

Women in Herodotus' Oracles

A Look beyond the Pythia¹

Carmen Sánchez-Mañas

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ABSTRACT: Women other than the Pythia are excluded from the consultation and reception of oracles, but they are nevertheless present in the oracular passages of Herodotus' *Histories*. This paper focuses on the roles that they play in these passages, with the aim of determining the extent of their visibility. To this end, an analysis is conducted on the basis of their belonging or non-belonging to the community of male consultants or recipients of oracles. The examination shows that female presence in Herodotean oracular passages is quantitatively significant, diverse and pivotal in revealing interactions between the domestic and public domains within the communities involved in these passages.

KEYWORDS: community; consultants or recipients; Herodotus; oracles; women – comunità; consultanti o destinatari; donne; Erodoto; oracoli.

In the *Histories*, Herodotus includes one hundred and one passages in which oracular sites are consulted and oracular responses given. Reproducing the practices of the male-dominated Greek society, he never shows women as consultants, recipients of oracles or independent diviners. He only gives one woman a consistent central place in his oracular passages. As Dewald has stated, quantitatively speaking, the Pythia is the most important woman in Herodotus' work; she appears in eight of his nine books and shares Delphic Apollo's wisdom with a wide variety of male Greeks and Barbarians, from individual tyrants, kings and aristocrats to ordinary men and entire civic bodies². However, since the function performed by the Pythia is institutional, a question arises regarding, to borrow an expression from Gould, «the visibility of women»³ who are not linked to the Delphic establishment in Herodotean oracular passages.

¹ Taking full responsibility for this paper, I would like to thank its two anonymous reviewers for their enlightening remarks and suggestions.

² Dewald 1981, 111.

³ Gould 1989, 130.

This paper seeks to answer that question by exploring the roles which other women play in these passages and how they are depicted. In order to achieve the highest possible precision, it focuses on women, both individually and in groups, who are mentioned in oracular responses or intervene in oracular passages, by providing oracular information, provoking the need to consult an oracular site or being a key factor in an oracular interpretation. Obviously, their degree of participation varies and, that being the case, not all these women have the same relevance. Nonetheless, they all contribute to oracular events, so they all deserve attention. This study is based on a dichotomy between belonging and non-belonging to the community of consultants or recipients, because female presence in all the oracular passages discussed is framed within the women's relationship with the men who consult and receive oracles. Thus, this essay is divided into three main sections (see *Tab. 1*):

Table 1

1. MEMBERS OF THE SAME COMMUNITY	1.1. Relatives of consultants or recipients: Her. I 7; I 91; II 111; V 92β; V 92η and VII 189.
	1.2. Service providers: Her. VI 52; VI 135 and VIII 96.
2. MEMBERS OF A DIFFERENT COMMUNITY	2.1. Relatives of (potential) enemies: Her. I 91 and VI 139.
	2.2. Relatives of potential allies: Her. VII 169.
3. CONCLUDING REMARKS	

1. MEMBERS OF THE SAME COMMUNITY

Nine individual women and three groups of women present in Herodotean oracular passages live in the Barbarian and Greek communities to which the male consultants or recipients of the oracles mentioned in these passages belong.

1.1. *Relatives of consultants or recipients*

The women who feature in Her. I 7; I 91; II 111; V 92β; V 92η and VII 189 tend to have a family relationship, through cohabitation, marriage or blood ties, with the men who consult or receive oracles in these passages.

In Her. I 7, three royal families are mentioned to explain Croesus' forefathers' access to the Lydian throne: the descendants of eponymous

king Lydus, Candaules' Heraclids and Croesus' own house, the Mermnads. The Heraclids are shown taking over from the first lineage as a result of an oracle, the origin and content of which are not discussed (Her. I 7, 4). Instead of going into oracular details, Herodotus concentrates on the ancestry of these kings, who, as they clearly benefit from the oracle, may be regarded as its recipients. A direct blood line links Heracles and the last Heraclid king Candaules through Heracles' Lydian son, Alcaeus. One could assert that Herodotus simply follows here a pre-existing tradition, but he makes a narrative choice by opting for one in particular. Among all available traditions, he deviates from the most widely accepted one and does not present queen Omphale, daughter of Lydian king Iardanus, as the mother of Heracles' son (cf. Apollod. II 6, 3; II 7, 8). According to Herodotus, the mother is Iardanus' slave. The evident lowering of status is a narrative strategy aimed at focusing readers' attention on Heracles alone as founding father, thus emphasising the dynasty's legitimacy, which was already established by the oracle. Since slavery prevents any chance of legal marriage and she is not described as a concubine, her cohabitation with Heracles appears to be less binding than concubinage. Her servile and anonymous condition accentuates the difference between the powerful male hero and his sexual partner, the powerless female mortal whose consent or lack of consent to their relationship is not deemed worthy of thematisation. Despite being the Lydian Heraclids' ancestral mother, she is not given an individual entity of her own; she is exclusively defined by her owner's identity and performs a purely biological function, that of passing on heroic genes to the next generation⁴.

In Her. I 91, Croesus, who is already Cyrus' prisoner, makes one last consultation at Delphi, and the Pythia delivers a response known as apology for its exculpatory content: Delphic Apollo is not guilty of treating Croesus unacceptably; rather, he himself is to blame for his defeat. But, in a typical example of Herodotean overdetermination, at the same time he pays for his ancestor Gyges' usurpation. Lydian king Candaules, desperately in love with his own spouse and convinced that she is the most gorgeous of all women, fatally wishes to persuade his guard Gyges of her beauty. He forces him to watch his wife in secret while she takes off her clothes in the bedroom. However, the wife becomes aware of her husband's incitement to voyeurism and forces Gyges to choose between two options: killing Candaules, marrying her and becoming king, or dying. Constrained by necessity, he opts for survival (Her. I 10-11).

⁴ Tourraix 1976, 369; Blok 2002, 232.

Murnaghan considers Gyges not an actor, but a spectator of events⁵. In a similar vein, Anhalt sees Candaules and his wife as puppeteers manipulating Gyges and suggests that Herodotus might have suppressed an early tradition, according to which Candaules' wife would have committed adultery with Gyges⁶. Even if formally suppressed, the possibility of an affair hovers over the account through the erotic charge of both the opening crisis (a woman undressing with her husband in their bedroom and another man, who fails to leave undetected) and its resolution (the woman has her husband murdered by this «other» man). Sexual or not, there is certainly a triangle, the dynamics of which are worth exploring further.

One may believe, as Cairns and Larson do⁷, that Candaules breaks the social rules of sexual propriety and destroys his relationship with his consort as well as the one between the royal couple and their guard. Following this way of thinking, the offended party – i.e., the wife – rightfully restores her honour by taking revenge. Initially, she plans to chastise Candaules alone (Her. I 10, 2). Later, she seems to consider both the mastermind (Candaules) and his agent (Gyges) to be responsible for the offence, since while presenting the dilemma to Gyges she contemplates the most severe punishment (death) for both men (Her. I 11, 2-3). Whether this is a real change of mind or a dialectical tactic, the truth is that she cannot take reprisals against both men because she needs a living husband to keep her position as the king's spouse.

Dewald and Boedeker characterise Candaules' wife as the beginning of a new line, that is, as a mother⁸. She is, indeed, Croesus' ancestral mother, but there are no explicit allusions to her maternity in Herodotus' text. This is because her position is determined by marriage not motherhood. Larson links her position to her anonymity by explaining that Herodotus deliberately hides her name in order to preserve her respectability, in opposition to his decision «to include the names of powerful or threatening women»⁹. However, she threatens Gyges and ultimately puts an end to Candaules' dominion. Therefore, I do not regard her lack of a name as a sign of respectability but as a way to highlight that she acts behind the scenes (planning the murder without actually carrying it out), in contrast to her named male companions.

