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HERODOTEAN AMESTRIS, SOPHOCLEAN DEIANEIRA AND A LETHAL GARMENT

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Abstract. *The goal of this paper is to investigate, analyze and compare the presence and role of a garment in two literary different stories. In both occasions, a precious mantle was offered as a gift but that initiative led to disaster. Herodotean Amestris and Sophoclean Deianeira face their husband's unfaithfulness and are both compelled to find ways to react. The details of both narrations will gradually bring to light the role as well as the influence of a garment-gift that is going to kill his receiver (Artaynte and Heracles). A present is transformed into lethal weapon and two female protagonists with different moral characters organize their plan of action in order to win back two lustful and powerful men.*

Keywords: *Herodotus, Sophocles, Amestris, Deianeira, the motive of a lethal gift.*

I. Amestris

In the last book of *Histories*, while the description of the Persian collapse slowly reached the end, Herodotus chose to display the tragic novella of defeated Xerxes and Masistes' wife (his own brother's), just as he did in the first book of his work narrating the story of Candaules' wife. It is considered a gloomy drama, full of passion and violence, luxury and intrigue, that takes place at the palace in Susa¹, a tale with "good" and "bad" characters (among them is Amestris², wife of Xerxes), based

on a problematic historical background³ as well. However, it is certain that many traditional novelistic motifs overwhelm its content: a great monarch who clashes with his trusty advisor, an intense sexual pathology, a beautiful object that turns out to be fatal, a binding promise that brings disaster, a cunning plan, a confused hero trapped in the "claws" of a strict long-

¹ See Asheri 2006: 326.

² In general, Amestris is described as a harsh and influential queen who played a distinctive role in Persian court. See Balcer 1993: 297-8, Brosius 1996: 4.

³ Behind the story might be discovered a genuine Persian tradition imbued with romantic details: perhaps Masistes once tried unsuccessfully to revolt against Xerxes and take over his power. See Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1983: 28-9, Macan 1973: 819-20. For an opposite view, see Asheri 2006: 328, Flower & Marincola 2002: 293, while Balcer attributes the massacre of Masistes and his family to Amestris' secret plans. See Balcer 1993: 330.

established custom who finally assents to something that opposes his will⁴.

The tragic development and outcome of the story witnesses another unsuccessful example of Persian aggressiveness: while the previous campaign against Greece was an act of *hybris* and provoked the rage of gods, this time, the Oriental “threat” is no longer military, but turns against the rules of sexual, domestic and political behavior⁵. The story involves a well-structured scenario which leaves no room for breathing, mainly due to a gradual reversal of roles. Although Xerxes appears from the beginning as the real protagonist of the novella, what shortly emerges afterwards is his weakness, which farms out his power to the hands of his crafty wife, Amestris, who will organize and execute a brutal act.

Initially, the Herodotean narration centers on the humiliated Xerxes. Because of his megalomania, he had already offended the gods as well as humans. He also abandoned his troops after his first defeat at Salamis. The historian did not give him the opportunity to take into serious consideration the importance of his military failure, but allows Xerxes to seek refuge in Sardis⁶, where he gets involved in a “spicy” intrigue. In Sardis, he will once again meet a small group of Persian militants: a sort of last pitiful “remnant” of their catastrophe. This group also includes the great king’s brother, noble Masistes, and his anonymous wife, who follows his return to Asia.

The view of this woman in Sardis will not be shielded for long; instead, it will fan the flames of Xerxes’ passion:

Being then at Sardis he became enamored of Masistes’ wife, who was also there. But as all his messages could not bring her to yield to him, and he would not force her to his will, out of regard for his brother Masistes (which indeed counted with the woman also, for she knew well that no force would be used against her⁷) (9.108.1)

Neither the sight of the exhausted soldiers nor the realization of destruction for which he was quite responsible was able to control the king’s obsession. However, something would prevent him from acting on the impulse of the sexual pressure he uses. It is not because he might respect a weak woman, but rather because of his relation with Masistes. This moral appreciation does not prettify – at least for a while – a “gloomy” character, but rather highlights the quality and value of Masistes⁸ itself. The obsessed ruler pursues and chases something that does not belong to him, but simultaneously appreciates its devoted and sincere “keeper”. Moreover, it is certain that the relationship between the two brothers, strongly bounded by pure respect, must have strengthened the decision of Masistes’ wife to resist and wrestle with the insane royal love.

