

1 **Artemisia: An Admirable Admiral**
 2 [Hdt. 5.49–50, 5.51.2–3, 7.99, 7.239.3–4, 8.68–69, 8.87–88, 8.93,
 3 and 8.101–103]

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 5 *Claims that Herodotus reveals himself as a proto-biographer, let alone as a proto-*
 6 *feminist, are not yet widely accepted. To help advance these claims, I have selected*
 7 *one remarkable woman—Queen Artemisia of Halicarnassus—whose exploits during*
 8 *the second Greco-Persian War are recounted in his Histories. It is to, Heraclitus—*
 9 *a near contemporary—to whom we attribute the maxim êthos anthropôi daimôn*
 10 *(ἦθος ἀνθρώπων δαίμων)—character is human destiny—and it is the truth of*
 11 *this maxim—implying effective human agency—that makes Herodotus’ creation of*
 12 *historical narrative possible. From his many vignettes, which, without advancing*
 13 *the narrative, Herodotus is able to color-in the character of the more notable*
 14 *individuals he depicts in his Histories. Although never the cradle to grave accounts*
 15 *typical of say Plutarch, by leap-frogging through three of the nine books, we can*
 16 *assemble a partially continuous narrative, and thus gauge Artemisia’s character.*
 17 *Arguably this permits us to attribute both credit and moral responsibility. This*
 18 *implied causation demonstrates that Herodotus’ writings include not only proto-*
 19 *biography but in several instances—one of which is given here—proto-feminism.*

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 21
 22 **Introduction**

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 24 Bar Aeschylus’ topical tragedy the *Persei*, first performed in 472 in which
 25 Artemisia, queen of Halicarnassus, is not mentioned at all, our only other
 26 early extant accounts of the contributions of individual commanders who
 27 participate in the naval battle off Salamis in the late summer of 480 are given
 28 by Herodotus in his *Histories*.¹ And here Artemisia, an ally of Xerxes in his
 29 punitive expedition against mainland Greece, is given almost as much
 30 attention as Mardonios, a close royal relative, and Xerxes’ overall battlefield
 31 commander.² Curiously, our next earliest mention of the queen of
 32 Halicarnassus is given in Aristophanes’ exceedingly bawdy but topical, anti-

¹Aeschylus, a veteran of Marathon, may also have been a participant in the naval battle off Salamis—an oarsman or a marine—not just a distant hillside spectator. His tragedy, the *Persians* (Πέρσων, *Persai*), with the Ghost of Darius incidentally criticizing Xerxes for hubris (ὑβρις) focuses on the Persian losses at Salamis and predicts further losses the following year (Plataea). His play is, of course, our earliest extant account of any of the East versus West military / naval encounters during the Greco-Persian Wars.

² Herodotus is unable to give us anything that we would recognise as dates. The Julian-Gregorian dates given in the margins of Strassler’s Landmark edition of the *Histories* for example are based on other evidence, but unless noted otherwise are those generally agreed by classicists.

1 war comedy *Lysistrata*, first performed in 411, where Artemisia gets honorable
 2 mention on a par with the Amazons. But just as nature abhors a vacuum and
 3 rushes to fill it, story-tellers are happy to exploit any glaring lacunae in the
 4 historical record. And we can surely blame Herodotus for these lacunae about
 5 Artemisia. She is, after all, his own countrywoman, from an aristocratic ruling
 6 family, and he of all contemporary individuals is exceedingly well-placed to
 7 provide an exhaustive cradle to grave account of her impact on the Dorian
 8 colony on the Anatolian coast that her family governed, should he so wish.
 9 Why he does not write more about his near contemporary countrywoman is
 10 difficult to gauge, unless it is simply that the Athenians in particular are still
 11 seething over her impact and their humiliation. As Rosaria Vignolo Munson
 12 comments, “the conspicuous feature of her feminine gender and masculine
 13 role, which in all likelihood sparked Herodotus’ interest in this extraordinary
 14 character, already relates her to the history of the war between the Greeks and
 15 Barbarians.”³ Perhaps, as Munson points out, what really distinguishes her
 16 from all of Xerxes’ subordinate commanders is that she is the only one serving
 17 under no compulsion whatsoever.⁴ Halicarnassus may have been obliged to
 18 supply a number of fully crewed triremes, but Artemisia is in no way obliged
 19 to command this contingent.⁵ Although high birth presents some measure of
 20 opportunity usually denied those of more modest heritage, Artemisia
 21 exercises authority, agency, and autonomy—and in the process proves her
 22 destiny as an able leader of men—a remarkable and rare character trait
 23 befitting an admiral.⁶

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26 **Legendary Heroine**

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The legendary Artemisia who emerges from centuries of these fascinating but totally unfounded accretions is often inconsistent with Herodotus’ account.⁷ In the second century, alas some six-hundred years later, even

³Rosaria Vignolo Munson. “Artemisia in Herodotus.” *Classical Antiquity* 7, No. 1 (1988): 92.

⁴ Munson, “Artemisia in Herodotus” 95.

⁵ Her contingent amounts to only five ships—an otherwise trivial less than half of one percent of a combined Persian fleet of over one thousand.