Albeit negatively, the oracular phrase «by a woman's deceit»¹⁰ (Her. I 91, 1: δόλω γυναικίῳ) implies that the woman, Candaules' wife, is clever

⁵ Murnaghan 2015, 271.

⁶ Anhalt 2008, 274-275.

⁷ Cairns 1996, 83; Larson 2006, 238, n. 44.

⁸ Dewald 1981, 106; Boedeker 2017, 127.

⁹ Larson 2006, 234.

¹⁰ The Greek-English translations used in this paper are my own.

enough to hatch the scheme that the regicide, Gyges, implements to kill Candaules. The mastermind role shifts here from Candaules to her, who is far more successful than he is. Gyges is the agent of the machinations against the woman and against the king. As Candaules' immediate successor, Gyges benefits the most from the second plot. Hence, it should be underlined that he is not a puppet manipulated first by the monarch and then tricked by the woman into putting Candaules to death; he follows (*ἐπισπόμενος*) a plan designed by the woman to trick and assassinate his sovereign and rule in his stead.

Candaules' wife intelligence is shown before in her quick understanding of the situation when she sees Gyges leaving her room¹¹. She also displays her prudence when he accosts Gyges only after she is sure of the palace staff's loyalty (Her. I 11). In addition, she is powerful, at least inside the royal residence, and not only over slaves or menials, but also over important courtiers, like Gyges. He is one of the king's favourites and entrusted with very serious matters (Her. I 8, 1) and responds to Candaules' wife call too, whenever he is summoned (Her. I 11, 1). It is no coincidence that in her audiences with Gyges she is referred to as ἡ βασίλεια. Hazewindus points out that this is the only time that she is given this title and considers it to be reminiscent of *δέσποινα* (Her. I 8, 3), i.e., a form of address through which Gyges indicates his subordination to her¹². Nevertheless, the royal title does not label her merely as *Gyges' queen* but as *the queen*. Furthermore, this is the first of nine appearances of the word *basíleia* in the *Histories*¹³. Its use emphasises that Candaules' wife exerts dominance on her own: she is not simply portrayed as a royal consort but as an authoritative figure whose intervention is crucial for the transfer of sovereignty from one king to another.

In Her. II 111, Pharaoh Pheros loses his sight for having thrown a spear into the Nile. After years of blindness he receives a prophecy from the Egyptian oracular site at Buto, stating that he would see again, if he washes his eyes with the urine of a woman who has had sexual intercourse exclusively with her husband. In his search for an antidote, Pheros tries all women, including his wife (Her. II 111, 2-3). Herodotus' economical use of words threatens to conceal an interesting implication of Pheros' reaction to the oracle. When the historian refers to all women, he does not mean

¹¹ Soares 2014, 228.

¹² Hazewindus 2004, 65.

¹³ The other eight appearances apply to three ruling queens and a goddess: queens Nitocris and Semiramis of Babylon (Her. I 185, 1; I 187, 1; I 187, 5 and I 191, 3) and Tomyris of the Massageteans (Her. I 205, 1; I 211, 3 and I 213); and Scythian goddess Hestia (Her. IV 127, 4).

the entire Egyptian female population but only the group who, according to the oracle, can relieve him of his disease: married women. Therefore, virgins, the epitome of sexual virtue, are left out of the narrative. Married women's husbands are also excluded. Harrison maintains that Pheros kills the spouse of the woman who cures him¹⁴, but Herodotus says nothing about him, or about any other husband.

As soon as his sight is restored, Pheros gathers all the married women who failed to help him in one city and burns the place down, with them inside. One could claim that, by chastising them, Pheros avenges their cheated husbands. However, this image as a rightful avenger collides with a less flattering one. Before taking these women's lives he uses their urine. The massive extent of his use uncovers the Pharaoh's disrespect for his male countrymen, whose wives he treats as if they were his own property. The complete omission of the Egyptian husbands gives prominence to the fact that Pheros' story goes beyond a grotesque piece of folklore about the traditional misogynist theme of feminine faithlessness¹⁵. It is indeed a tale of a blind ruler whose healing process involves his eyes being symbolically opened to the hidden reality, which is represented by his wife's and many other married women's infidelity. At the same time, it is a tale of a monarch who exercises absolute control over his subjects as a whole; the female ones are unnamed and objectified and the male ones insulted and silenced.

The treatment recommended by the oracle, cleaning his eyes with urine, is consistent with traditional Egyptian medicine¹⁶. In addition to its healing qualities, urine has a sexual connotation due to its human origin. Since Pheros' tests do not include sexual contact, urine's sexual connotation is mostly latent in the text and is only fully developed through a brief reference to the Pharaoh's marriage to the woman who supplies the successful remedy (Her. II 111, 4: τῆς δὲ νηάμενος τῷ οὐρῷ ἀνέβλεψε, ταύτην δὲ ἔσχε αὐτὸς γυναῖκα). As Egypt's only decent wife she gains both sexual access to Pheros and the highest uxorial status in the country, but she does not stand out among her peers enough to have her name recorded; she is as anonymous as the lecherous women. Furthermore, since her union with Pheros is not said to produce children, she does not fulfil her marital duties, she is a mere vehicle for Pheros' recovery.

In Her. V 92, Socles of Corinth delivers a speech, which reflects Corinthian traditions that predate Herodotus. Notwithstanding, Herodotus makes a narrative choice by not circulating the inherited material himself,

¹⁴ Harrison 1997, 200, n. 13.

¹⁵ Lateiner 2015, 104.

¹⁶ Lloyd 1989, 332-334.

but giving way to a secondary narrator who intervenes before the Spartans and their Peloponnesian allies¹⁷. Undeniably, Socles speaks of the former Corinthian tyrannical dynasty, the Cypselids, in a pejorative way. He succeeds in convincing the Peloponnesians to reject the Spartan proposal of reinstalling Pisistratus' son Hippias as tyrant in Athens (Her. V 93). In his discourse he cites five oracles. Two individual women, Labda and Melissa, play an important part in four of them, while a group of female Corinthians is referred to in connection with one response.

In Her. V 92β Labda is introduced. She belongs to the Bacchiads, the then ruling clan of the oligarchy of Corinth, but her father Amphion cannot marry her within their extended family because she walks with a limp; her name graphically describes her deformity through the form of the Greek letter lambda, Λ¹⁸. Amphion gives his daughter's hand to a certain Eetion, son of Echebrates. Still childless after their marriage he consults at Delphi and the Pythia tells him that Labda is pregnant with a child who will rule over Corinth. The phrase «by this woman or any other» (Her. V 92β, 2: ἐκ δέ οἱ ταύτης τῆς γυναικὸς οὐδ' ἐξ ἄλλης παιῖδες ἐγίνοντο), which motivates the consultation, puts his lawful wife on the same level as his hypothetical concubines, indicating that Eetion would like a child, whether born in or outside wedlock. The response he receives enlightens the Bacchiads, who understand that an earlier oracle has the same meaning (Her. V 92β, 3). Both predictions reveal that Labda is already on her way to producing an heir. While Eetion's wife's pregnancy is depicted with the same verb, the subjects differ in both oracles (Her. V 92β, 2, v. 2: Λάβδα κύει [...]; Her. V 92β, 3, v. 1: αἰετὸς ἐν πέτρῃσι κύει [...]). In the first oracle, the subject is a proper name, Labda. By calling her by name, as she has done with Eetion in the previous line, the Pythia distinguishes Labda from the other women with whom her husband might have had sexual intercourse and brings her back to the position that she deserves as his wife. On the contrary, in the second oracle the subject is a common name, that of an eagle, which is a symbol for royalty or high lineage as well as an animal famous for its sharpness (cf. Hom. *Il.* XXIV 308-311; XVII 674-678).

