6</sup> Rollinger (1993); Beard and Henderson (1997); from a different point of view Lloyd (1976) 289–91.

<sup>7</sup> See also Ch. 15 in this volume.

views on women's prominence and what is generally considered to have been the more common practice in Greece at the time, as noted by Gould. What made Herodotus describe the world so differently from his contemporaries? And what exactly is it that is different? An assessment of the range of positions taken by scholars on questions dealing with narration and historical process therefore forms the second strand of this chapter.

*Approaching the theme: fact and fiction in the Histories*

Since there is 'no single formula which covers the role of women in Herodotus' (Gould (1989) 130), there is no single interpretative framework which may accommodate all, or most, scholarly work on the subject. The various approaches rather reflect the problems raised by the character of Herodotus' work itself. The *Histories* seem to me to pose an extreme case of a generic question about all historical writing: how are we to understand the relationship between historiography as narration and the events it claims to describe and explain? This question is both more intractable and more important than might appear at first glance. For instance, when distinguishing the elements that together make up the *Histories*, Immerwahr concludes that 'historical knowledge in Herodotus moves on three levels: events, traditions about events, and the historical work which interprets these traditions' (Immerwahr (1966) 6). This analysis gives a fine insight into the way a reader experiences Herodotus' text, but the underlying problem surfaces again in the choice of priority. Either one proceeds from the 'historical events and the traditions about them', or one ascribes the decisive role to 'the historical work which interprets these traditions'. In the first case, the impact of the interpretative level is not belittled, but it is regarded ultimately as the kaleidoscope through which the reader is presented with historical events, however coloured and rearranged. Critics who adhere to this position regard Herodotus first and last as an historian—perhaps a highly imaginative and certainly a highly creative one, but nonetheless one who is mainly concerned with understanding what had happened in the world around him, when and why. They value Herodotus' narrative *qua* rhetorical discourse—for example his use of source-quotations and direct speech—as a legitimate vehicle for the conveyance of a historian's view of history. Of the critics discussed here,

Tourraix (1976), Dewald (1981), and Lateiner (1989) fall into this category. In the second case, the emphasis shifts towards the text—to the *Histories* as an account (probably oral in origin, later committed to writing) that is essentially the creation of a Greek author. Here, Herodotus himself is seen first and last as a writer—a storyteller. From this perspective, the relationship between his text and the historical, outside world is more or less incidental—a matter requiring a separate, altogether different kind of judgment. Although the critics belonging to this latter group will not deny that some references to real, historical events were included in the *Histories*, they consider this hardly relevant to what they see as the core of Herodotus' creation. This position, though based on widely differing theoretical points of view, is here represented by Pembroke (1967), Rossellini and Saïd (1978), and Gray (1995) on the one hand and, occasionally, Fehling (1989<sup>2</sup>) on the other.

The two positions, at least in their most radical versions, are difficult to reconcile. They seem each to be defended by critics who focus predominantly on the ethnography/cultural history contained in the first five books of the *Histories*, with an occasional reference to the last part. Scholars focussing on single episodes, particularly in the last three books (here represented by Munson (1988)), appear to be little troubled by a pull towards either extreme. Ultimately, the common aim of most critics is to look for a balance between text and event—for a means to connect Herodotus' role as creator of his narrative with the historical events that he considered worth recording.

*From narrative to historical agency*

The recognition of women's central role in the narrative structure of the *Histories* was more or less initiated by Erwin Wolff (1964; Marg (1965) 668–78). In his article, he points out that Herodotus marks the beginning and the end of his main theme—the collision between the Greek and Near-Eastern worlds—with parallel stories: the episode of the Lydian king Candaules, who showed his wife naked to his advisor and later successor Gyges (1.8–13), and the episode of Xerxes' infatuation with first the wife and then the daughter of his brother Masistes (9.108–13).<sup>8</sup> In both stories, a queen's response to her hus-

<sup>8</sup> For the Masistes story, see also Chs. 9, pp. 207–8 and 13, pp. 310–13 in this volume.