⁶We do not know when Artemisia, the governor or queen of Halicarnassus, is born—but when first mentioned by Herodotus she is a widow and is serving as regent for her underage son. Nor does Herodotus mention when her forever-unnamed husband—the late tyrant of Halicarnassus—died. Whether an able ruler or not, he has served his primary purpose—ensuring the succession.

⁷We do not know when Artemisia was born—but when first mentioned by Herodotus she is a widow and has been serving as regent for her underage son. However, at the time of the second Greco-Persian war her son is of military age. Nor does Herodotus

1 Plutarch gets into the act, as does Polyaeus of Macedonia; but neither give
 2 reliable sources for their plausible accretions. Artemisia is a widow, but in all
 3 likelihood does not seduce Themistocles during a secret assignation just
 4 before the battle off Salamis. But she likely directs her marines to festoon the
 5 drowning Kalyndian king's body with spears and arrows—just to make sure it
 6 floats. However, is it also unlikely that when spurned by a youthful Persian
 7 lover she throws herself off a cliff into the Aegean Sea—she likely had no use
 8 whatsoever for a boy toy in the first place. Herodotus makes no mention of
 9 her either before or after the two naval battles of 480. In four short paragraphs,
 10 Herodotus gives us a few biographic details in his first entry, followed by
 11 three anecdotes; the first of the three concerning her interactions with Xerxes
 12 after the three-day long indecisive naval engagement off Artemision which
 13 takes place before the battle off Salamis, then an account of an incident during
 14 the battle, and closing with her personal and strategic interactions with Xerxes
 15 after that disastrous naval defeat off Salamis. One way to effectively write
 16 someone right out of history is to deliberately write as little about the
 17 individual as possible.⁸

20 **Destiny Defined**

21
 22 The significance of Artemisia's boldly theophoric name cannot be
 23 overlooked and at the very least constitutes an interesting challenge to divine
 24 Greek myth for the child on the part of her noble parents.⁹ Artemis, the
 25 goddess of chastity, virginity, archery, the hunt, the forests, the wilderness,
 26 and the moon, is only a secondary Olympian deity.¹⁰ Nevertheless, she is

mention when Artemisia's husband—the tyrant of Halicarnassus—died. If her son was aged at least eighteen in 480 and Artemisia was married in Spartan fashion when in her late teens, a good guess is that she was born no later than 516.

⁸See lines 672-683 of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. The Chorus of Old Men lament the women's current audacity, offering a cautionary reminder of Artemisia's fighting prowess which they compare with that of the Amazons fighting at Troy against the Argives. Much of the rest comes from the fertile minds of Hollywood script-writers who in former years felt obliged to meet some mandated T and A quota.

⁹There are only three virgin goddesses among the Olympian pantheon—Hestia, Athena, and Artemis—although all three have many ardent suitors they certainly have no offspring. They are honoured as virgin goddesses partly because they remain chaste and celibate with absolutely no wish to marry; but principally because, bar heeding their father, Zeus, they pursue their own interests independent of any male influence or subservience. Artemis and her twin brother Apollo are the irregular offspring of Zeus and the Titanide Leto.

¹⁰Except when being shown as the moon goddess, Artemis is always depicted wearing a skimpy, off-shoulder, mid-thigh length, slit-skirted Dorian *peplos*—similar to the short tunic, the *chiton exomis*, favoured by young Spartan women— in stark contrast to

1 widely worshipped throughout mainland Greece and in the various Dorian
 2 and Ionian settlements in the Aegean and the Anatolian mainland. A number
 3 of major festivals are held to honor her including one held every four years at
 4 Brauron, north of Athens in eastern Attica, and others at her temples in
 5 Ephesus and in Sparta.¹¹ According to Homer, Artemis is one of the Olympian
 6 goddesses who support the Trojans in their war with Greece; Athena, of
 7 course, supports the Argives. The unanswered conundrum remains that when
 8 the Greek goddesses, one way or another, and Athena in particular, are just as
 9 powerful as any of the male gods in the pantheon, and just as widely
 10 worshipped, why is the status of Greek women generally kept so low and
 11 restricted?¹²

12 The first few sentences below are the extent of the strictly biographical
 13 information Herodotus gives about his countrywoman, the queen of
 14 Halicarnassus.¹³ He must have known much more about the ruling family
 15 than he gives in Book 7 of his *Histories*, and we can only speculate on the
 16 reasons for his brevity. Part of this may be Herodotus' belief that to be truly
 17 Greek one has to be free; and the Dorian and Ionian colonies in the Eastern
 18 Mediterranean and the Anatolian coast are anything but free and as a Persian
 19 appointed ruler she and her family are more than complicit in their continued
 20 subjugation. Very little is known of Herodotus' early life, but most scholars
 21 believe that he leaves Halicarnassus voluntarily, or is indeed exiled moving

the voluminous, heavily folded, ground-length Ionian *chiton* favoured by Athenian women and, of course, the style Athena is invariably depicted as wearing (Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores* 36). A young Spartan woman wearing the peplos is often referred to as a thigh flasher μηρό φώτων (*miró fóton*) a form of dress eschewed by Athenian women (Pomeroy, *Spartan Women* 25). Wonder Woman notwithstanding, the skimpy clothing for athletic and fit, Spartan women was likely flattering, whereas from Pomeroy's remarks, far too polite to say as much, that since Athenian women's exercise is limited to housework mainly indoors or in the adjacent courtyard, we might surmise that their flabby thighs and heavy buttocks are far better not flashed (Pomeroy, *Spartan Women* 31).