For Strong, Labda's main contribution to her son's future status lies in the blood ties that connect her son to the oligarchs¹⁹. In fact, the connection legitimises, to some extent, his access to rulership. But more important than this is that she saves his life. Right after childbirth, she welcomes the visit of ten Bacchiads who she believes to be in her house out of fondness

¹⁷ Enrico 2015, 156-180.

¹⁸ For «Labda» as a speaking name cf. Ogden 1995, 220, n. 10.

¹⁹ Strong 2010, 463.

towards the baby's father and whose real aim is to kill it (Her. V 92γ, 1-2). Incapable of accomplishing their purpose, they go out and blame each other at the door, deciding to go in again and murder it (Her. V 92γ, 4). Labda overhears their conversation and quickly hides her son in the most concealed place that she can see – a *κυψέλη*, probably a container for storing grain²⁰, after which Cypselus is named – knowing that they would look everywhere (Her. V 92δ, 1). When the Bacchiads return they do search the house, but they cannot find the baby, so they leave and pretend that they have fulfilled their task (Her. V 92δ, 2).

With her husband offstage, the woman alone thwarts the murderous mission of ten adult men despite initially trusting them. Paradoxically, it is her trust that gives her the opportunity to save her son. By handing her son over to them she creates a situation of intimacy between the baby and its assailants; the newborn's smile sparks sympathy among them and dismantles their plan, forcing them to exit the house and devise *in situ* a new strategy and thus inadvertently disclose their true intentions to Labda. Purves draws attention to the recurrence of the concepts of covering and uncovering within the account of Cypselus' salvation²¹. In fact, this game of hide-and-seek played by Labda and the Bacchiads is constructed around sight-related terms (Her. V 92δ, 1-2: *ἐς τὸ ἀφραστότατόν οἱ ἐφαίνετο εἶναι [...] ἐσελθοῦσι δὲ καὶ διζημένοισι αὐτοῖσι ὡς οὐκ ἐφαίνετο*) and, from the moment she becomes aware of the threat, Labda proves worthy of her oracular eagle identity. She triumphs over the aggressors' weaker perception by making use of her sharp vision to anticipate their actions and find the most undetectable refuge available for her baby.

Introduced in the narrative as the wife of a consultant, Eetion, her performance is chiefly that of the devoted mother of another consultant, their son Cypselus; Labda's maternal protection allows him to impose the tyranny foretold by the oracle obtained when he reached adulthood and went to Delphi (Her. V 92ε, 2)²².

After Cypselus, Socles focuses on his son and heir, Periander, by drawing a portrait that revolves around his contact with his dead wife Melissa, daughter of tyrant Procles of Epidaurus (III 50, 2). In Her. V 92η, wanting to seize some money deposited in his keeping by a foreign guest, Periander sends emissaries to the oracular site of the dead in Thesprotia, one of the principal shrines where ancient Greek consultants could encounter dead

²⁰ Gray 1996, 379.

²¹ Purves 2014, 122.

²² Gould 1989, 131.

persons and ask them questions²³. This is the only instance in the *Histories* in which a dead person is consulted at an oracular site. Accordingly, a proof of truth, an exception in oracular passages, is provided by the dead person concerned, who is not a reputable oracular prophetess but a dead woman that appears invoked at a relative's behest. Johnston points towards the necessity of demonstrating that Melissa is the right ghost and alleges that

 Melissa's proof not only reveals Periander's personal proclivities but shows that she knows what has been happening in the upper world since she died, as does her knowledge of where Periander's object can be found.²⁴

Melissa's proof, that Periander had put his loaves inside a cold oven, is accepted by her husband, who committed necrophilia with her body (Her. V 92η, 2-3). The proof presupposes her knowledge of Periander's misdeed, but it does not necessarily mean that she learnt the deposit's location when she was already dead. Rather I believe that she knew it *before* her death. In spite of its gloomy atmosphere, the exchange between Periander and Melissa is strikingly domestic. From the question that his messengers ask her, it is obvious that he does not know or does not remember the location of the foreigner's money, and he does what any married man would do if he could not find something he wanted, namely, turns to his partner for help, as if he had asked «Darling, where is my wallet?». As a married woman Melissa was surely intended to be in charge of domestic affairs. She probably acted as administrator at her husband's home or, at least, was to some extent familiar with the family finances. Given her husband's ignorance or failure to remember the matter, she presumably either kept the deposit herself or was told where it was while she was still alive; after all, she has a speaking name, Μέλισσα («bee»), which illustrates the archetype of industrious wife who is skilled in household management (cf. Semon. VII 83-85 Diehl). In other words, it is her lived experience as his wife that makes Melissa the right ghost for Periander.

She takes the opportunity offered by her husband's request to improve her situation, refusing to explain where the deposit is and complaining about being cold and naked because her funerary clothes were not completely burnt. The alleged feeling of cold suggests that she retains her sensory capacity after death. Melissa is not entirely disconnected from the world of the living and thus unable to rest in peace. To do so, she needs Periander's cooperation.

²³ Johnston 1999, 29.

²⁴ Johnston 1999, viii.

By virtue of her allegorical language, Melissa provides an evidence for his eyes only (Her. V 92η, 2: μαρτύριον δέ οι εἶναι) and conceals Periander's necrophilia from both his oracular messengers and his contemporary compatriots. It would certainly have remained unnoticed by Socles' and Herodotus' audiences without an explanation (Her. V 92η, 3: ὃς νεκρῷ εἰούση Μελίσση ἐμίγη). This reveals two different readings of Periander's interaction with Melissa. On the one hand, there is a public reading, on which Socles focuses. Periander transgresses social convention at the expense of his wife and all female Corinthians, whom he strips of their clothes. As in Candaules' wife's incident, nudity outside the limits of marriage brings shame on women²⁵. Moreover, Periander's act is reminiscent of Pheros' conduct towards Egyptian women, because both attitudes result in a flagrant disrespect for the women's kinsmen. In this way, it is set out explicitly that Periander subjugates all the inhabitants of Corinth, both men and women. In retrospect, Socles exposes Periander not only as a necrophile but also as an oppressive husband who possesses his wife even after her demise, an iniquitous tyrant who usurps his fellow countrymen's rights by treating their women as his own property, and as a dishonest host who is eager to appropriate his guest's resources.

On the other hand, Periander's interaction with Melissa also permits a private reading. In her utterance, Melissa uses her husband's sexual abuse of her as a code that is exclusive to them both, but she does not resent it, possibly because it fits the dynamics of their relationship²⁶. However, her denial to reveal the location of the deposit implies a tacit reproach for neglecting the proper cremation of her funerary clothes. Conscious of it, Periander pays attention to detail in order to make amends. He assembles the Corinthian women at Hera's temple, which is a suitable place for appeasing his wife²⁷. They all come in their best finery as if they were attending a religious festival, plausibly thinking that they would participate in a celebration. Their smart attire gives Periander the chance of presenting Melissa with a lavish sacrifice. When he makes his second consultation, Melissa informs Periander of the deposit's location (Her. V 92η, 3-4). Her change of behaviour makes it clear that she does not condemn her husband for his greed for someone else's money or for forcing all the Corinthian women to be naked. Conversely, she sees his covetousness as a bargain-

²⁵ Soares 2014, 229-230.