Xerxes is not at all discouraged from the woman’s rejection. In fact, he proceeds to develop his tactics. He plots and announces the weddings of his son and successor, Darius⁹, and the daughter

⁴ About this kind of motifs, see Aly 1969: 194 and 202-3, Wolff 1964: 55-8, Cartledge 1993: 84-6, Flower & Marincola 2002: 292.

⁵ See Dewald 1997: 69.

⁶ See Wolff 1964: 57, Stoessl 1959: 487.

⁷ I followed the translation by A.D. Godley, *Herodotus. The Histories*, Cambridge 1920.

⁸ Masistes’ moral fiber is praised throughout the novella. See also Stoessl 1959: 488.

⁹ Darius was Xerxes’ eldest son. In 465 BC, he was unjustly accused for involvement in murder of his father and was executed by his younger brother Artax-

of Masistes' wife, Artaynte. Though in the wake of this initiative, Xerxes aims to come closer to his own object of desire! First and foremost, the marriage of Darius is the plan (the "brain child") of his father used in an effort to improve matters, as the monarch believes it may do so. Meanwhile, everything appears to be under control and the protagonists are eager to return to Susa, where this amorous "game" is reasonably expected to reach its height.

Xerxes, as if he was the bridegroom, practices what Darius was obliged to do: he carries his son's young wife into the palace and will soon be enchanted by her. He used "live bait" in order to trap his previous object of desire at all costs, but is finally attracted¹⁰ by that charming girl, who is endowed with beauty. Artaynte, with no moral inhibitions, will respond to the king's disgraceful love by giving the cue for the following fatal promise. The *arete* of Masistes' wife, which was significantly stamped by the turndown of the royal love in Sardis, is entirely hostile towards her daughter's sexual behavior.

The next chapter will gradually reveal Xerxes' love affair¹¹. Amestris' first presence in the tale keeps up with an act of romantic love by ignoring the fact that Xerxes has already offered his heart to another woman:

Xerxes' wife, Amestris, wove and gave to him a great gaily-colored mantle, marvelous to see. Xerxes was pleased with it, and went to Artaynte wearing it. (9.109.1)

xerxes, who rose to power soon afterwards. However, the Herodotean text stresses the weakness of his character which helps his father's plans. See Flower & Marincola 2002: 294, Asheri 2006: 329, How & Wells 1928: 770, Macan 1973: 813.

¹⁰ See 9.108.2.

¹¹ See Hazewindus 2004: 100.

Herodotus puts very close to each other the names of the novella's two fatal women¹²: a loyal wife gives a magnificent cloak to the king, a garment that was diachronically considered as one of the most valuable presents to be offered in Persian court¹³. Xerxes was certainly getting very excited in receiving such a precious gift, but hastens to enjoy the moment with his young mistress! A self-centered person delivers and enjoys whatever may satisfy his senses, being untroubled by the consequences of his action. At once he is thankful for the marvelous offer, but soon enough he looks for pleasure in Artaynte's hug, which he prefers over the reward¹⁴.

The girl is surprisingly bold and stubborn:

*"Will you give me whatever I ask of you?"
He promised this, supposing that she would ask anything but that; when he had sworn, she asked boldly for his mantle. (9.109.2)*

Essentially, she demands something too precious, something that Xerxes could not even imagine. She simultaneously challenges him to keep up with his commitment and seems to undervalue the reaction of Amestris if she would find out the truth. For the time being, Xerxes is trapped and horrified, and his emotions stress the irony of the scene: The young concubine, who is supposed to behave with humbleness and obey at the best of times, is now portrayed as a courageous, impudent persona, while the great monarch, the "salt of the earth", is crushed by anxiety.

¹² See Montgomery 1965:17.

¹³ See Brosius 1996: 75.

¹⁴ For the Herodotean aspect of ingratitude that generates the "obligation" of revenge, see Gould 1989: 54.