¹¹See Hdt 6.138.1 for an account of the abduction of young Athenian women when attending the festival held at Brauronia; and, Hdt. 1.26.2 for mention of Artemis' major temple in Ionian Anatolia rebuilt by Croesus in the mid sixth-century. Rebuilt again in the fourth century, eventually becoming three or four times larger than the Parthenon, the temple is ranked among the seven wonders of the ancient world.

¹²Recall that Poseidon, the god of the Seas, and Athena, the goddess of Wisdom and Skill compete to be the patron deity of the city-state founded and ruled by its first king, Cecrops—they almost go to war over the honour but Athena's gift of an olive tree beats Poseidon's brackish spring water supply hands down. She gave her name to the city.

¹³All quotations from the *Histories* are from the Andrea Purvis translation presented in Robert Strassler, *The Landmark Herodotus* (New York, NY: Random House, 2007).

1 first to Samos and eventually to Thurii in Italy, but is never free to return
2 home.¹⁴

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4 Although I am not mentioning the other subordinate commanders because I am
5 not compelled to do so, I shall mention Artemisia. I find it absolutely amazing
6 that she, as a woman, should join the expedition against Hellas. After her
7 husband died, she held the tyranny, and then, though her son was a young man
8 of military age and she was not forced to do so at all, she went to war, roused by
9 her own determination and courage. [2] Now the name of this woman was
10 Artemisia; she was the daughter of Lygdamos by race part Halicarnassian on her
11 father's side, and part Cretan on her mother's side. She led the men of
12 Halicarnassus, Kos, Nisyros, and Kalymna, and provided five ships for the
13 expedition. [3] Of the entire navy, the ships she furnished were the most highly
14 esteemed after those of the Sidonians, and of all the counsel offered to the king by
15 the allies, hers was the best. I can prove that all the cities under her leadership
16 which I have just mentioned were Dorian, since the Halicarnassians came from
17 the Troizen and all the rest from Epidauros (Hdt. 7.99).¹⁵

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19 A matter Herodotus' text does not make clear is that late in the sixth
20 century Artemisia's father—king Lygdamos I—is appointed by the Persians as
21 ruler of Halicarnassus, so she too is the daughter, queen-consort, and mother
22 of a king. Artemisia's husband, whose name is not recorded, succeeds to her
23 father's satrapy—a succession likely enhanced by this marriage.¹⁶ He dies
24 before their son Pisiadelis reaches the age of majority, and so, quite unusually,
25 Artemisia, his mother, is appointed by the Persians to serve as her son's
26 regent.¹⁷

¹⁴ One suggestion is that Herodotus' family—or perhaps just a brother—fell afoul of the ruling family and are essentially deemed *persona non grata*—sometimes constructive criticism of an autocratic regime is taken as dissent with a whiff of irreparable disloyalty bordering on treason.

¹⁵Troizen and Epidauros are both Dorian city-states in the eastern Peloponnese. When Athens is evacuated after the battle of Thermopylae the non-combatants, mothers and children are taken to Aegina, Salamis, and Troizen.

¹⁶This suggests strongly that Artemisia is an only child (or an only surviving child) and an heiress particularly attractive to those aristocratic Carians/Halicarnassians with ambitions for royal appointment to the local governorship. Her family is Dorian rather than Ionian and so they may adopt the more liberal Spartan *patrouchoi* precedents rather than those for Athenian *epikloroi*. Either way her husband's line is terminated. Although the throne is infinitely less exalted than that for Sparta let alone Persia, this is another of many similarities she shares with Gorgo, and Atossa and perhaps even Helen of Sparta.

¹⁷That her spouse remains nameless is priceless. Athenians never name their womenfolk and dismiss their genetic contribution as incubators—Artemisia's spouse is a nameless inseminator.

No Persian Puppet

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Although Artemisia is briefly married to her father's successor as the tyrant of Halicarnassus, he is forever unnamed. Just as the role of many Greek women—with a few notable Spartan exceptions—is limited to the domestic sphere, it is ironic that her husband fulfills the domestic cum barnyard function of ensuring the possibility of succession with a male heir and is promptly vaporized from all record. That Artemisia is deemed an acceptable regent by Darius and later by Xerxes is notable, and not just because the status of widows who decline to remarry is often problematic in many societies.¹⁸ Just as significant, five sailing masters and their crews accept Artemisia as their admiral—this is not an empty honorific, they are granting her real agency as their naval commander and putting their well-being, opportunities for glory, battle-honors, and survival in her hands. Herodotus tells us in book 6 that in the aftermath of the Ionian revolt Mardonios commands a large land army and a fleet which he leads down to Cilicia and then sweeps up the Anatolian coasts toward the Hellespont (Hdt. 6.43.1–4).¹⁹ From Herodotus' account Mardonios deposes all the tyrants of the Ionians and establishes democracies in their cities. This is possibly an exaggeration; all Darius wants is for these city-states to continue paying annual tribute and to respond to his requests for levees for military expeditions.