²⁶ Periander had killed his wife and suffered yet another calamity (συμφορῆ) in Her. III 50, 1. The word indicates either that it was an accident or that Periander regretted it. At any rate, the circumstances of her death show that violence is a factor in their relationship.

²⁷ Hera is the divine guardian of human marriages, cf. Pomeroy 1987, 22.

ing chip for imposing her interests and his donation of the finest clothing owned by the whole female population as recognition of her highest rank among Corinthian women, corresponding to her position as the ruler's deceased wife. The public humiliation that the living female Corinthians endure exalts dead Melissa, and the gulf between them is widened by this difference: whilst the group falls into anonymity, the individual's name, i.e. her distinct identity, is preserved.

But, most importantly, Periander and Melissa instrumentalise each other. He supplies the garments with a view to obtaining the information that he needs in order to take his guest's money, and she supplies this information in return for the clothes that she needs for her comfort in the underworld.

In Her. VII 189, within the account of a three-day storm that wrecks a number of Persian ships off the coast of Magnesia (Her. VII 188-191), Herodotus gives a voice to the Athenians in a tale of divine intervention. An oracle of unknown origin urges them to summon their relative by marriage as a protector. Recalling that Boreas, the north wind, had an Attic wife called Oreithyia, daughter of their ancient king Erechtheus, the Athenians infer that Boreas is their relative-in-law and enlist his and Oreithyia's help to direct the adverse weather conditions against the Barbarian fleet.

Following a well recognisable pattern, the myth presents a young woman who is carried away by a god (cf. Plat. *Phdr.* 229b-d). Finkelberg points out that Herodotus does not mention Oreithyia's kidnapping and explains his silence using the argument that at his time there was no consensus on the site of abduction²⁸. But taking lack of consensus as the reason for this omission detracts from the main trait of the recollection of the legend, its succinctness. The only particulars given are her link to Boreas, her origin, her own name and her father's name (Her. VII 189, 1: γυναῖκα Ἀττικὴν, Ὠρείθυιαν τὴν Ἐρεχθέος).

This display of narrative economy brings Oreithyia's standing to the fore. Her abduction is passed over to emphasise that she is not just another mortal woman carried off by a philandering male deity but Boreas' wedded wife of royal descent. Moreover, the registration of her name leaves no doubt that she herself is the only one amongst all human princesses including her sisters whom he marries. In her double capacity as king Erechtheus' daughter and Boreas' spouse Oreithyia lets the Athenian people connect with her divine husband; she is the key to their oracular interpretation.

On the symbolic level, the Athenians can be regarded as members of their old king's family. They are indeed called Ἐρεχθεῖδαι, sons of Erech-

²⁸ Finkelberg 2014, 92.

theus (e.g. Pind. *Isthm.* II 19; Eur. *Med.* 824), which makes Oreithyia their sister. Upon his marriage, Boreas becomes their brother-in-law (Her. VII 189, 1: τὸν γαμβρόν)²⁹, and the Athenians have the right to declare themselves his favourites. Oreithyia does not only guarantee this privileged relationship. Offered sacrifices and invoked along with Boreas, she plainly has acquired a superhuman status and the power to create storms. But it remains unclear whether she exerts her power on this occasion because only Boreas is believed to have helped the Athenians and Oreithyia is left out of the thanksgiving: she has no share in the temple that the Athenians erect upon their return to Attica, dedicated to Boreas alone (Her. VII 189, 3).

1.2. *Service providers*

The women who appear in Her. VI 52; VI 135 and VIII 96 perform social, religious and domestic duties for the benefit of the communities in which the men that consult or receive oracles in these passages live.

In Her. VI 52, the origin of the Spartan diarchy inaugurated by brothers Eurysthenes and Procles is reported as a genetic explanation for the feud between their respective descendants, diarchs Cleomenes and Demaratus. Monarchical king Aristodemus, who led his folk to the Peloponnese, dies prematurely leaving a pair of identical twins as heirs, born to his wife. She is a Spartan of Theban and Argive descent. Her Theban forefathers go five generations back to Polyneices, son of Oedipus (Her. VI 52, 2). Her Argive connection – visible in her speaking name, Argeia («Argive») – dates back to Perseus and his grandfather Acrisius (Her. VI 53-54). Through Argeia, Eurysthenes and Procles add Labdacid and, above all, Perseid pedigrees to their paternal Heraclid lineage³⁰. Although exceedingly noble, there are signs of a fraternal grudge in her ancestry, as revealed by brothers Polyneices and Eteocles and by twins Acrisius and Proetus (cf. Eur. *Phoen.* 70-80; Apollod. II 2, 1). In accordance with this history, Eurysthenes and Procles grow up to loathe each other and pass their feelings on to their progeny. But Argeia is not a mere transmitter of genes; she is an attentive mother who looks after her babies herself (Her. VI 52, 7-8)³¹. At the same

²⁹ In this passage γαμβρός is usually translated as «son-in-law», as in Finkelberg 2014, 87; Mikalson 2003, 61; Fontenrose 1978, 318 or, with reservations, Powell 1938, 63. Albeit possible, this meaning would make the Athenians Oreithyia's parents and hence peer to king Erechtheus, and such an equation is at odds with their subjection to Erechtheus.

³⁰ Calame 1987, 175.

³¹ For highly ranked Spartan women who take on childcare responsibilities cf. Pomeroy 2002, 74.

time, she is ambitious. As womanhood prevents her from wielding power, she aspires to make both her sons king, in opposition to the Spartan custom of enthroning the eldest heir of their previous leader.

Gera has labelled the tale as incoherent:

Herodotus' story does not really make sense: Argeia wants both her sons to be king and consequently refuses to acknowledge the law of primogeniture, but when she takes care of her infant sons, she consistently tends the older one first. And, indeed, in doing so she behaves just as Panites expects her to: none of the parties involved can disregard the rights of the elder son. The twins are identical and undistinguishable (cf. ὅστε καὶ ὁμοίων καὶ ἴσων ἐόντων), but when the Spartans observe Argeia, they are nonetheless able to tell the difference between the two and realize that she always feeds the same one first. One also wonders why Panites did not come up with his plan before the oracle was consulted, for it would have been equally effective then. In addition, it is not clear why, once the oracle on the dual kingship had been given, and Argeia had achieved her essential aim of having both sons rule, she would be unwilling to reveal the identity of her older son.³²

However, there is no contradiction between Argeia's behaviour in public and private; both follow the same logic. Her statement that she cannot differentiate between her twins while clearly doing so, feeding and bathing them always in the same order does not mean that she publicly rejects the tradition of primogeniture, which she observes in private. She simply does not wish for her younger son to be neglected and reduced to the category of a commoner by the Spartans. In other words, she wants both boys to hold kingship but not necessarily the same degree of authority, so she has no intention whatsoever of disregarding the eldest child's rights. As for the babies' physical appearance, it is usual that people outside their inner circle may not be able to distinguish one twin from the other, but this incapability can be overcome through repeated contact, which is precisely what the recommendation offered by the Messenian Panites requires. The Spartans have to watch the woman taking care of her children a considerable number of times in order to reach a definitive conclusion on the problem of seniority. Furthermore, it is not that Argeia obstinately hides the truth once the oracle is given, but rather that the Spartans do not turn to her again; they are perplexed by the prediction. Panites intervenes, therefore, at the perfect time in the narrative after the Spartans have exhausted their two channels of information – the king's widow and the oracular shrine –, which they use once. Argeia probably does not know about the oracle or about the Messenian's counsel, since she is expressly unaware of the reason