band's irresponsible behaviour triggers off a series of disastrous events. What induced Herodotus to select precisely these stories to flank his history? Wolff in fact wondered how and why Herodotus had made a choice between different versions of the same story. The existence of variants was certain in the case of the Lydian episode, but highly unlikely in the case of the Masistes story. Linking his views to Reinhardt's observations concerning the Gyges story (1940; 1960; 1965), Wolff argues that the Masistes story provided the clue to the choice of the Gyges version. In the Persian episode, Xerxes' transgression of marital fidelity and the subsequent revenge of the queen on the one whom she considered the original danger to her own position—Masistes' innocent wife—would ultimately lead to his own downfall (465 BC), a finale not included in the *Histories* themselves but foreshadowed by Herodotus and known to the whole world when he was writing. This pattern of events at the Persian royal court directed Herodotus' selection from among the various Gyges stories. He chose one which enabled him to represent the situation along similar lines: the Lydian king's betrayal of the trust of his wife by placing her in a situation close to enforced infidelity, her subsequent insistence that revenge be taken against the real offender and, after Gyges' decision that Candaules was to blame, the downfall of the latter and the succession of Gyges. Since, according to Herodotus, Gyges' descendant Croesus was the first to begin 'barbarian' aggression towards the Greeks, the Lydian episode was the first in a chain of conflicts that would only end with the defeat of Xerxes. The vast canvas of the Greek-barbarian confrontation thus becomes the central part of a triptych, with the wings portraying queens taking decisions fatal to their ruling but erring husbands.

Wolff interprets these stories as narratives that, as a series of situations, lead to a moral of wider significance: kings who destroy themselves and their kingdoms begin by destroying their own households. Thus he breaks away from a long-standing tradition which perceived women's agency in Herodotus as symptomatic of the historian's fatal inclination toward the anecdotal. Instead he shows that the larger project of the *Histories* is represented even in stories he himself classifies as 'harem-love stories' (Wolff (1965) 673). Wolff makes no explicit statements, however, about the connection of these stories to historical reality. Whether Herodotus gives a Hellenized and dramatized account of structural tensions existing within the Persian ruling families, as a specialist on Persian history has argued (Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1983) 27–31), or just passes on a story that

suited his fancies about Xerxes, is not a question Wolff wants to discuss. His approach to the stories of these royal women helps to reveal the structural coherence of the *Histories* as a narrative; that is, to our understanding of Herodotus' views and the ways in which he has moulded his material accordingly.

Although Wolff's article was apparently unknown to him, Alexandre Tourraix (1976) was equally struck by the queen's agency in the Candaules story, but he expanded the argument in several ways. First, he connects the Lydian story not only to its counterpart concerning Xerxes and his queen, but also to about fifty other stories in the *Histories* which reveal a similar pattern. According to Tourraix, episodes such as those of the Athenian tyrant Pisistratus marrying the daughter of Megacles (1.60), the Corinthian tyrant Periander keeping alive the memory of his dead wife Melissa (5.92), the succession of Cyrus to the royal throne through his mother (the Median princess Mandane, 1.107-8), Cambyses gaining power over Egypt through the daughter of pharaoh Apries (3.1-3), and, negatively, the male Babylonians losing power through the killing of the women of their city (3.150), demonstrate that in monarchical societies power exercised by men is only legitimate and lasting if it includes the feminine and is transferred through it. The feminine may be represented by a goddess (see for instance Athena's protection of Peisistratus at Pallene, 1.62) or another kind of feminine power, but most often it is incorporated in the wife, sister, or daughter of the predecessor. There is a strong tie, implicit but effective, between the person of the queen and royal power itself (Tourraix (1976) 370-1). By acting as the indispensable intercessors between men's generations, women were to perform a role that was at once dynamic and consolidating.

Woman, or femininity, is the guarantee, mortal or immortal, of the solidity of Power, particularly in its monarchical forms: she thus fulfils two complementary and fundamental functions, by simultaneously assuring both the transmission and the permanence of Power. (Tourraix (1976) 369, tr. J. B.).

Thus Tourraix perceives not only a common structure in the opening and closing scenes, as Wolff had done, but also an intermittent series of similarly structured events throughout the *Histories*. The recurrence of this pattern again demonstrates the strong compositional coherence of the *Histories*. Episodes such as the ones on royal succession should be understood, not as digressions, but as instances signifying the meaning of the whole.