Although Xerxes is desperate for Artaynte, he even fears his wife's shadow¹⁵. The dynamic queen had suspected the unfaithful man all along, as Herodotus states with clarity. Perhaps she became too averse to the presence of a cute young girl in palace from the very beginning; an ambitious girl who might dream up a life in the lap of luxury. Besides, Amestris could have noticed the mysterious attitude of Xerxes towards Artaynte, which caused the simultaneous "isolation" of Darius, typically her husband.

Eventually, a marvelous mantle will bring Amestris to light, and she will become fully informed about everything:

Amestris heard that she had the mantle, but when she learned the truth, it was not the girl with whom she was angry. She supposed rather that the girl's mother was guilty and that this was her doing, and so it was Masistes' wife whom she plotted to destroy. (9.110.1)

Herodotus places the two "contestants" of Xerxes on the same line: one that protects his marriage and another that threatens to intervene in it. Amestris offers him an expensive gift with love, but Artaynte shamelessly keeps it. The mistress opportunistically enjoys Xerxes' love and his presents, while the loyal wife lacks both. Nevertheless, Amestris is not keen to give up. On the contrary – she plots to prove her power by eliminating the enemy and earning her unfaithful husband back.

The observed transition is noted of responsibility from daughter to mother¹⁶, who is going to be targeted by Xerxes'

dangerous wife. The historian does not mention the reason of inculpation of an innocent person, and this choice creates a time gap and triggers many possible scenarios and assumptions. For instance, Herodotus could allude that the queen might impute to Artaynte's mother the secret leading role of potential conspiracy inside the palace. The flames of Xerxes' passion would be extinguished one day, but Amestris' power and privileges would still be at stake, if Masistes' wife would target the royal throne for Masistes' sake. In that case, she only uses Artaynte's sexuality in order to take advantage of Xerxes' weakness and vulnerability.

On the other hand, it is doable to interpret the queen's motives and plan in terms of psychology. Amestris would have probably seen that Masistes' wife was the primary "quarry" of the "predator"-king. Perhaps this potential love affair could justify Xerxes' lost self-affirmation – one that was damaged after the failure of his ambitious campaign against Greece – or could offer the sexual life he lacked inside the royal bedroom. According to the queen's mode of thinking, Masistes' wife could be deemed as an imminent danger for her power, somebody who might try to take advantage of Xerxes' proneness to sexual pleasure; even if the monarch finally prefers her cute, younger daughter. In view of the above, Amestris' victim is not innocent. Her activity and role motivates the instant reaction of Xerxes' spouse: Amestris is going to commit a crime that will mitigate her anger and envy.

Revenge is methodically organized; The queen will be patiently waiting for the glorious feast dedicated to Xerxes' birthday, the greatest celebration day in

¹⁵ See 9.109.3.

¹⁶ See Flory 1987: 43.

Persia¹⁷. It will also allow the monarch the opportunity to display and prove his generosity by offering gifts¹⁸ to relatives and courtiers. Xerxes, compelled to satisfy their requests, will be trapped once again:

Waiting for that day, Amestris then asked of Xerxes that Masistes' wife should be given to her. Xerxes considered it a terrible and wicked act to give up his brother's wife, and that too when she was innocent of the deed; for he knew the purpose of the request. (9.110.2-3)

Amestris apparently asks for Masistes' wife. Xerxes is terrified because, on the one hand, the request concerns his brother's wife, and on the other he knows that she is innocent and is going to suffer. It is the second time that Xerxes is haunted by a woman's demand: firstly, he was shocked by Artaynte's request for his mantle and was unable to get away with it. Now he is deadlocked due to Amestris' insistence and traditional ceremonial customs¹⁹. Xerxes proves to be entirely powerless, incapable of changing the situation, thus backs down time and time again. His stance seals the ghastly fate of Masistes' wife.