³² Gera 1997, 122.

why she is under surveillance (Her. VI 52, 5). Even though she only interferes in the political affairs once, when the Spartans ask her (Her. VI 52, 3-4), this is sufficient to prompt a consultation at Delphi. In fact, the Pythia instructs the Spartans to behave towards the twins in a very similar way to Argeia. They should honour them both as kings but give pre-eminence to the firstborn, as she nurses them, attending to both but catering to the older baby's needs first. Her ambition is thereby endorsed by a Delphic oracle: the Spartans take charge of her favourite's upbringing, treating him as the firstborn, and call him Eurysthenes and his brother Procles (Her. VI 52, 7). Dual kingship becomes, from then on, the distinct feature of the Spartan political system. In this respect, Argeia is a kings' mother whose service to the community, which is represented by her double childbirth, ensures short-term social stability through the perpetuation of the late ruler's line but also gives rise to a political reorganisation that is not trouble-free³³.

In Her. VI 135, the Parians visit Delphi after Athenian Miltiades interrupts his last campaign, an offensive against Paros (Her. VI 132-140). According to them, it all begins when Miltiades finds himself in a predicament. A Parian woman called Timo then advises him to do whatever she tells him to, if Paros' capture is important to him. Her name, which is related to the verb τιμῶ («worship gods»), suits her position as an under-priestess of the chthonic goddesses Demeter and Persephone (Her. VI 134, 1: ὑποζάκορον τῶν χθονίων θεῶν)³⁴.

Dillon argues that Timo's dealings with Miltiades exemplify violent defensive actions undertaken by politically disempowered but ritually powerful women against political and military male leaders who try to control the religious activities of women³⁵. Indeed, as a female prisoner of war (Her. VI 134, 1), Timo has a place at the bottom of the social pyramid, whereas he, as winner of the Battle of Marathon and commander in chief of the army that holds her captive, is at the top. In addition, as a staff member of Demeter Thesmophoros' temple she is ritually competent in a field from which he, a non-native man, is excluded. Even so, attention should be drawn to the fact that he does not seek that control; it is she who goes to talk to him (Her. VI 134, 1). The fact that the Parians consult at Delphi before taking a decision shows that they have qualms about executing a woman with sacred status. Nevertheless, their comprehensive statement of her alleged crimes, including both an act of treason for instructing the enemy to capture her

³³ Boedeker 2017, 128.

³⁴ The term ὑποζάκορος seems to designate a minor female official active in cults devoted almost exclusively to goddesses, cf. Riel 2011, 12.

³⁵ Dillon 2017, 167.

homeland and a violation of a religious taboo by showing Miltiades rites prohibited for men (Her. VI 135, 2), implies that the Parians make efforts to prevent her from being granted immunity on the grounds of her status. But their plea is ineffectual, as the Pythia exonerates her, denying that she is responsible in any way and elucidating her behaviour further: Timo lures Miltiades into profanation with a vain promise of conquest, and he gives in to temptation. He intends to defile Demeter Thesmophoros' temple and its contents, with the aim of depriving Paros of the goddess' protection and thereby making the island conquerable³⁶. Miltiades' sacrilegious purpose faces an inexplicable opposition and does not materialise; despite this, he is punished. Unable to enter the temple and seized by panic, he severely hurts his thigh and has to return to Athens, where he is dishonoured and dies from the injury (Her. VI 134, 2; VI 136).

In triggering this, Timo acts as an effective instrument of the goddess whom she attends. Through her, Demeter Thesmophoros makes Miltiades ruin himself, the very man who endangers the continuation of her cult at Paros by threatening her worshippers.

Once Timo's role is clarified by the oracle, one expects some reference to the Parians' reaction to the prediction, but nothing of the sort is said; it is not known whether they let her live or not. Such an abrupt silence gives reason to think that Miltiades' temptress is not Timo in flesh and blood but a vision that inveigles the Athenian general into impiety and vanishes as soon as its function has been fulfilled. The oracle's wording hints that Miltiades experiences an epiphany (Her. VI 135, 3: Τιμοῦν [...] φανῆναί οἱ [...]). Timo would thus be doubled in the fashion of Stesichorean Helen (cf. Plat. *Phdr.* 243a-b; Apollod. *Epit.* III 5; Eur. *Hel.* 31-47). As real Helen stays in Egypt while her ghostlike image is carried away to Troy, the apparition of Timo would persuade Miltiades, while the real Timo would remain uninvolved and non-responsible. However, Timo is a familiar presence at the Athenian camp and has insider knowledge about both Parian matters and the Demetrian cult on the island. By virtue of those qualities, she would provide the godsent phantom with an image that would be suitable for deceiving Miltiades, thereby providing a service, albeit an involuntary one, to her community.

In Her. VIII 96 the naval Battle of Salamis is connected with its aftermath. The passage comprises two oracular responses that share the same realisation: many wrecks are carried to the Attic coast, specifically, to a shore called Colias. Only the content of the second oracle, uttered by seer Lysistratus of Athens, is stated: Colian women will cook with oars. But it is overlooked by all Greeks (Her. VIII 96, 2). The mention of their failure to

³⁶ Boedeker 2007, 79.

comprehend it suggests that Greeks as a whole are the intended recipients of the prediction. However, the allusion to Colias stamps a local hallmark on the picture; it is Attic women who are the subject of the prognostication, thus making their menfolk the most probable primary addressees of Lysistratus' words.

In Athens, women are responsible for food preparation, and married women should be able to cook³⁷. Taking this into account and given the scarce information provided by the text, there are two alternative contexts for the oracle that cast a different light on the oracular fulfilment.

The prophecy is finally realised after Xerxes' retreat. In the first context, that is, the domestic one, Lysistratus would foretell how the housewives living in the Attic peripheral area of Colias use wooden oars of damaged ships found on the beach as kitchen utensils. Against this backdrop, the Persian king's departure is just a detail. But considering where the wind blows the battle wrecks, a religious context is also viable. Athenian women usually perform the customary sacrifices to Demeter at Colias (Plut. *Sol.* VIII 4). Accordingly, the phrase «Colian women» would refer to female Athenians in general, who congregate at Colias to worship the goddess during the preliminary part of the Thesmophoria, a festival open only to married women³⁸. In this way, the oars would become devices for cooking sacrificial victims. At this juncture, the oracular fulfilment has broader implications, with all Athenian housewives participating in a civic ritual after the occupier king has left their native land.

Despite their differences, both contexts show Attic nameless women, whose anonymity underpins their representation as a group, economically reusing available resources for strictly feminine activities with advantageous effects for their community, such as feeding their families in normal conditions or complying with rituals meant to promote soil and human fertility after a particularly difficult time.

2. MEMBERS OF A DIFFERENT COMMUNITY

Two individual women and one group of women emerging in Herodotean oracular passages are and feel integrated into Barbarian and Greek communities to which the male consultants or recipients of the oracles reported in these passages do not belong.

³⁷ Pomeroy 1987, 89, n. 55.

³⁸ Sourvinou-Inwood 2004, 151; Johnston 2013, 375.

2.1. Relatives of (potential) enemies

The women who take part in Her. I 91 and VI 139 have a blood relationship with persons that the consultants or recipients of oracles in these passages view as foes or potential rivals.