The second way in which Tourraix expanded the argument was by ascribing to this pattern a wider meaning than Wolff, who had limited his interpretation to the level of narrative in the strict sense. According to Tourraix, the recurrence of the pattern in both the Greek and Oriental societies exemplifies Herodotus' view that behind cultural differences some historical conditions common to all mankind manifest themselves. One such feature is the fundamental difference between monarchy and democracy (or, in a weaker sense, aristocracy). This difference overrides the distinctions between, say, Persian and Greek in their effects on the vicissitudes of power.<sup>9</sup> Placing the Greek tyrants in the same category as the Near-Eastern kings, classification by the yardstick of monarchy puts 'being Greek' as the alleged norm of civilization into perspective.

Moreover, the pattern implies an idea of matrilinear succession as a prerequisite to patrilinear succession, hence preceding it either in time or in force. Many generations of ancient historians have argued that the manifest connections between (Eastern) monarchy and feminine power in the *Histories* was a clear sign, in the eyes of the ancient Greeks and of modern scholars equally, of that monarchy's fatal weakness and inclination towards capricious tyranny; for examples, see Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1983). In contrast, Tourraix now argues that Herodotus' idea of the feminine basis of monarchical power represents a widely held view on essential connections between women and the historical change of political systems. Tourraix is careful not to commit himself to a judgment as to what really happened, but he insists that Herodotus conveys a notion in which nations both East and West strongly believed, and which thus had gradually become part of the Greek perception of history.

Throughout the *Histories* Herodotus applies a mythical scheme with an aetiological value, which he derived from a common fund of Greek ideas and which echoed a mental structure [that was partly related to] Indo-Iranian cosmologies. (Tourraix (1976) 380; tr. J. B.).

<sup>9</sup> In this context the Constitutional Debate (3.80-2) is a fine example of the notion that political patterns are universal; compare Herodotus' comment that those who do not believe that Otanes, a Persian, had advocated democracy in this Debate would be astonished to learn that Mardonius founded democracies in various cities on the Ionian coast (6.43).

The interaction between matrilinear and patrilinear pressures in the transmission of power, as Tourraix sees it, recalls the older hypothesis of matriarchy. Since the scholarly excommunication of its most influential spokesman, J. J. Bachofen (*Das Mutterrecht*, 1861), the theme of matriarchy has been considered a tricky affair among ancient historians (Blok (1995) 63–112). At the time of Tourraix's article, however, matriarchy was becoming fashionable again in some feminist circles, and this interest did not escape the notice of professional historians. Tourraix's paper was published in the *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne*, which, true to its name, included a critical response, and Jacques Annequin, who responded to Tourraix, immediately raised objections which clearly aimed at eradicating any matriarchal implication. Tourraix, though defending his argument, hastened to acknowledge that his use of the terms 'matriarchal society' and 'matrilinear filiation' had been imprudent (Tourraix (1976) 389).<sup>10</sup> One of the objections brought forward by Annequin concerned the relationship between narrative and reality. What did Herodotus really know about the practices and traditions which lay behind the stories told him by his Near-Eastern informants? How could we know that the pattern of belief in the feminine basis of monarchical power was truly as widespread as Tourraix claimed it to be? Was it not just a Greek/Herodotean idea projected on to the outside world? Was not the story-pattern of the powerful queen used to conceal a social reality in which women were in fact the objects of marriage exchange? Tourraix replied that one should look at political relationships not only from the outside, but also from inside the society itself. Moreover, although cutting *l'histoire des mentalités* off social history might be a risky step, it was sometimes necessary to start with an analysis of historical 'mentalities' (Tourraix (1976) 389–90).