Amestris wins the official license to kill, and the murder is going to happen very soon:

Amestris sent for Xerxes' guards and treated Masistes' wife very cruelly; she

cut off the woman's breasts and threw them to dogs, and her nose and ears and lips also, and cut out her tongue. Then she sent her home after she had undergone this dreadful ordeal. (9.112)

The inhuman mutilation²⁰ of that miserable woman assures emphatically the punishment of a victim as well as the enormous power of the one who imposed it. Above all, the queen manages to get rid of Masistes' wife and simultaneously destroy a serious threat to her authority²¹. We can not escape the tragically ironic conclusion²² that, despite possible interpretations of her action, Amestris essentially mutilates a woman that had fully respected the royal bedroom in the past! Masistes' wife, like Amestris, was always loyal to her husband.

The tragedy of Masistes' aristocratic *oikos* reaches its end: in attempt to avenge the loss of his wife, Masistes and his comrades will be defeated in Bactria and rebellion will be stifled²³. It is imperative to realize that Herodotus, by choosing a sudden bitter end, neither justifies the innocent or heroic victims nor condemns Xerxes' obsession or Amestris' brutality. In fact, he wants to give us food for thought, wondering about the fall of a powerful man in terms of morality, or about evil caused by an unpunished guilty person who never acknowledged her mistakes. Perhaps, in Amestris' lifetime, the cloudy days have already passed. She probably

¹⁷ See 1.133.1. Herodotus stresses the importance and value of a birthday in Persia. A big, special celebration on the emperor's birthday is obviously taken for granted. See Brosius 1996: 94, Flower & Marincola 2002: 296.

¹⁸ However, such a royal habit is not mentioned elsewhere. See Briant 1996: 330-1, Flower & Marincola 2002: 296. If the Herodotean version is going to be accepted, we might assume that women could also actively participate in celebration.

¹⁹ See 9.111.1.

²⁰ Such mutilations were a usual phenomenon in Oriental monarchies, according to Herodotus (e.g., 2.162.5, 3.118.2, 3.154.2). See Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1983: 29, West 1997: 430, Kent 1953: 124, Lateiner 1987: 92-3.

²¹ A disabled person, even if he survived, he could never rise to power. See Hartog 1988: 338, Hazewindus 2004: 119.

²² See Gray 1995: 199.

²³ See 9.113.2.

lived a peaceful life with no more family problems or threats. However, it is certain that it would be impossible to erase her past: her story, like every story, is a book written with no corrections.

II. Deianeira

The theme of collapse of family ties due to a threatening “invasion” of a young person within the territory of a troubled marriage shows up once again at Sophocles’ *Trachiniae*. Despite the chronological and structural problems²⁴ that had been pointed out by many scholars, the drama describes the destruction of Heracles as well as the simultaneous destruction of an attractive female figure, the wife Deianeira. Our interest primarily focuses on that decent woman, as she experiences her own tragedy²⁵ that is exposed, developed and completed before the self-centered²⁶ and brutal Heracles enters the scene.

This sympathetic protagonist is constantly tormented by fears²⁷, as it is already confirmed in the Prologue. At first, she was terrified by the possibility of a marriage with a monstrous river god, but Alcmena’s son intervened and saved her life. What followed was a sequent marriage with him, which caused a new anxiety attack, since Heracles was always absent while performing his labors²⁸ imposed on

him, and Deianeira was exiled in Trachis with their children. Although all missions ended successfully and Deianeira should feel relieved, nothing can dispel her fears:

*But now that he is free from all his labors,
now I am seized by greater dread than
ever*²⁹. (lines 36-7)

The long-standing absence of Heracles in order to perform his latter feat has filled up her pure soul with panic, as she is seriously worried about her husband’s life.

Suddenly a change of scene is observed; a breathless messenger shows up willing to *free her from fears* (line 181), announcing that the great hero is safe and sound, and soon is going to arrive triumphantly in Trachis. The details of Heracles’ last feat will be extensively presented by the herald Lichas, accompanied by a female group of pitiful prisoners, who immediately attract Deianeira’s attention and sympathy.