We know that Darius divides his empire into some twenty large provinces or satrapies and each province is governed by a satrap appointed by the king and to serve at his pleasure. Herodotus does not name these provinces but he does number them and the first province includes much of the Anatolian coast (Hdt. 3.89–90).²⁰ We also know that in the middle of the sixth century the Dorian city-states, including three on Rhodes, form a loose alliance and hold an annual festival which they celebrate at the Triopian sanctuary. Herodotus writes:

In the same way the five cities of the Dorians (formerly known as the six cities of the Dorians) refuse to admit any neighboring Dorians to their Triopian sanctuary. Moreover, they bar all those who break any of the rules of the sanctuary from participating in the rites and activities there (Hdt. 1.144.1).

¹⁸ In this respect, as widows, Gorgo, Atossa, and Artemisia face the same challenge—except that we know that for internal dynastic reasons Atossa is compelled to remarry twice, whereas Gorgo and Artemisia are at liberty to decline and indeed do so.

¹⁹ Mardonios is not just a Persian general. He is Darius' nephew, brother-in-law, and son-in-law. His mother is Darius' sister, his sister is one of Darius' wives, and he is married to one of Darius' daughters, Artazostre.

²⁰ See Hdt. 3.90.1—for the first provincial district: the Ionians, the Magnesians of Asia, the Aeolians, Carians, Lycians, Milyans, and Pamphylians, all of whom were assessed as a single unit for payment of tribute, came 400 talents of silver.

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2 Although Herodotus gives us few details, the Carians are involved in the
3 Ionian revolt, but he does not specifically say that the Halicarnassians join in
4 and one inference is that they do not. Again, we resort to the argument from
5 silence, where in this instance it is inconceivable that Herodotus does not
6 know or is misinformed. Either way, it appears from his commentary that the
7 ruling family or the aristocracy in general, are regarded as loyal and reliable.
8 We know that Artemisia is permitted to serve as regent for her then underage
9 son, so even if she is not personally known to the Persian monarchs, she is
10 deemed an acceptable place holder. Likely she earns this esteem long before
11 supporting Xerxes' invasion with five manned triremes and is thus admitted
12 to such military councils as Xerxes chooses to hold from time to time.
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14 15 **An Admirable Admiral** 16

17 Sometime after the inconclusive naval battle off Artemision, but just
18 before Xerxes' disastrous engagement off Salamis, Herodotus recounts:
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20 So Mardonios made his way around and questioned them, beginning with the
21 Sidonian. They all expressed the same opinion, urging him to initiate a battle at
22 sea, except for Artemisia who said:²¹

23 "Speak to the King for me, Mardonios, and tell him what I say, since I have not
24 proven to be the worst fighter in his naval battles off Euboea, nor have I
25 performed the least significant of feats.²² Tell him, 'My Lord, it is right and just
26 that I express my opinion, and what I think is best regarding your interests. Here
27 is what I think you should do: spare your fleet; do not wage a battle at sea. For
28 their men surpass yours in strength at sea to the same degree that men surpass
29 women. [2] And why is it necessary for you to risk another sea battle? Do you
30 not already hold Athens, the very reason for which you set out on this campaign?
31 And do you not have the rest of Hellas too? No one is standing in your way;
32 those who have stood against you have ended up as they deserved.

33 "Let me tell you what I think your foes will end up doing. If you do not rush
34 into waging a sea battle, but instead wait and keep your ships near land, or even
35 if you advance to the Peloponnese, then, my lord, you will easily achieve what
36 you intended by coming here. [2] The Hellenes are incapable of holding out
37 against you for very long; you will scatter them, and each one will flee to his own
38 city. For I hear that they have no food with them on this island, and if you lead
39 your army to the Peloponnese, it is unlikely that those who came from there will
40 remain where they are now and concern themselves with fighting at sea for the
41 Athenians.

²¹At this time Sidon along with Tyre are the two most powerful Phoenician city-states.

²²See Hdt. 8.9–10, this is the first we learn of her participation in the inconclusive naval battle at Artemision a week or so earlier in the late summer of 480.

1 “But if you rush into a sea battle immediately, I fear that your fleet will be badly
2 mauled, which would cause the ruin of your land army as well. And there is one
3 more thing that you should think about, sire, and keep in mind: bad slaves tend
4 to belong to good people, while good slaves belong to bad people. And you, the
5 best of all men, have the worst slaves, who are said to be included among your
6 allies, namely, the Egyptians, Cyprians, Cilician, and Pamphylians; they are
7 absolutely worthless.”