An additional conclusion might be that this idea of the historical-political role of women represents a view of the world that was not unique to Herodotus but one that he shared with the whole of the ancient world. Thus it would not be Herodotus' presentation of women's historical importance, but rather the historiographical tradition beginning with Thucydides that needed explanation. Such an inference is close to the conclusions drawn by Carolyn Dewald,

<sup>10</sup> The use made of Tourraix's article is interesting: Dewald (1981) 114, Munson (1988) 92, and Lateiner (1989) mention it but use it less than would suit their respective arguments; Gray (1995) does not refer to it at all.

defending the most positive view of Herodotus' description of women's historical prominence to date (Dewald (1981)). Of course she acknowledges a difference between narrative and reality, but the structure of her article draws all our attention to the world as it may have existed beyond Herodotus' text: '[a] real effort is made . . . to describe women as they were, or at least as Herodotus thinks they must have been' (Dewald (1981) 92). Dewald classifies Herodotus' descriptions of 'women as they were' according to the kinds of agency they display in the *Histories*, adding the number of occasions on which each occurs. Thus she argues that 'women who do not act' (128 occasions) but passively participate in events (e.g., being unable to bear children, being given away in marriage, or being war victims) 'become a motif repeatedly emphasizing the thin line that in ancient societies separated cultural survival from cultural extinction.' (Dewald (1981) 93; cf. Lateiner on 'normality' above). 'Women who act' (212 cases), either in groups or individually, carry out all kinds of actions in complementary balance with their men's actions, conforming with the expectations of the same culture, though in a different mode. They are, first and foremost, the ones who maintain the *nomos*; children usually take after their mothers in matters of culture (Carian women married to Ionians, 1.146; Attic women married to Lemnians, 6.138; the Sauromatae living more like Amazons, 4.117). The individual women who act in the public sphere (22 cases) 'frequently . . . articulate the social values that underlie their actions' (Dewald (1981) 108), thus reinforcing the traditional norms which may have come to be at risk at that particular moment. The 62 women who act as priestesses and founders of religious cults are representatives of the divine order imposed on mankind and are therefore not comparable to the former group.

Dewald ((1981) 111) perceives in Herodotus' rendering of existence distinct but connected spheres of activity—nature, society and culture, divinity. She does not relate these spheres to a temporal structure, although she recognizes that the female cult-founders and priestesses recall mythical times (Dewald (1981) 118, n. 27; cf. Vandiver (1991)). Yet the reader of the *Histories* senses that the patterns of culture underlying the events on the surface of history had been created long before,<sup>11</sup> and are firmly founded in religious notions that

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Lateiner (1989) 186: ' . . . social structure determines a nation's political fate,

define the limits of human behaviour. Women are the ones who guard this tradition (Dewald (1981) 119 n. 30), and Lateiner (1989) does justice to these relationships by placing 'the subject of women' between 'limit, transgression, and related metaphors' and 'moral principles in history'. These are in fact Greek ideas;<sup>12</sup> in this context it is only fitting that in Herodotus' Egypt, the alleged opposite of Greece, 'women are not dedicated to the service of any god or goddess' (2.35).<sup>13</sup> But Herodotus seems to have forgotten about this when applying the same scheme (religion = very ancient = women's first priority) to several Greek oracles and cults: they originated in very ancient Egypt and with Egyptian women (e.g., Dodona and Siwa, 2.51–8;<sup>14</sup> cf. Leto's oracle, 2.152, 155; the Thesmophoriae, 2.171; temple of Athena at Lindus, 2.182). Nevertheless, women, being the embodiment of social and religious tradition, thus transfer historical culture into the actual events. This connection between the past and the present is particularly exemplified by 'women who act' throughout the Greek and barbarian world. Herodotus' rendering of women's historical agency, according to Dewald, is due to the fact that his descriptions are not yet defined by the conventions of a genre (Dewald (1981) 91). However, other critics of Herodotus' text argue that the very opposite is the case—an argument to which I shall now turn.

*From historical agency to narrative*

While women participate on the level of narrative proper, acting either in groups or individually, this narrative is situated within Herodotus' world-view, of which his ethnography is a major part. Here, even more tantalizing than in the case of more strictly 'historical' episodes, it is often difficult to assess the relationship between Herodotus' account and the world he describes. Are 'truth' and its

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although Herodotus has not yet found the theoretical and abstract terminology to express it so concisely'.

<sup>12</sup> On the Greekness of the idea of women's influence 'long ago', see Pembroke (1967) and below, pp. 237–9.