After an initial examination apropos of Candaules' wife, it is now time to return to Her I 91 in search of another woman, the mother of an enemy of consultant Croesus. Croesus committed a mistake when he dismissed a previous oracular warning against a potential mule-king of Media (Her. I 55, 2). Thinking it impossible for a mule to reign over the Medes, he launched a war and lost his empire to Cyrus (Her. I 77-85). At the end of Delphic Apollo's apology, the Pythia points out that Cyrus is indeed the mule-king, the product of a marriage between parents of different ethnicities (Her. I 91, 5).

The Delphic explanation of Cyrus' background prioritises his maternal line. His mother, who is referred to as a Mede and a daughter of king Astyages of Media, is explicitly regarded as better than his father. He is designated an inferior to her twice and is described as a Persian, a subject of the Medes and an undeserving social climber who marries his mistress (Her. I 91, 5-6). Both parents are eclipsed by Astyages, the only relative of Cyrus whose name is given. By only naming the two of them, the oracle implicitly underscores the continuity between grandfather and grandson. Undoubtedly, the princess lends legitimacy to her son's accession, but she does so to the same degree as Labda. That is to say, in spite of being half Mede, a direct descendant of Astyages and the next king of the Medes, Cyrus does not acquire control of Media by inheritance.

This is evident from the information available in other sections of the *Histories*, where Cyrus' parents' names are revealed (Her. I 107-108). His mother is called Mandane, possibly a speaking name meaning «the Median woman»³⁹. Astyages dreams of her urinating so much that she floods the whole of Asia and covering the continent with a grapevine emanated from her genitals. Fearing that her son would usurp his throne⁴⁰, he tries to avert danger by sending his daughter away to live with the man he chooses as her husband, a Persian called Cambyses, a good tempered well-born man, whom Astyages himself considers much inferior to any middle-ranked

³⁹ Asheri 1988, 334.

⁴⁰ For the meaning of Astyages' dreams, cf. Pelling 1996, 70-74. Urine retains in the first dream the sexual connotation displayed in Her. II 111. According to Gray 1995, 205 it also signifies fecundity, but Mandane, as the mother of an only child, is not endowed with special fertility.

Mede (Her. I 107, 2). This opinion echoes the oracular description of Cyrus' parents' union, but is not totally accurate, since Cambyses is an Achaemenid prince (cf. Her. I 111, 5; I 125, 3; III 75, 1) and the king of the Persians⁴¹, at that time subdued to the Medes. By arranging their marriage Astyages creates the conditions for the birth of an heir to a vassal dynasty that simultaneously has a rightful claim to his own throne, giving the Persians a good leader for a potential rebellion against the Medes. Astyages orders to have Cyrus killed as a baby, but his life, like Cypselus', is spared. Cyrus survives apart from his biological family and, when he grows up, commands the Persians, revolts against and deposes his grandfather and conquers the Lydian Empire (Her. I 123-130).

Separated from her only son straight after his birth, Mandane cannot look after him in his early childhood, but ten years later he is discovered, pardoned and sent to Persia with his parents by his grandfather (Her. I 120, 6). Though when he arrives Cyrus is no longer a little boy expected to live with the women in the house (Her. I 136, 2), Mandane assumes her role as mother. She does so in a politicised way: she collaborates with her husband to enhance Cyrus' political stature among the Persians by creating the impression that he has survived thanks to special divine providence. Upon hearing how important his adoptive mother Cyno («bitch») has been in his life, they both spread the word that he was suckled by a female dog (Her. I 122, 3). At this point, Herodotus rationalises infant Cyrus' exposure myth (cf. Ael. *VH* XII 42; Just. *Epit.* I 4, 10). However, by presenting his parents as its first propagators (Her. I 122, 3) he makes Mandane and Cambyses committed to their son's political future and fully conscious of the benefits that he could derive from the aura of an abandoned royal child who is miraculously rescued by an animal sacred to the Persians⁴².

In Her. VI 139, a chain of grievance and requital between the Pelasgians dwelling in Attica and their Athenian neighbours culminates. After being expelled by the Athenians the Pelasgians settle on Lemnos (Her. VI 137). Having decided to retaliate and capitalising on their familiarity with the Athenian religious calendar, they carry off many of the women who are celebrating the festival of Artemis at Brauron and bring them to Lemnos (Her. VI 138, 1). Given the nature of the festival, the group of nameless Athenian women of whom Herodotus speaks must be formed by young unmarried girls performing rites of transition to marriageability and marriage⁴³.

⁴¹ Bichler 1988, 55.

⁴² Exposed babies saved and suckled by she-animals may achieve glory, cf. Pedrucci 2016, 320. For the sacred character of dogs in Persia cf. Asheri 1988, 336.

⁴³ Sourvinou-Inwood 2004, 153.

As a result of their kidnapping, these girls lose their chances of an honourable marriage in their city and are reduced to concubinage in another community (Her. VI 138, 1: *καί σφεας ἐς Λήμνον ἀγαρόντες παλλακὰς εἶχον*), but the kidnapers pay a price for interrupting a ritual supposed to tame women for marriage⁴⁴. Through their act of violence the Pelasgians do not acquire docile Athenian wives who assimilate to their male partners' culture but non-married women who resist them in a passive-aggressive way. The ravished women, whose anonymity stresses that they all act in a coordinated manner, teach their descendants Attic Greek and Athenian customs. This is the only occasion connected to an oracular passage when mothers are said to have played the role of educator. Dewald puts the spotlight on the women's persistence and ability to raise their sons and daughters, who happen to be also those of their captors, in the Attic culture amid a hostile environment⁴⁵. Their effort, however, leads to disaster.

These children of mixed parentage ironically avoid mingling with their legitimate half-brothers of pure Pelasgian extraction, over whom they prevail (Her. VI 138, 2). The concubines and their children diverge from the other women coupled outside their social or ethnic group and their sons that Herodotus handles in his oracular passages. While Labda and Mandane are married women who give birth only once and integrate themselves and their sons into their husbands' household and nation, the Athenian women and their bastards build a parallel closed community that refuses to acculturate to the Pelasgian society and even jeopardises the established order.

Contrary to the assertion of Sourvinou-Inwood⁴⁶, the superiority of the concubines and their children is not based on ethnicity; had they adapted to the Pelasgian language and usages, the Athenian women and their children would still have been ethnically different to the Pelasgians but not better. Their primacy stems from their adherence to Attic culture and their number, since the Athenian concubines prove to be extremely fertile (Her. VI 138, 2: *ὡς δὲ τέκνων αὐται αἱ γυναῖκες ὑπεπλήσθησαν*). The Pelasgian men wipe their bastards and concubines out (Her. VI 138, 4). After the murder, the Pelasgians starve and become childless because their lands bear no fruit, and their wives and animals do not have as many offspring as before. Strong understands their plight as proof of divine favour towards mixed unions⁴⁷.

⁴⁴ For the ritual meaning of the festival honouring Artemis at Brauron cf. Sourvinou-Inwood 2004, 163.

⁴⁵ Dewald 1981, 99.

⁴⁶ Sourvinou-Inwood 2004, 164.

⁴⁷ Strong 2010, 462.