8 As Artemisia was speaking to Mardonios, all those who were well-disposed
9 toward her thought her words most unfortunate, since they believed she would
10 suffer some punishment from the King for telling him not to wage a battle at sea.
11 On the other hand, those who were envious and jealous of her, because she was
12 honored as one of the most prominent of the allies, were delighted by her
13 response to the question, thinking that she would perish for it. [2] When these
14 opinions were reported to Xerxes, however, he was quite pleased with
15 Artemisia’s answer. Even prior to this, he had considered her worthy of his
16 serious attention, but now he held her in even higher regard. Nevertheless, his
17 orders were to obey the majority; he strongly suspected that off Euboea they had
18 behaved like cowards because he was not present, but now he was fully prepared
19 to watch them fight at sea (Hdt. 8.68–69).
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21 Just as the two virgin goddesses, Athena and Artemis, who never marry
22 and, except to their father Zeus, remain accountable for their own actions and
23 never answerable to any of the other Olympian deities, Artemisia of
24 Halicarnassus keeps her own counsel.²³ Having listened to the advice of his
25 commanders, with only Artemisia dissenting, Xerxes commits to an
26 immediate naval engagement. Perhaps Xerxes surrounds himself with too
27 many sycophants who will ultimately serve him poorly—he needs
28 independent minded councilors who are not afraid to tell him when he is in
29 error—but we can infer that rightly or wrongly he has already decided on a
30 course of action, and any meeting of commanders is just for a show of unity.
31 Doubtless Artemisia perceives a closed mind, which is why she asks
32 Mardonios to speak for her—if only to speak for the record. She has the
33 courage to voice her convictions, but the loyalty and discipline to obey her
34 emperor’s orders without further dissent.
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36 I cannot speak with certainty about the rest of them, how each specific group of
37 barbarians and Hellenes performed in the fighting, but this is what happened to
38 Artemisia, which resulted in her winning still higher esteem from the King. [2]
39 The King’s fleet had reached a state of mass confusion, and it was during this
40 crisis that Artemisia’s ship was pursued by one from Attica. She was unable to
41 escape it because there were so many other friendly ships in front of her, and
42 since her own ship was closest to those of the enemy, she made a decision which
43 turned out to be very much to her advantage. While she was still being chased
44 by the Attic ship, she rammed at full speed, a friendly ship manned by

²³Nor, like Hestia, does she become a respected but colourless old maid.

1 Kalyndians and the king of the Kalyndians himself, Damasithymos. [3] Now I
 2 cannot say if there was some quarrel she had with him that had arisen while they
 3 were still near the Hellespont, or even whether, when she ran into the Kalyndian
 4 ship, the deed was premeditated or accidental. [4] But when she rammed it, the
 5 good she accomplished for herself was twofold. For when the trierarch of the
 6 Attic ship saw that she was ramming a ship of the barbarians, he assumed that
 7 Artemisia's vessel was either a Greek ship or one that was deserting from the
 8 barbarians and now fighting for the Hellenes, so he turned away from her ship to
 9 attack others (Hdt. 8.87.1–4).

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11 Surely Herodotus is disingenuous here rather than just diplomatic. He
 12 claims that he does not know whether or not there was some cause of a
 13 quarrel between Artemisia and Damasithymos, and then proceeds to name
 14 the time and place; his audience will be suspicious that this is allusion for
 15 insiders only. We can argue from silence. If the incident at the Abydos
 16 crossing of the Straits is sufficiently salacious—such as Xerxes being concealed
 17 in a rolled-up carpet and frequently smuggled by his bodyguards into her
 18 sleeping quarters—Herodotus could not have resisted including it.²⁴ Perhaps
 19 there is well-known, but not very interesting long-standing enmity between
 20 the two city-states, Halicarnassus and Kalynda, or between their ruling
 21 families? More likely, Damasithymos is envious of her renown and
 22 sufficiently boorish to cast insulting, misogynistic aspersions at her expense
 23 and behind her back figuring that he would get away with them.²⁵

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25 That was one result to her advantage: she escaped and was not destroyed. But
 26 another outcome was that, even though she was doing harm to her own side, she
 27 won the highest possible praise from Xerxes. [2] For it is said that as the King
 28 was watching, he noticed one ship ramming the other, and one of the men with
 29 him said, “My lord, do you see how well Artemisia is fighting, and how she has
 30 sunk an enemy ship?” Xerxes inquired if it was truly Artemisia who had
 31 accomplished this feat, and they confirmed that it was, clearly recognizing the
 32 ensign of her vessel, and believing that the one she had destroyed belonged to the
 33 enemy. [3] So all that, as I have explained, brought her good fortune. And in
 34 addition, no one from the Kalyndian ship survived to become her accuser. In

²⁴In addition to Artemisia not being truly Greek, despite her Dorian ethnicity, Herodotus may be suggesting that culturally some of the *royal barbaric power* has rubbed off on her and that as a Persian-appointed governor she readily adopts any degree of ruthlessness to get the job done. If a *bête noir's* vessel happens to get in her way of course she will plough straight through it. She might even ask her marines to give its former commander a few spears to aid his flotation.

²⁵Happenstance perhaps, but fully in character with her eponym, the goddess Artemis, has a habit of emptying her quiver into anyone arrogant enough to make an unsolicited lecherous advance. Artemis even dispatches her boon hunting companion Orion, Poseidon's mortal son by Euryale, in this manner—perhaps in error.

1 response to what he had heard, Xerxes is reported to have said, “My men have
2 become women, and my women, men!” (Hdt. 8.88.1–3).

5 **A Double Standard, even for Medizing**

7 Although we can infer that it is the Athenians, Herodotus does not say
8 precisely which party among the League offers the reward for the capture of
9 Artemisia. But the reasons he gives are unconvincing—and one suspects, but
10 cannot prove, that there was much more to it than just her gender.²⁶ Nor does
11 he indicate whether the commanders of the many other Ionian and Dorian
12 naval contingents allied to Xerxes are similarly proscribed. But we can argue
13 from his silence that they were not. We might also observe a strange paradox;
14 Alexander I of Macedon goes out of his way to be accepted as Greek and the
15 Peloponnesian League turn a forgiving blind eye to the accommodations he
16 makes over the years with both Darius and Xerxes to remain in power. In
17 contrast, Artemisia is accepted as Greek, evidently to her disadvantage, as the
18 League does not grant her the same leniency over the same politically and
19 militarily necessary realities. Possibly in land battles it is easier to disguise
20 indifference to vigorous engagement, whereas in fleet action—at that time, an
21 archery, ramming, and boarding contest at sea performed at five or six
22 knots—such action avoidance is harder to conceal whether Xerxes is actually
23 watching or not.

