

Herodotus 9.111

This paper aims to give the reader the opportunity to understand how Herodotus describes the role of women in paragraph 9.111 but also through the *Histories* and the reason why Herodotus sometime leaves the female characters nameless¹.

The reader will also find out the story concerning the royal family of Xerxes², whose dynamics, seem, agreeing with Griffith³, to be an intention of Herodotus to link the beginning and the end of the work.

The *Histories*, in fact, begin with the novel by Candaules and Gyges⁴ and end with the story of Xerxes and his brother's wife⁵ both stories seem connected from the author who offers to the reader two family insights⁶ into which ἔρωσ plays a fundamental role. According to Gammie⁷ both tales have some points in common, both begin with the description of a kind ἔρωσ, erotic and passionate love felt by a king towards a family member which is shown with an offer: Candaules over Gyges⁸ and Xerxes over Artaynte⁹. Xerxes' wife¹⁰ and Candaules' wife¹¹ blame a person originally involved and give the chance to compromise. At the end the king is obliged to accept the compromise, Xerxes¹² having to respect the tradition of banquets, as Griffith explains, "unwilling, but compelled by custom, Xerxes κατανεύει, 'nodded down'¹³, in the time honoured gesture of assent"¹⁴ and Gyges for the respect of a person to whom he was devoted¹⁵, and the consequent end of the kingdom, both Candaules and also Masistes. It is reasonable to assume that Griffiths tries to explain how Herodotus creates a narrative structure that repeats itself in different parts of the book as here¹⁶. In fact his methodological intention is to create a repetitive and schematic order of events that the reader can already know and in which he knows how to orient himself.

In addition, Larson¹⁷ states that another strong similarity between the two stories is the fact that Herodotus hides the two women's names, because he is worried about the guilt of which the two innocent wives could be accused, on the one hand, Candaules' wife worries about defending her sexual reputation, being seen naked by another man, while as regards Masiste's wife, she is the only one of the three female characters of the tale to remain nameless, a voluntary action by Herodotus to underline its goodness compared to the other two.

In support of this opinion can be seen as Herodotus previously describes the figures of Io, Europa, Medea and Helen¹⁸ "[...] as prelude and counterpoint to his tale [...] although to us these women are purely mythical [...] his representation of their situations as historical thus allows us to compare his treatment of their names with his subsequent treatment of the rather more acceptably historical figures of Candaules' and Masistes' wives"¹⁹

¹ Larson, 2006, pp.225

² Hdt 9.111

³ Griffith, 2011, pp.312

⁴ Hdt 1.8-13

⁵ Hdt 9.108-113

⁶ Hdt, 1.8-13, 9.108-13

⁷ Griffith, ibidem, pp.311

⁸ Hdt 1.8.2

⁹ Hdt 9.109.2

¹⁰ Hdt 9.110.2-111.1

¹¹ Hdt 1.11.2

¹² Hdt 9.110.2-111.5

¹³ Hdt 9.111.1

¹⁴ Griffith, ibidem, 2011

¹⁵ Hdt 1.11.2-4

¹⁶ Hdt 1.8-13, 9.108-13

¹⁷ Larson, ibidem, pp.240

¹⁸ Hdt 1.1-5

¹⁹ Larson, ibidem, pp.229

Some scholars²⁰ do not consider Herodotus very active as a moralist, instead, according to Larson, Herodotus, through the various stories told, describes: “three different types of wifely figures and denotes these differences through naming: Masistes’ wife, the blameless, faithful and victimized wife, remains anonymous, while Herodotus freely (and repeatedly) names Artaynte, the adulterous daughter, and Amestris, the savage and powerful queen of Xerxes some can be named, others remain nameless.”²¹

It is worth noting, how, even Candaules’ wife, is reflected in one of the three delineated roles. She is the victimized one, who remains in the middle of the progress of events between the two men. This comparison between the two stories leads the reader to have an expectation at the end of the Xerxes’ novel. As Welser raises²², in fact, as Candaules had been punished, being killed at night by his guard, so also the revenge and the promise of death of Masistes are awaited by the reader. These similarities between the deaths of Xerxes and Candaules would be “uncanny”²³, to use Welser's words, without an analysis from the methodological point of view of Herodotus' work. His historiography, as Citti recalls, is known as the first organized narration, which works following a methodology based on the use of objective, reasoned and clear sources.

In conclusion it is important to underline how, Herodotus’ choice, to name or leave the female characters nameless, and to create a compelling and planned dynamic of the facts between the brothers, Xerxes and Masistes, and, the end of Xerxes kingdom, can be defined as elements of the “Herodotean didacticism”, which, “becomes in the last chapters of the Histories almost pedagogical in its forcefulness and focus, its desire deliberately to instruct the reader in his proper response to what he reads and experiences.”²⁴

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²⁰ Waters (1971) 84; Dewald (1981) 106; Hazewindus (2004) 80, 125-6

²¹ Larson, *ibidem*, pp. 241

²² Welser, 2009, pp. 364

²³ Welser, *ibidem*, pp. 365

²⁴ Welser, *ibidem*, pp. 383