Nonetheless, the problem is not related to hybridity; it is a punishment for parricide, as the equivalence between this killing and the previous – and, in modern eyes, mythic – assassination of Thoas’ Lemnian subjects by their own Lemnian wives (VI 137, 4) reflects. When the Pelasgians consult about a solution at Delphi, the Pythia orders them to make whatever reparation the Athenians decide (Her. VI 139, 1-2). Her response does not, as Baragwanath says, render the Athenians arbiters of justice⁴⁸ because they are not unbiased but directly affected by the wrongdoing. The Athenians, who have not avenged the massive abduction of their girls, are considered relatives of the victims and, therefore, authorised by Delphi to fix the compensation for the damage suffered as the offended party. In fact, the oracle acknowledges that both the concubines and the bastards are Athenians, as well as that the Pelasgian men have given up their family obligations towards their illegitimate children and their mothers. These women’s cultural loyalty prompts an inversion of the patriarchal system. They do not only retain their Athenian identity, but also make their children identify themselves as Athenians; these children do not belong to their fathers but to their mothers. The fathers themselves perceive the risk that such alienated children could pose, if grown up, for the true Pelasgians – that is, their sons by their lawful wives –, and resort to crime in order to prevent any threat. Although it is the children, presumably the male ones, who are credited with the capability of destabilising the community in the future, the concubines are seen as the source of evil and killed too. For the Pelasgians, these women are mothers of potential enemies.

2.2. *Relatives of potential allies*

One individual woman appearing in Her. VII 169 has a marriage relationship with a person with whom the consultants of the oracle recounted in this passage contemplate entering into a military pact.

In Her. VII 169, it is explained why the Cretans do not join the Greek league against Xerxes. When approached by representatives of the league, the Cretans make their decision dependent on oracular advice. They consult at Delphi about whether they should help the Greeks, and they receive a response reminding them of Minos’ wrath (Her. VII 169, 2). As a result, Crete was depopulated twice: first, when the Cretans could not avenge Minos’ assassination in Sicily, and, later, when they returned home from Troy, having fought on the Achaean side (Her. VII 170-171). Faced with

⁴⁸ Baragwanath 2008, 141.

the prospect of a third depopulation, the Cretans then resolve not to take sides in the hostilities (Her. VII 169, 2; VII 171, 2). According to Saïd, a universal law of justice operates in this oracular passage: one must pay back the debt that is due⁴⁹. In my estimation, the point is not an unpaid debt – strictly speaking, it is only the Cretans who are in debt to Minos on account of their frustrated retribution against his murderers – but a problem of reciprocity. The Pythia raises objections to the Cretans' collaboration in a military Panhellenic endeavour because it is unmotivated. Since the other Greeks did not assist them in their attempted revenge for Minos' death, the Cretans owe nothing to them and should not aid them. Moreover, the Cretans have already experienced the consequences of failing to reciprocate the Achaeans' indifference towards Minos' death with their own indifference towards Helen's destiny.

The prophecy plainly concerns itself with Helen's kidnapping by Alexander, a.k.a. Paris. They are already identified in Her. I 3, but the oracle names neither of them; only her spouse Menelaus is named. As Harrison demonstrates⁵⁰, Helen is defined exclusively in relation to Menelaus and he, not she, plays the offended party in the abduction. Furthermore, her inclinations towards Alexander are not discussed, and she is deprived of agency and reduced to the status of stolen property: «the woman carried off from Sparta by a Barbarian man» (Her. VII 169, 2: τὴν ἐκ Σπάρτης ἀρπασθεῖσαν ὑπ' ἀνδρὸς βαρβάρου γυναῖκα). This response presents the Trojan War as mere revenge on the part of a cuckold Spartan husband and his collaborators who, except for the Cretans, remain unidentified. Yet, as the Achaeans who wage war against Troy are more than mere collaborators of Menelaus, Helen is far from being a simple Spartan woman. Like Oreithyia, she is superhuman and an object of worship (Her. VI 61, 3). But, in contrast to Oreithyia, Io, Europa and Medea (Her. I 1-2), who are carried off while still unmarried, at the time of her abduction Helen is married and, what is more important, the reason behind her husband's kingship of Sparta⁵¹.

Omitting both Helen's name and any reference to the identity or provenance of those fighting at Troy except for Menelaus and the Cretans entails deprecation. By disdaining her and the majority of Achaeans, the Pythia trivialises the Trojan War and, by extension, the next prime conflict between Greeks and Barbarians, Xerxes' invasion, to which she does not even allude. Her message is perfectly discernible: the Greek struggle

⁴⁹ Saïd 2012, 99.

⁵⁰ Harrison 1997, 190.

⁵¹ Menelaus becomes king of Sparta upon his marriage to Helen, heiress to the throne, cf. Calame 1987, 175; Maguire 2009, 87.

against Persia is not the Cretans' concern. Although his elder brother, king Agamemnon of Mycenae, presided over the Achaeans (cf. Hom. *Il.* II 576-590), the oracle revolves around Menelaus because he governed and thus embodied Sparta, leader state and paradigm of the anti-Persian coalition. As the personification of Sparta, Menelaus can be deemed, on a symbolic level, a possible friend of the Cretans, making Helen the wife of a potential ally of the consultants.

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In quantitative terms, female presence in Herodotus' oracles exceeds ten per cent of the total, reaching a percentage of 10.89%. Eleven oracular passages in the *Histories* feature women, distributed as follows (see *Tab. 2*).

Table 2

NUMBER OF PASSAGES	PASSAGES	NUMBER OF INDIVIDUAL WOMEN INCLUDED IN EACH PASSAGE	NUMBER OF GROUPS OF WOMEN INCLUDED IN EACH PASSAGE
6	Her. I 7; V 92β; VI 52; VI 135; VII 169; VII 189	1	0
2	Her. VI 139; VIII 96	0	1
2	Her. II 111; V 92η	2 (Her. II 111); 1 (Her. V 92η)	1 (Her. II 111); 1 (Her. V 92η)
1	Her. I 91	2	0

Individual women attract most of the attention; they appear in seven oracular passages, while groups of women take part in two. The other two passages are in an intermediate position and show both individual women and groups.

The overall picture is that individual women and groups of women tend to be dealt with separately. The line dividing them continues in Her. V 92η, where the individual and the group are clearly distinct from one another, and the body of women is a foil for the single woman's particularity. The boundaries are blurred only in Her. II 111, where one individual, who was previously not integrated into it, is absorbed by the group, and the other, who was

formerly part of the group, is isolated from it. Both women's halfway status between individuality and collectivity is marked by their namelessness.

In fact, anonymity is typical for the four groups. Either members of the same community as consultants or recipients or of a different community, all unities are formed by anonymous women, a quality that highlights the fact that groups are made of a compact fabric which does not leave any margin for independent manoeuvre.

Individual women can be anonymous too; in total four of them, who are all Barbarians and members of the same community as the consultants or recipients, have no name. Apart from the two midway cases in Her. II 111 commented on above and corresponding to Pheros' first and second wives, Heracles' sexual partner (Her. I 7) and Candaules' wife (Her. I 91) are nameless everywhere in the *Histories*. It is possible to think that their anonymities mirror each other insofar as they both share the role of ancestral mother to two successive Lydian dynasties. This is not to say that their innominate conditions connote exactly the same thing, because both women find themselves at the opposite ends of the social pyramid – the slave mother of the Heraclids at the bottom and the queen, mother of the Mermnads, at the top – and have different functions in the oracular passages. Whilst the slave is exclusively dedicated to procreation, the queen secretly shapes events. Thus, for them, anonymity has undertones of powerless servitude and of surreptitious influence, respectively.