25 Of the Hellenes who fought in this naval battle at Salamis, praise for the greatest
26 valor went to the Aeginetans, and after them to the Athenians; of individual men,
27 to Polykritos of Aegina and the Athenians Eumenes of Anagyrous and Ameinias
28 of Pallene. It was Ameinias who had pursued Artemisia; if he had realized that
29 she was sailing on that ship, he would not have stopped before capturing her or
30 being taken himself, [2] for orders to capture her has been given to the Athenian
31 trierarchs, and a prize of 10,000 drachmas has been offered to whoever captured
32 her alive, since they considered it a disgrace that a woman should wage war on
33 Athens. But as I described earlier, she managed to escape, and there were others
34 whose ships had survived also who were all now at Phaleron (Hdt. 8.93).

36 his Athenian bounty—ninety-five pounds of silver—needs some
37 explanation beyond perceived disgrace by the Athenians and the gender
38 discrimination later voiced by Xerxes equating female gender with cowardice.

²⁶We know that her ships fought well at Artemision, Herodotus lets her tell us so (Hdt. 8.68.1). Perhaps she came to Athenian notice then. But she ignores the messages left by Themistocles urging the Ionians to detach themselves from the Barbarian forces, or if that is not possible to be neutral, or at the very least fight very poorly (Hdt. 8.19 and 8.22.1–3). Actually Themistocles likely hoped that Xerxes would hear of these messages and not trust his Carian allies.

1 None of the other Ionian commanders attracted bounties for their capture—
 2 whether dead or alive Herodotus does not say. Herodotus' final entry directly
 3 concerning Artemisia takes place in Xerxes' campaign headquarters,
 4 presumably near Phaleron, shortly following the disastrous naval battle off
 5 Salamis and comprises three paragraphs:

6
 7 Xerxes felt as much joy and pleasure in hearing this as he could, considering his
 8 adversities. He told Mardonios that he would first consult with others about the
 9 two courses before giving him an answer. And while he was deliberating with
 10 his specially chosen counselors, he decided to summon Artemisia to join the
 11 consultation, because she had obviously been the only one before who had
 12 correctly perceived what should be done. [2] When Artemisia arrived, Xerxes
 13 sent away all of the others, his counselors as well as his bodyguards, and said to
 14 her, "Mardonios bids me to stay and make an attempt on the Peloponnese,
 15 claiming that the Persians—the land army, that is—are not to blame for the
 16 disaster, and that they want to display proof of that. [3] In any case, he bids me
 17 to do that, or if not, he wants to pick out 300,000 troops from the army and
 18 completely enslave Hellas, and bids me lead the rest of the army back to my
 19 homeland. [4] Well, then, since you counseled me well by trying to prevent me
 20 from waging the naval battle that has taken place, please tell me now how I can
 21 prosper through your good advice."

22 Thus he requested her advice, and this is what she told him: "Sire, it is difficult
 23 for me to give the best advice to you, as you are seeking the best possible course
 24 of action, but in view of the present situation, it seems to me that you should go
 25 back home, and if Mardonios wants and promises to do what he has suggested,
 26 leave him behind here with the men of his choice. For if he does subjugate this
 27 land as he claims he would like to do and thus succeeds in this plan, the success
 28 will be yours, my lord, since the conquest will be performed by your slaves. On
 29 the other hand, if the outcome is the opposite of what Mardonios thinks will
 30 happen, it will be no great misfortune, since you will survive and so will your
 31 power in Asia as far as your house is concerned. [3] And if you and your house
 32 survive, the Hellenes will have to run many races for their lives. Besides, if
 33 something happens to Mardonios, it is of no great consequence. And if the
 34 Hellenes win, they will not win anything substantial by destroying your slave,
 35 while you will march home after you have burned Athens, and thus will have
 36 achieved the goal of your expedition.

37
 38 Strangely, Artemisia's strategic advice very closely matches that given to
 39 Xerxes by Artabanos four years earlier, long before the Persians muster their
 40 army and embark on their punitive expedition (Hdt. 7.10.Θ.1-3).

41 Xerxes was delighted with this advice, for she had succeeded in telling him
 42 exactly what he was thinking himself. But I suppose that even if all the men and
 43 women in the world had advised him to stay, he would not have done so, such
 44 was his state of utter terror. After praising Artemisia, he sent her off to take his
 45 sons to Ephesus, for some of his illegitimate sons had accompanied him (Hdt.
 46 8.101-103).

