



Women in Herodotus

HERODOTUS AND HIS HISTORIES CLASS

This presentation will focus on:

- ▶ The women in our source Herodotus' *Histories* to discuss women as victims of Eros or the victims of others Eros with specific reference to:
 - ▶ Cambyses
 - ▶ Xerxes
 - ▶ Mycenius' Daughter
- ▶ Looking at the representation of women, types of relationships which lead to transgressive or non transgressive behaviors.

3.31-33 Cambyses' Madness:

Comparison to Book of Ester.

Quotes:

“His Sister ... His Wife” Hdt. 3.31

“Passionately lusted after another of his sisters” Hdt. 3.31

“Cambyses had married the one he particularly lusted after” Hdt. 3.31

“He though his brother would kill him and gain power.” Hdt. 3.30

Summary:

- Cambyses dreams of his brother killing him and taking power.
- Cambyses marries his sister against Persian Law, lusts after his other sister.
- Cambyses kills his brother.
- Cambyses' Wife-Sister hints at knowledge of murder, he kills her.
- In one account he also kills their unborn child.

3.31-33 Cambyses' Madness:

Transgressions:

Lusting after sisters – Incest.

Marrying sister above the Persian law.

Murder of Brother (Male Victim of Eros)

Murder of Sister (Possibly unborn child also)

*Eros – Lust for another,
or lust for power?*

*Does Eros create
transgressive behaviour?*

Candaules' Boast:

Quotes:

"Candaules became enamoured
... Most beautiful woman in world"
Hdt. 1.08

"I don't think you believe what I
say ... I want you to see her
naked" Hdt. 1.08

"It is a source of great shame to
even see a MAN naked" Hdt. Hdt
1.10

"Either you can kill him ... have me,
have kingdom ... or kill yourself."
Hdt 1.11

► Transgressions:

► Candaules forces his
guard to see his wife
naked. Very
unorthodox/shameful.

► Candaules' wife forces
Gyges to kill either the
King or himself.

► Gyges kills his own king,
becomes ruler.

9:108-113 Xerxes



Types of Eros

Xerxes-Masistes wife- lust [Hdt.1.108.1-2]

Xerxes-Niece Artaynta- lust (Ἡραμαί - eramai) [Hdt.1.108]

Artaynta-robe- material lust [Hdt.1.109]

Amestris-brothers wife- revenge
(εβουλεue ολεθρον – ebouleue
olethron) [Hdt.1.110]

Masistes-his wife- love [Hdt.1.111]

Transgressive

Xerxes-Masistes wife- lust

Xerxes-Niece Artaynta- lust
(eramai)

Non-transgressive

Masistes-his wife- love

Mycenius' Daughter:

Story of Lust – Possibly raped by Mycenius'

Possibly took her life – Victim of Eros via Mycenius.

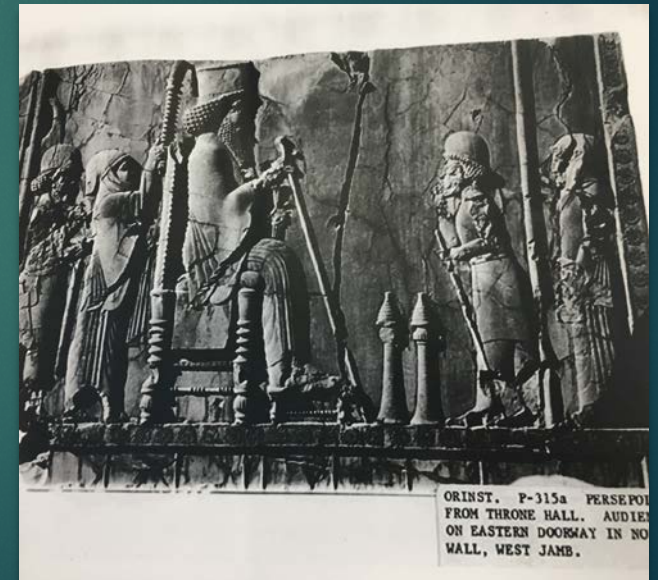
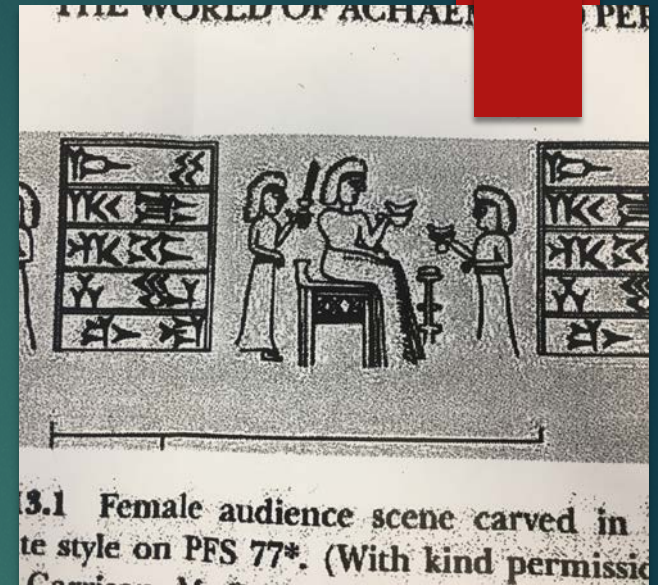
Heavily grieved – Placed in gilded Cow Coffin and kept in Palace.

Statues of Handmaidens arrayed around her –
Possibly with dead/maimed Handmaidens inside.

Handmaidens possibly maimed and killed for
allowing her to kill herself after rape. – Victims of Eros.

Representation in art

- Shows the Persian view of Persian royalty, Queens and Kings are viewed in the same way and this is showed in their representation in art.



Have you identified a cultural understanding of eros?

- ▶ The idea of neutrality until affected by eros, beings guided to a set of actions that are either positive or negative.
- ▶ Persian women – is it important that they were ‘barbarian’ people?
- ▶ *Hippolytus* - Phadra is a Greek woman, interference of the gods, are they less susceptible to eros under normal circumstances? Do the Greeks require divine intervention to be in those situations.
- ▶ Plato – honorable and dishonorable love

Does genre affect the presentation?

- ▶ Yes, the genre of the story will affect the representation of the protagonist, as either a villain (Medea) or a victim (Hipp). This will influence the readers opinion of the effects of their eros.
- ▶ If this was a play the names of the main characters would need to be mentioned.

What type of women are presented? Is that important?

- ▶ Noble women: play are focused on the lives of Kings, Persian ones are associated with the wives/daughters of kings.
- ▶ For entertainment purposes no one wants to hear about the common people.
- ▶ Herodotus talks about Persian women

Bibliography

- ▶ Herodotus, *The Histories*. A.D. Godley. (trans.). 1920. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.