However, among individual women there is a trend towards namedness, which strengthens them as distinct characters. Of the eleven individual women who appear in Herodotean oracular passages, seven are given a name; five of them are named in the oracular passages themselves; they are all Greek, members of the same community as the consultants or recipients and, with one probable exception, very well born. Starting with the best born, Oreithyia is a daughter of the Athenian king Erechtheus (Her. VII 189), and her name is recorded as a way to highlight her own ascension from human royalty to partnership in marriage with a god. Next in line is Argeia (Her. VI 52), a descendant of the royal houses of Thebes and Argos, whose speaking name points to her illustrious Argive kinship. A tyrant's daughter and a girl born to a Corinthian oligarch are holders of speaking names too: the first one, Melissa (Her. V 92η), alludes to a personality trait; and the second, Labda (Her. V 92β), refers to a physical defect, peculiarities that are both relevant to the narrative. The lowest born of these women is presumably Timo (Her. VI 135), who has a name appropriate for serving gods at a temple, but whose low-grade job suggests that she is of humble origins.

The two other individual women are also of very noble heritage. They are named, not in the oracular passages but elsewhere in the Herodotean

work. Despite being born into disparate cultures, Barbarian Mandane (Her. I 91) and Greek Helen (Her. VII 169) have royal backgrounds and are members of a different community from the consultants or recipients. Mandane is a Median princess who is probably given a speaking name. Her. I 91 exceptionally presents two individual women: Candaules' wife and Mandane. If Candaules' wife's name is consistently unknown, Mandane's, which is revealed in Her. I 107, is silenced in the oracular passage as a way of giving prominence to the linkage between her father Astyages of Media and her son Cyrus of Persia, who seizes power from his grandfather. It is no coincidence that Her. I 91 also focuses on the ties between Cyrus' enemy, consultant Croesus, and his forefather Gyges, who, like Cyrus, steals the kingship from the preceding ruler Candaules. Croesus' defeat, as explained in Her. I 91, marks the end of a course started by one usurper, his ancestor Gyges, and the beginning of the trajectory of the other kingdom robber, his victor Cyrus. In this criss-cross of usurpations, each one of the two women has family relationships with both the usurped and the usurpers but commits herself to the latter's activities. As for Helen, she is a Spartan princess, consort of king Menelaus, is carried off by Alexander and venerated at Sparta. Her name, which is introduced very early in the *Histories* (Her. I 3), is omitted in the oracular passage, degrading her as if she were mere property stolen from its owner. Her treatment in Her. VII 169 resembles that suffered by the Egyptian wives (Her. II 111) and the Corinthian female residents (Her. V 92η), who are objectified too. However, her objectification is remarkable because it is not inflicted on anonymous women by a monarch in trouble or a capricious tyrant but on arguably the most famous woman in Greece by the Pythia.

Although Helen's readiness to flee with Alexander is hinted at in Her. II 115, 4, in Her. VII 169 the Delphic prophetess' description of the abduction adheres to the codes of traditional role allocation, putting all the responsibility on her male abductor. Traditional role allocation actually applies to all oracular passages discussed in this paper: the female sphere of activity in oracular contexts is almost always familial, service providers included. Women and groups of women are mothers, wives, sisters or concubines of the consultants or recipients themselves, as well as of the consultants or recipients' kings and potential enemies and allies. Timo is once again a unique case; as she is a member of the staff of a temple, she is the only woman whose space is not private. And this is not all. As will be seen below, the split between Timo and all other women, both individuals and groups, is noticeable in the interaction between the sexes too. In the eleven oracular passages women display three different degrees of interaction with men (see *Tab. 3*).

Table 3

NULL INTERACTION	UNDERDEVELOPED INTERACTION	DEVELOPED INTERACTION
Her. VIII 96	Her. I 7; VI 135; VII 169; VII 189	Her. I 91; Her. II 111; V 92β; V 92η; VI 52; VI 139

The only instance of null interaction is in the group of Attic married women (Her. VIII 96), who comply with their household chores or religious duties without men; therefore, no problems of coexistence are thematised. Heracles' sexual partner's (Her. I 7), Timo's (Her. VI 135), Helen's (Her. VII 169) and Oreithyia's (Her. VII 189) intercourse with males in their environment is underdeveloped in the sense that it is not totally elaborated or left unfinished. Her. I 7, VII 169 and VII 189 could pose issues of sexual consent that are not addressed. In Her. VII 189, the Athenians pray to their brother-in-law and their sister Oreithyia, but it is not specified whether she reacts to the prayer. A similar situation occurs in Her. VI 135. As stated previously, Timo behaves in an unparalleled manner: she is the only woman shown taking the initiative in an interaction between the sexes. She establishes contact with Miltiades, not the other way around. Her move is seen as treason by her fellow Parians, who want to condemn her to death. The Pythia exculpates Timo and divests her of any autonomous agency by turning her into a divine instrument, but the Parians' final decision on Timo is left pending. It is not stated whether she is killed; she disappears from the narrative.

As between Timo and the Parians, tensions between the sexes often arise in the remaining six passages, where dealings between women and men are developed, that is, comprehensively described. These dealings sometimes combine fraught and harmonious elements. Mandane's (Her. I 91) relationship with her father is at first so strained that he sends her away, takes her baby boy away from her and wants him dead. Later, when the tension eases, daughter and father still live very far from each other. In contrast, her relation with her husband and son appears to be peaceful: both parents work as a team for their son's sake.

However, the developed interactions tend to be predominantly tense. I list them here according to a criterion of ascending intensity. There is a low level of tension between Argeia (Her. VI 52), who lies to the Spartans, and the Spartans, who invade her privacy, but it fades when the Spartans, urged by the Pythia, take a decision on her twins that conforms to her ambitions. Periander attacks the dignity of all the Corinthian female inhabitants without facing any resistance. By contrast, Melissa refuses to yield to his wishes

until her own request is fulfilled (Her. V 92η). Tension escalates in Her. V 92β, in which Labda neutralises an assassination attempt on her child by some distant male relatives. Tension can increase further to the point of actual killing. Pheros (Her. II 111) needs a chaste married woman to cure him but, confronted with massive adultery, he executes his first wife and all others who do not meet the requirement, causing a slaughter that spares only the life of his virtuous second wife. The Athenian concubines (Her. VI 139) oppose their Pelasgian captors by transmitting their birth culture to their progeny, and the Pelasgians respond with parricide, killing their own concubines and offspring. When high tensions degenerate into an assassination attempt or murder, the targets and fatalities are invariably women and children with one conspicuous exception: king Candaules of Lydia. Like Mandane's, Candaules' wife's (Her. I 91) interaction with men is dual-faceted; but it is by no means harmonious. Pushed to the limit by Candaules, she pressurises Gyges, and they both join forces in a win-win plot to eliminate Candaules, resulting in Gyges' enthronement and her revenge and maintenance of her status as queen. It is indeed the power that she exerts inside the royal palace that enables her to reverse the pattern and have Candaules occupy the victim's place.

All things considered, it can be concluded that women other than the Pythia enjoy great visibility in the oracular passages of the *Histories*. This visibility is reflected in the significant proportion of oracles where these women appear; in the diversity that they exhibit, whether as individuals or in groups, anonymous or named, Greek or Barbarian, human or superhuman, alive or dead, and even real or unreal; and, fundamentally, in the wide range of possibilities that interactions between women, who are generally confined to the role of a relative, and men, who generally occupy leading positions, offer Herodotus for bringing to light points of contact and friction between the domestic and public domains within the communities that are mentioned or intervene in his oracular passages.

CARMEN SÁNCHEZ-MAÑAS
Universidad de Zaragoza
csm@unizar.es

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