<sup>13</sup> As *hiratai gynē oudemia* is translated by A. D. Goldey (Loeb-ed.). According to Lloyd (1976, *ad loc.*), Herodotus means to say that in Egypt women could not perform the functions of a Greek *hieraiē*: sacrifice and various tasks concerning the conditions of and around the temple.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Zografou (1995); Lloyd (1976) *ad loc.*; compare Fehling (1989<sup>2</sup>) 65–70, who points out the implausibility of this passage.

opposite 'fiction' adequate terms by which to judge Herodotus' descriptions of societies that were far removed from his own in time or space? Often the borderline between ethnography and historical events is hardly discernible, as in the case of Tomyris, the Scythian queen who defeated Cyrus (1.205–16). What might the action of this valiant queen have to do with the promiscuity her society was reputed to practise?

In an article that stimulated a new approach to Herodotean studies, Simon Pembroke (1967) first makes a careful distinction between Bachofen's theories and the evidence on which they were based. Although Herodotus had certainly not been Bachofen's only source, the *Histories* occupy the most prominent place in the ethno-historical corpus, often comprising the most extensive account, the oldest complete account or even the only extant account of a given people or event. In a number of representative cases, Pembroke compares Herodotus' version with other descriptions of the same situation, for instance the reputed matriliney of the Lycians (1.173; for a full assessment of this case, see Pembroke (1965)). The decisive difference between his own view and that of Bachofen is that, in a metaphor from biological research, Bachofen thought he had found fossils while Pembroke sees the same evidence as descriptions of fossils (Pembroke (1967) 8). This observation changes the nature of the evidence from indications of a historical reality into elements belonging to a discourse. Matriarchy, matriliney, promiscuity, and similar phenomena—'ancient descriptions cannot simply be subsumed under the categories of modern anthropology' (Pembroke (1967) 23)—all appear to be examples of societies whose reputed existence served to represent alternatives to Greek *polis*-life as Herodotus and his contemporaries knew it. These alternatives included situations both in Greece and outside it—for instance women's political rights in Athens when the strife between Athena and Poseidon for overlordship of the city was not yet decided, or matriliney in Lycia. The value attributed to these alternatives could be positive, recalling the golden times of Cronus, or negative, indicating chaos under a rule of women, but most often consisted of a mixture of the two. As to their location in time, the alternatives were usually held to be deep in the past in the case of Greece, but still to be part of the present in the case of societies elsewhere in the world. In this respect some congruity seems to have existed between Herodotus' view of time and space and that of scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—including J. Lafitau

and Lewis H. Morgan, and other evolutionists such as Bachofen (see also Pembroke (1977)).

Comparison between Pembroke's views and those of Tourraix (who does not refer to him) clearly shows how the arguments point in different directions. Both critics agree that the alleged prominence of women in kinship and politics—and Pembroke's discussion includes various kinds and degrees of sexual licence as well—in the past and elsewhere exists first of all in the eye of the beholder; that is, in the eye of Herodotus and his contemporary Greeks. What Tourraix calls 'a mythical scheme with an aetiological value' is very close to Pembroke's 'structure of alternatives'. The narrated relations between the sexes represent an imagined socio-cultural structure, which the Greeks considered to be effective in both Greek and non-Greek societies. This structure is defined by Tourraix as a religious element of politics and by Pembroke as a matrix to give time and space a political meaning. However, their ways part in the meaning they attribute to 'reality'; the difference may seem slight, but it is important. Tourraix argues that Herodotus' 'mythical scheme' may derive ultimately from a religious tradition common to the Near East and the eastern Mediterranean which must have borne some relation to historical practices. The pattern revealed in the fifty-odd stories reflects some comparable reality, however indirect, twisted and changed it may have become through the prism of myth. Pembroke, on the other hand, makes an essential distinction between the mythical patterns of matriarchy and the reality that the stories claim to reflect. He points out that the models of 'alternative societies' are far more schematic than the historical practices to which they profess to refer: '[no] coherent relation can be established between the pattern of fact and the pattern of tradition' (Pembroke (1967) 35). So no single type of reality may be assumed to be reflected in a similar instance of 'mythical' representation, and 'it is in every case the precise nature of the relation between fact and description which must be ascertained' (Pembroke (1967) 23). In sum, Pembroke is the first to call fundamentally into question the relationship between Herodotus' narrative and the world he claims to portray, not because of Herodotus' alleged 'lying' about the world (cf. Fehling (1989<sup>2</sup>) but because of the internal referentiality of his text as part of what amounted to general Greek values.