It is pointed out that young and lovely Iole is distinguished among them, and we might claim that her fate parallels that of Deianeira: the tragedy of both women clearly relies on their beauty³⁰. Lichas manages to aptly conceal the girl’s real identity and the important role she is going to play within Heracles’ house. But the abrupt intervention of the messenger will hasten the disclosure of truth. Iole is not just at the mercy of Heracles, but is the new mistress of a love-struck hero who ruined a city³¹ in order to capture her. Deianeira, a mature woman who continues to have deep feelings for her absent husband,

²⁴ For the chronological uncertainty of *Trachiniae*, see Johansen 1962: 257, Segal 1977: 103, Pohlsander 1963: 280, Raven 1965: 225, Schwinge 1962: 63. For the drama’s morphological unity as well as for the assessment of Deianeira’s role, see Adams 1957: 109-10. Gellie 1972: 53-4 and 285, Ronnet 1969: 45, Perrotta 1935: 474-5.

²⁵ See Whitman 1951: 107.

²⁶ For Heracles’ self-centeredness, see Galinsky 1972: 49-50.

²⁷ For the use of vocabulary relevant to these fears, see Torrance 1965: 302.

²⁸ See Easterling 1977: 122, Galinsky 1972: 46.

²⁹ I followed the translation in verse made by R. Torrance, *The Women of Trachis and Philoctetes*, Houghton Mifflin 1966.

³⁰ *Because her beauty has destroyed her life.* (line 465) See also Easterling 1968: 63.

³¹ See lines 476-8.

realizes that she is going to lose him when she was about to meet up with him.

Her spontaneous reaction in the next scene raises many questions. Although her soul lacks hatred or rebelliousness, Deianeira is completely unable to share the conjugal bedroom with the concubine³². She recalls a well-hidden erotic “weapon”, the clotted blood of the dying centaur Nessus³³. Just before he died, he cunningly advised her to use it as a remedy, as a love-charm for Heracles’ heart, if he was ever to love another woman. Deianeira did not scorn his advice and now confesses:

*and I have dipped this tunic in it, as
he said when living. Yes, I have performed it.
Oh, may I never come to know the meaning
of wickedness or women who are wicked.*
(lines 580-3)

Undoubtedly, that woman is fully incapable of performing such an act. She has immersed the tunic in that bloody liquid but hesitates to send it to Heracles as he returns. She is unsure and ambivalent, and lacks calmness as well³⁴. Deianeira is aware that her act could be deemed bold and audacious, when confronted with her heart’s innocence, but cherishes the hope that this gift would lead to the rebuilding of conjugal love. Above all, she succumbs to the pressure of time: Lichas is almost getting ready to depart and Deianeira, walking on the edge of a cliff, soon will fall down.

³² See lines 539-40.

³³ In some way, the struggle between Heracles and Nessus implies a strange reversal of roles: beautiful young Deianeira once was the object of desire for a beast. Heracles defended his wife, and his victory symbolized the contrast between a well-respected marriage and potential violent ravishment. Seeing Iole, Heracles went wild and behaved as a lustful beast, like Nessus. See Woodford 1974: 161-2.

³⁴ See Gellie 1972: 65-6.

The tragedy reaches its end and Deianeira will be the first to perceive the truth. The woolen tuft she used for coloring the tunic was faded and then vanished while was exposed to the sun³⁵. It was time to realize that she should never have trusted the centaur. Instead of bringing joy to Heracles, the cloak will soon sentence him to death. The straightforward heroine will not seek forgiveness and will prefer rather a dignified death than a life full of disgrace:

*One who takes pride in being good by nature
will not endure a life marred by dishonor.*
(lines 721-2)

From now on, a sequence of tragic events will overwhelm the last scenes of *Trachiniae*: Deianeira’s son Hyllus, misconstruing what he saw, will arrive to affirm her fears. The pitiable woman is unable to face the outburst of her beloved son’s anger, who wishes her death instead of being her son³⁶! The details of Hercules’ suffering while the tunic excruciatingly devours his flesh are mostly addressed to the audience. Deianeira will leave the stage in silence and soon afterwards the Nurse will give details of the suicide³⁷ of that modest woman.

The outset of *Trachiniae* served as a source of information on the marriage between Heracles and a young woman. This same woman passed away and we must not ignore that she became his wife, mother of his children, and, above all, his lover³⁸. She commits suicide in his

³⁵ See lines 689-704.