Surrounded by Yes-Men

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Evidently all Xerxes is waiting for is for one of his more credible and selfless commanders to openly recommend the course of action he was going to adopt anyway. Entrusting her with the safe return to Susa of his offspring demonstrates that he has no doubts about either her loyalty or seamanship. Herodotus' narrative about the conclusion of the second Greco-Persian war continues in book 9 of his *Histories* with the land battle at Plataea and what might have been a naval engagement off Samos, but which became a land battle at Mycale on the Anatolian mainland. Herodotus does not say whether or not Artemisia's ships are involved in the campaign during the summer of 479, although he mentions that the Phoenicians were sent away (Hdt. 9.96). Perhaps Artemisia's fleet are sent away, too?

When the Hellenes had destroyed the majority of the barbarians, both those fighting and those fleeing, they set fire to the enemy ships and to the entire wall. But before they did that, they collected and removed all the spoils to the beach, and there discovered that among the items they had seized were some treasure chests full of riches. After setting fire to the wall they sailed away in their ships.

[2] When they arrived at Samos, the Hellenes held a conference to discuss the evacuation of the Ionians and in which part of Hellas under Greek control they might be settled, because they were considering the abandonment of Ionia to the barbarians. On the one hand, it seemed impossible for them to protect the Ionians by guarding their land forever, but on the other, they knew that if they did not somehow protect the Ionians, the latter would have no hope of escaping punishment at the hands of the Persians. [3] In view of these considerations, the Peloponnesians in office at the time thought it best to depopulate the trading centers of those Greek peoples who had medized and to allow the Ionians to inhabit those lands.²⁷

But the Athenians believed that Ionia should not be evacuated at all, and that the Peloponnesians should not determine what would happen to Athenian colonists. In the face of their vehement opposition, the Peloponnesians yielded to them. [4] And so it was in this way that the Hellenes admitted into their alliance the Samians, Chians, Lesbians, and the other islanders who had joined the Greek side in the fight, and they obliged them with pledges and oaths to remain faithful to the alliance and not to desert it. After binding them to the alliance with sworn oaths, they sailed off to break up the bridges, which they thought would still be intact (Hdt. 9.106.1–4).²⁸

²⁷This primarily naval force is under the overall command of the Spartan king, Leotychidas. The command of the Athenian contingent fell to Xanthippos (Hdt. 8.130.1–3).

²⁸After the battle off Salamis in the late summer of 480, Xerxes retreats with part of his army through Thessaly, Macedonia, and Thrace to the Chersonese. Here he discovers that autumn storms had already destroyed his bridges across the Dardanelles to the Hellespont. The remnants of the trireme fleet that fought at Salamis and supporting

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2 The Spartan proposal involving mass relocations is perhaps grossly
3 impractical, but their point about the impossibility, not to mention the cost, of
4 garrisoning every Ionian colony on the Anatolian coast in perpetuity (and
5 presumably every Dorian settlement, too) is strictly pragmatic. The
6 settlements in the Cyclades Islands can deter invasion with their own naval
7 forces and resist any attempts at siege until aid arrives from the mainland, but
8 strong, fully-manned, naval squadrons on constant patrol, except for the
9 winter months, are needed to protect the more distant islands such as Rhodes,
10 Samos, Chios, and Cos.

11 Critically this is Herodotus' first mention of an alliance headed up by
12 Athenians, soon known as the Delian League. Up until this time the forces
13 opposing Xerxes have been under the umbrella of the Sparta-led
14 Peloponnesian League, with a handful of city-states outside of the
15 Peloponnese including Athens, admitted as ad hoc members for the duration
16 of the hostilities (Hdt. 9.106.4). Once again Artemisia proves to be prescient,
17 even with a crushing League victory the Spartans are still either isolationist or
18 preoccupied with threats nearer home—or both—they do not have their own
19 navy and their hoplite army seldom ventures beyond the Peloponnese—the
20 ghost of Cleomenes could have told anyone that much without recourse to
21 Delphi.

22 Anyone familiar with the sixth-century territorial ambitions of Cyrus the
23 Great—and we can include Queen Artemisia—would remember that in 546
24 the Ionians sent messengers to Sparta asking for help in their struggle against
25 Cyrus (Hdt. 1.141.4 and 1.151.1). Herodotus writes:

26

27 The Lacedaemonians, however, refused to heed this plea and decided against
28 helping the Ionians against Cyrus, so the messengers departed. However, in
29 spite of having turned the Ionians away, the Lacedaemonians dispatched some
30 men in a penteconter—I presume in order to spy on the affairs of Cyrus and the
31 Ionians. And when they arrived in Phocaea, they sent the most distinguished
32 man with them, named Lakrines, to Sardis to declare to Cyrus in the name of the
33 Lacedaemonians that he must not inflict reckless damage on any city in Hellenic
34 territory, since the Lacedaemonians would not tolerate it (Hdt. 1.152.2).

35 Cyrus' response to this threatened *line in the sand* from Sparta is a succinct
36 *middle or Median finger*, and a gentle reminder for Spartans to mind their own
37 business:

38

39 They say that when the herald had delivered this message, Cyrus questioned the
40 Hellenes who were with him, asking them who were these Lacedaemonians who
41 would send such a command to him, and how many of them were there? When
42 he heard their response, he said to the Spartan herald, "I have never feared any

transport vessels ferry the king and his troops to Abydos on the Asian side (Hdt. 8.130).

1 men who have a place in the center of the city set aside for meeting together,
 2 swearing false oaths, and cheating one another, and if I live long enough,
 3 Lacedaemonians will have troubles of their own about which to converse, rather
 4 than those of the Ionians” (Hdt. 153.1).