Relations between Herodotus' world-view and historical reality have dissolved almost entirely in a number of publications that elab-

orate the idea of 'the alternative'.<sup>15</sup> Michele Rossellini and Suzanne Saïd (1978) analyse the model of alternative societies underlying Herodotus' ethnography on a wider scale than Pembroke. They demonstrate that the 'uses of women' (meaning the degrees of monogamy, polygamy to promiscuity) were linked with patterns of behaviour in other codes, notably diet (vegetarian, milk-drinking, cannibalism), sacrifice, and burial. Moreover, the further the society in question was removed from the civilized centre, the more the Greeks' understanding of the rules governing such codes tended to be confused or inverted, or to disappear altogether. In this way a mental map could be drawn to designate the way in which Herodotus would describe and estimate the culture of a people, according to its area of residence. Herodotus' description has a certain logic, a sense and a meaning, but ultimately has nothing to do with reality (Rossellini and Saïd (1978) 1003-4). The theoretical concept of 'alterity' or 'otherness', which holds that the understanding of the 'other' is bound by necessity to use only terms that refer to oneself—a theory which was to gain momentum a few years after Rossellini and Saïd's publication<sup>16</sup>—is only hinted at at the very end of their article. The authors' views are more representative of the Parisian approach to myth (Rossellini and Saïd (1978) 950-3). This includes an awareness of myth's ability to subsume a great variety of phenomena in its structures, thus giving meaning to the world, rather than the other way round, and applying this meaning to a wider area than the themes of the mythical narrative itself.

Although they refer to Pembroke's views, Rossellini and Saïd move in a somewhat different direction. On the one hand, our understanding of women's roles in Herodotus' ethnography is enriched by their revealing the systematic connections with other cultural codes. The meaning of gender in the larger historiographical context can thus be explored; compare for instance Lateiner (1989) on 'ethnography as access to history' and 'historiographical patterning'. On the other hand, this wider view of cultural space goes hand in hand with a diminishing view of the dynamics of time; in the perspective of Rossellini and Saïd's argument, there seems to be hardly any history left in the *Histories*. Indeed, Herodotus' world-view appears also

<sup>15</sup> See also Ch. 15, pp. 365-7, in this volume.

<sup>16</sup> The best-known example of this approach in the case of Herodotus, is Hartog (1980).

to be entirely Hellenocentric, the opposite of what had been supposed before. Because Herodotus defines all forms of 'barbarian' culture by the nature and extent of their being non-Greek, taking the adult, male Greek citizen for a norm and thereby sustaining a Greek-barbarian/male-female polarity, any similarities between Greek and non-Greek societies as represented in the *Histories* have nothing to do with any underlying, historical congruence, but are only the result of an essentially Hellenocentric representation of the world.

Although aiding impressively our understanding of the ways in which Herodotus was constrained by the limitations of his knowledge when approaching others, the concept of 'alterity' as a model, and its concomitant methods, also poses severe limitations. Theoretically, and taken to an extreme degree, to insist on the ultimate self-referentiality of Herodotus' world-view—a charge that could be levelled at any text—renders the whole enterprise of writing history rather pointless. On a more practical level, the 'discourse on the Other' is liable to be applied too schematically. With the overt purpose to criticize such practices, Vivienne Gray analyses some of the more famous stories (including the story of the wife of Candaules, and that of Xerxes and Masistes' wife) in order to demonstrate that the opposition Greek-barbarian, man-woman was too simplistic (Gray (1995)). Gray concludes that the narrative model of the 'vengeful queen' requires the inclusion of the 'vengeful king' and 'vengeful servant' as well. This narrative model exemplifies an underlying political model which complicates a Greek/democratic—barbarian/monarchic polarity by adding a barbarian-master/barbarian-subject polarity (Gray (1995) 201). Although Gray attempts to mitigate the discourse on polarity by drawing Dewald's approach into the discussion, the outcome still strikes the reader as being quite schematic.