³⁶ See lines 734-6.

³⁷ For many details regarding Deianeira’s suicide, see Wender 1974: 1-17.

³⁸ Especially in lines 915-22, Sophocles uses words and phrases of sexual content. See Winnington-Ingram 1969: 47, Musurillo 1967: 74.

bedroom, on his bed, and this tragic end is caused neither by her huge mistake nor by Hyllus' false accusations, for he was deluded by her intentions. Deianeira resorts to suicide only when she realizes that she has destroyed Heracles, namely her own life: in fact, she was already dead before committing suicide.

III. Amestris and Deianeira

Two different stories, two different literary genres presented two mature female protagonists painted in vivid colors. What links both stories in a unique way is a precious garment-gift that is supposed to flatter the receiver, but ends up to be lethal. Despite significant differentiations, a common core can be easily pointed out: the power of Cypris³⁹, who invades suddenly and threatens the protagonists' life, activating their reaction regardless of the tragic consequences.

Deianeira is a modest woman who normally fears the passing of years. Once she was young, she was endowed with beauty, but she was also blessed with a curse: Although she married Heracles and gave birth to his children, she always needed to endure without complaint the anguish and uncertainty caused by his absence in order to perform labors. It is true that she loved her famous husband and, in expectation of his return, she would be keen to overlook his numerous love affairs⁴⁰. But this time, the triumph of

his last feat keeps up with self-centered, unacceptable behavior: Heracles decided to send his beautiful concubine as an ironic "reward" for Deianeira's long-standing fidelity!

However, her love is still stable and pure: she does not hate young Iole; on the contrary, she feels compassion for her fate, although she concedes that it is impossible to compete with her beauty. In any case, she must take initiatives in order to win back her husband's love and care. Deianeira will perform a fully desperate deed, while at the same time she seriously doubts its quality. Her gullibility, when she seeks the advice of the young members of the Chorus⁴¹, serves as affirmation of her fears. Finally, she will send the lethal tunic, mingled with bloody poisonous liquid, which is going to stamp out Deianeira and Heracles⁴² as well. It is quite ironic that a peaceful figure – a love-struck mature woman – unwillingly succeeds in killing the undefeated hero, while everybody failed to do so in the past⁴³. In a strange way, the heroine loses her life in searching for her husband's lost love. Deianeira is sacrificed on a conjugal bed, putting an end to a marriage that probably never really existed.

Despite the disastrous effects, Deianeira's behavior proved to be tragically vulnerable. On the contrary for Amestris, her actions will prove her harshness. Like the Sophoclean heroine, she is also mature and blessed, on the condition that she was

³⁹ For the great power of love within *Trachiniae* see Linforth 1951: 260-1, Stinton 1976: 136-8.

⁴⁰ Heracles' supernatural strength is often accompanied by sexual desire. In fact, the traditional literary ingredients of his character included good eating and drinking, and intense sexual activity as well. For Heracles' comic aspect see Galinsky 1972: 82-90, Winnington-Ingram 1980: 84.

⁴¹ See line 385.

⁴² Initially, the garment will bring joy (line 763) to unsuspecting Heracles, but soon the poison starts to devour his flesh. The self-centered hero suffers while was absorbed by thoughts of himself. For the subject of Heracles' isolation and alienation see Biggs 1966: 228-9 and mainly Ehrenberg 1946: 144-66.

⁴³ See Winnington-Ingram 1980: 86.

married with the Persian monarch. The unexpected presence of a young beautiful woman at the palace will threaten Amestris' privileged position, which is then at stake. Unlike Iole, Artaynte is not a slave, but will soon enchant a king fully addicted to pleasure. The queen suffers a lot, but will soon play her new pivotal and dominant role as she will move on to execute her rival along with the rest members of her *oikos*.

Another common point is also indicated by both authors: the absence of male protagonists. Although Xerxes heads the campaign against Greece, it is uncertain whether Amestris is tortured by all these deep fears that overwhelm Deianeira in exile. Though everything is changed once both heroes return to their base: Heracles is accompanied by beautiful Iole, his live "spoil" that will replace Deianeira in the conjugal bedroom. On the other side, a humiliated leader is directed to Susa, eager to fall in love with the woman that was supposed to become his son's wife. There was a secret expectation that Xerxes might find ways to avoid a scandal in Persian court; however, he is going to be defeated, this time not in the battlefield, but in his own territory.