5
 6 From what Herodotus tells us, Cleomenes, his forefathers and his
 7 successors did not need to hear Cyrus’ threat—even the scantiest knowledge
 8 of Eastern Mediterranean geography informs the Spartan kings that the
 9 Anatolian coast, let alone Susa, is too far away. They might come to him in
 10 force, but that is different—and for that blame the Athenians for foolishly
 11 starting a fight that they would need help to finish.

12 13 14 **A Dorian Amazon** 15

16 What can we deduce about Artemisia’s character from the four extended
 17 anecdotes that Herodotus provides? He goes to considerable lengths to give
 18 her genealogy as more Dorian than Carian, let alone Ionian; and it is fair to ask
 19 why. When describing the battle off Salamis Herodotus appears to be
 20 comparing her role as a trusted military/naval advisor to Xerxes to the parallel
 21 strategic discussions Themistocles is having with other members of the
 22 Hellenic Alliance. Xerxes’ treatment of her is gender neutral—she is one of his
 23 more trusted and able naval commanders and that is all there is to it.²⁹ Neither
 24 fish nor fowl—Artemisia, unlike Atossa is not the consort of a Persian
 25 emperor. But to her credit she has earned agency, autonomy, and authority:
 26 moreover, she is prepared to accept the cost—accountability.³⁰ Nor has she
 27 been obliged to become androgynous like Artemis or Athena to achieve this—
 28 she takes a spouse and is a child-bearer. Unlike Gorgo she is not the consort
 29 of a Spartan king. She is an effective ruler in her own right, and it is this
 30 effectiveness that Herodotus and his audience find disturbing with an
 31 ambivalence fluctuating between admiration and revulsion.³¹ On a personal
 32 and domestic level, the Greek commanders have no difficulty seeing

²⁹ Richard Stoneman argues that Xerxes is dominated by strong women; initially by his mother (obviously), then by his principal (and only wife), and that perhaps he was similarly impressed by Artemisia (*Xerxes: A Persian Life* 9, 30, and 123). But unless Xenophon or Strabo have given scholars independent evidence, then this is just a Stoneman interpretation of Herodotus, perhaps overly influenced by modern popular novelists.

³⁰These three essential elements—the three A’s— are always present in whichever wave of feminist theory you scrutinise let alone adopt.

³¹One of the more famous dictums of Demosthenes comes to mind, “Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of our persons, but wives to bear us legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of our households” (Demosthenes, *Orations* 59.122).

1 themselves fulfilling three roles for their wives: father for their children, but
 2 companion, and lover for their children's mother; but they are blind to the
 3 notion that their spouses might well see themselves fulfilling three similar
 4 roles for their husbands—namely *hetairai*, but not just *pornai*, *pallakai*, and
 5 *gynaikai*. Just as the men have temporarily suspended their domestic
 6 responsibilities to go to war, Artemisia, albeit a widow, has done much the
 7 same thing. The Athenian playwright's jest about her being an Amazon is
 8 dangerously telling, and that is not just because the Amazons, like Artemis,
 9 fought on the Trojan's side against the Hellenes.³²

10 Furthermore, do events in Anatolia within living memory have any
 11 bearing on her style of governance? Artemisia will doubtless have heard of the
 12 very similar rebuff given by the Spartan king Cleomenes in 500 when
 13 Aristagoras, the tyrant of Miletus, comes to Sparta soliciting his interest in a
 14 self-financing raid on the Persian capital Susa (Hdt. 5.49.1–4, 7–9). All Spartan
 15 interest vanishes, if there ever was any, when Cleomenes learns that the
 16 Persian capital is a three-month long journey inland from the coast (Hdt.
 17 5.50.2). That Aristagoras is successful in obtaining Athenian interest is the
 18 cause of Darius' crushing of the Ionian Revolt early in the fifth century, and
 19 one of the reasons behind several Persian punitive expeditions to mainland
 20 Greece and the two Greco-Persian wars. In short, as the ruler of Halicarnassus
 21 Artemisia knows that causing trouble for Xerxes and then relying on Athens,
 22 let alone Sparta, for military protection forever afterwards is naïve if not
 23 foolhardy. This puts her in a similar position to that of Alexander of Macedon.
 24 She best serves her subjects, let alone her own family, by keeping Xerxes'
 25 garrison troops well out of her domain and by giving Xerxes no cause to
 26 dismiss her and appoint a Persian commander to her governorship—in short,
 27 pay the agreed tribute on time, respond promptly to troop levies, and do not
 28 knowingly harbor malcontents.³³

³² The Amazons, who Herodotus tells us come from a region in northern Anatolia and who perhaps inveigle young Scythian warriors to come ashore solely for breeding purposes—copulation on demand for procreation—are always depicted dressed very much like Artemis, wearing the short Spartan peplos with right shoulder bare (Hdt. 4.111.2–4.113.1). From post Homeric sources we know that the Amazons are skilled mounted archers and fought against the Greeks during the Trojan War. There are also mythical stories of Theseus and the Amazons attacking Athens.

³³ As hinted at by several scholars, appearances are sometimes not deceptive at all and this may be why Herodotus and possibly his family become *personae non gratae* in Halicarnassus.

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