A more satisfactory way of using the polarity-model for subtler ends had been created a few years earlier by Rosaria Munson (1988; not mentioned by Gray). In an admirable discussion of Artemisia, the female tyrant of Halicarnassus and her roles as Xerxes' advisor and as combattant in the Battle of Salamis, Munson shows the recurrent shifting of positions, which destabilizes any fixed meaning of 'self' and 'other', and definitely undermines a polarized view. Artemisia is both female and masculine, Greek and enemy, cunning and victorious; she fights on Xerxes' side but is almost a double of Themistocles. Indeed, although Artemisia does eventually become identified with a topsy-turvy world, threatening to Hellas, that world

resembles Athens more than it does Persia (Munson (1988) 94).

Arguing that Artemisia shows a remarkable similarity to Athens, Munson demonstrates that the Athenian political ideal of *isēgoria* encourages people to pursue their own interests, on the grounds that this is likely to benefit the whole community. In problematic circumstances, however, individuals clearly give up the community to serve their own ends, as indeed Themistocles considered doing if the Greeks failed to resist Xerxes at Salamis. The very same attitude marks Athenian policy after Salamis and the city's subsequent pursuit of its own interests, ultimately at the cost of the community of allied cities. Artemisia also exemplifies the moral-political insight that the use of one's *gnōme* (intelligence) brings greater benefits than enjoying *tuchē* (good fortune). This view draws attention to possible connections between Herodotus and the sophists, and, with greater certainty, to critical judgments of the political attitude of Athens during the 430s and 420s (Munson (1988) 102–5). Munson thus infers that Herodotus' audience was expected to see the Artemisia story in the light of the later consequences of Salamis, just as Wolff concluded that the story of Masistes and his wife (and the wife of Candaules) were to be seen in the light of Xerxes' later death.

It is impossible to say how much of Herodotus' account of Artemisia is his own invention. This remains true of anything he reports for which there is no other source available. Artemisia does not belong to the category of ethnography, but neither is she unequivocally historical. She must have been a famous figure, but obviously Herodotus could not know anything about her secret advice to Xerxes (8.68–9; 101–2), and Fehling gives little credit to the way in which the account of Artemisia's role at Salamis is introduced (Fehling (1989<sup>2</sup>) 127). From this perspective, Munson's discussion remains firmly on the 'narrative' side. Yet it is her careful analysis of the wider political and philosophical issues at stake in the Artemisia episode that allows a connection to be made between Herodotus the creative story-teller and the historical world in which he lived.

### Conclusion

Quite early in Book Five, a small story is inserted on the situation in Miletus some time before the Ionian revolt. Ridden with *stasis*, the Milesians ask the Parians to create peace among them. The

Parian envoys visit the whole territory of Miletus, finding most *oikoi* completely wasted but collecting the names of those whose lands are well tilled. Having returned to the city, the Parians appoint the owners of the well-tilled lands to be the new rulers of Miletus because, they say, these people would probably take as much care of public affairs as they did of their own (5.29). This view seems to have been a common one in the Greek world; in Athens it was voiced on the stage by Creon, speaking to his son Haemon, in Sophocles' *Antigone*: 'The man who acts rightly in family matters will be seen to be righteous in the city as well' (661-2).<sup>17</sup> There is hardly a political theory in classical Athens that does not take the *oikos* as a point of departure for understanding the *polis* as a community and a state.

It seems that Herodotus used this perspective on the *oikos* as a model for the *polis* when shaping his history. The novelty of his approach may be found in his application to history of a model that was being scrutinized, debated, parodied, and applied in many other contexts and genres. The model included much to guide his selection of ethnographical features: genealogy (of peoples and individuals), manners of livelihood, burial, sacrifice, sexual customs, and gendered division of labour. It enabled him to understand the relations between men and women as mutually dependent, even though each sex had priorities and weaknesses of its own. It led him to expect that the most influential interviews would take place behind closed doors. It even provided him with a good entry into the larger theme of the Persian Wars which, because it was inspired by Homer's epic tale of Troy, included domestic relationships. He applied this model widely in his history, and the efforts of modern critics to discern where and how he did so bear testimony to his versatility. Few historians followed his example in antiquity, but his audience probably found his writings not only exciting and enjoyable, but perfectly comprehensible.

<sup>17</sup> On the influence of dramatic styles in Herodotus, see Lateiner (1989) 20-34 and Ch. 6 in this volume.