Amestris could no longer be kept in the dark about this relationship. In fact, a cloak – a gift for her husband – will bring that love affair to light: a marvelous garment suddenly covers the well-formed body of Xerxes' young mistress and this act of love implies the disclosure of the king's infidelity! At this point, both stories are parallel: Although Deianeira's tunic aims to "refresh" Heracles' love, that initiative could be also considered as the unconcealed demonstration of her love. The faithful woman was patiently waiting

for her husband's return, hoping that he could never abandon her again after completing his last task. Iole's arrival and potential role hastily connects the gift with magic, and love with death.

In the same manner, Amestris manifests her love towards Xerxes with a view to comfort him after the disastrous expedition against Greece. The mantle might serve as a kind of remedy to heal his wounds as well as to underline the consistency of her love. Moreover, a potential erotic symbolism should not be overlooked: on condition that both women were mature and not any more desirable, Deianeira and Amestris intended to offer a fancy cloak, for they are unable to offer their body anymore. Xerxes disregards his wife's intentions, while lustful Heracles accepts the garment, but he is also keen to share his bedroom with two women.

Unlike Sophocles' heroine who fears that she is soon going to play second fiddle to the cute Iole, Amestris is not threatened by Artaynte's beauty, but seems to be wary of the future stability of her authority. Although Xerxes was very excited because of his love affair with Artaynte, the queen clearly targeted Masistes' wife as her main rival in palace. Thus, she must act cunningly and methodically in attempting to bring out a successful plan and produce the best results. If the view⁴⁴ that the central idea of female royal members' activity in the Persian court was to ensure the prosperity and safety of their *oikos* could be accepted, Amestris could be considered as a perfect paradigm. Throughout his narration, Herodotus rejects hesitation or spontaneous confusion that characterizes Deianeira as well as her doubtfulness and

⁴⁴ See Brosius 1996: 119-20.

agony in whether she leads a life *marred by dishonor*⁴⁵.

To sum up, two stories were analyzed in terms of revealing the disastrous role of a garment that started as a gift and ended up as a lethal weapon. However, that disaster may be interpreted in a different way: Heracles' suffering condemns his humble wife to death, while the massive destruction of Masistes' family pacifies Amestris. In the end of both stories, the "good" protagonists pass away. While Sophocles wonders about the painful course of action of an innocent figure who suffers in silence, Herodotus describes emphatically the guilt of a cruel woman and the futile attempts of a weak king to stop her.

⁴⁵ See lines 721-2.

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HERODOTO AMESTRIDĖ, SOFOKLIO DEJANEIRA IR MIRTĮ NEŠANTIS APDARAS

Konstantinos Deligiorgis

S a n t r a u k a

Šio straipsnio tikslas – iširti ir palyginti Herodoto *Istorijos* finalinėse scenose (9. 108–113) ir Sofoklio tragedijoje *Trachinietės* aptinkamą dovanos motyvą bei jo funkciją. Abiejuose skirtingų žanrų kūrinuose dvi moterys – Kserkso žmona Amestridė ir Heraklio žmona Dejanėja – savo vyrams dovanoja ypatingą drabužį, tačiau šios dovanos, priešingai gavėjų lūkesčiams, atneša ne džiaugsmą, o pražūtį.

Tiek Amestridė, tiek Dejanėja lemtingais gyvenimo momentais susiduria su savo įtakingų vyrų neištikimybėmis ir imasi veiksmų, kad išsaugotų ir situoktinių meilę, ir savo padėtį visuomenėje. Abiejuose pasakojimuose šis motyvas yra esminis. Nuosekliai atskleidžiamos veiksmo aplinkybės išryškina dviejų moterų – graikės ir barbarės – charakterių bei kultūrų skirtumus.

Gauta 2016 08 22

Priimta publikuoti 2016 11 02

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