



ARTEMISIA

ARTEMISIA (Gk. *Artemisiā*, Ion. *-íē*), queen (Pausanias, 3.11.3: *ebasíleuse*) of Halicarnassus in Caria, who as an ally of Xerxes I took part in the Persian expedition against Greece in 480 BC (Herodotus, 7.99.1). The daughter of one Lygdamis was Halicarnassian (not Ephesian, as the scholiast of Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 675 has it) by descent on her father's side and Cretan on her mother's side (Herodotus, 7.99.2) and thus was given a common Greek name. On the death of her husband (whose name is not attested) she preserved the tyranny in her polis and assumed regency for her son under age named Pisindēlis (Suda, s.v. *Hēródotos*), who probably followed her after attaining his majority. On account of her manly courage and not under any compulsion, she participated in Xerxes's expedition (Herodotus, 7.99.1). She was in supreme command of the forces supplied by Halicarnassus, Cos, Nisyros, and Calydna (7.99.2); and she herself put five splendid ships at the Great King's disposal, which are said to have been the most celebrated of the entire fleet after the Phoenician ones (7.99.3). She had rendered exceptional services already in the battles of Euboea (Herodotus, 8.68.1), but still more remarkable is the role she played before and during the battle of Salamis.

When Greek and Persian ships faced each other near Salamis, Artemisia advised Mardonius and (through him) Xerxes not to risk a naval battle (Herodotus, 8.68.a1), because the Greek fleet was superior to the Persian, and she recommended to advance speedily to the Peloponnesus (*ibid.*, b1), because in that case the Greeks would disperse, abandon Athens, and make off to their respective hometowns. This speech of Artemisia, though presented by Plutarch



as her words verbatim (*De Herodoti malignitate* 38), obviously is not authentic, but expresses Herodotus's own estimation of the military situation. Respecting her most of his allies, Xerxes was pleased with her wise advice (Herodotus, 8.69.1-2), but did not follow it. She is said to have accomplished great deeds in this battle (Pausanias, 3.11.3), even if the description of the deeds of that woman, whose capture had been ordered to the Athenian admirals and on whose head the Athenians had put a price of 10,000 drachms (Herodotus, 8.93.2), in part are enlivened with anecdotes or even pure fabrication. For instance, she was able to recover the body of Xerxes's dead brother Ariamenes, the commander-in-chief of the Persian fleet, and to bring him back to the Great King (Plutarch, *Themistocles* 14.4).

It was presumably in a later stage of the battle, in the general confusion of the Persian fleet, that she succeeded in escaping from an Athenian ship pursuing her ship (Herodotus, 8.87) by ramming and sinking a friendly ship, from Calynda in Caria, that was carrying Damasithymus, the king of that town, whereupon her pursuer turned away, possibly thinking her ship was that of an ally (cf. Polyaeus, 8.53.1-2). The emendation of Calynda into Calydna/Calymna often considered for the Herodotean passage is quite unlikely, however, because it is about a "friendly ship" (*nēi philíēi*, Herodotus, 8.87.2), not about one under her own control, and because Damasithymus is listed in 7.98 as leader of his own squadron. In Polyaeus 8.53.3 it is also said that Artemisia let her ship sail under a Persian or a Greek flag, according to the particular situation.

After the disaster of the Persian fleet near Salamis, when Mardonius in Phaleron advised the Great King to retreat, Xerxes consulted Artemisia again, who alone had given him the right advice before that battle (Herodotus, 8.101). She confirmed him in his resolve to retreat to Asia, where alone he would be secure (8.102). Xerxes then marched off overland to the Hellespont, crossed back into Asia, and proceeded to Sardis, while she sailed for Ephesus, escorting there several of Xerxes's illegitimate sons (8.103, 8.107.1; cf. Plutarch, *De Herodoti malignitate* 38). About her fate in the following years nothing is known.

Herodotus (who perhaps was distantly related to her) portrayed Artemisia with great sympathy, and it is not without grounds that Plutarch reproached him with admitting more space to the stories about her than to the general account of the battle (*De Herodoti malignitate* 43). Nevertheless Artemisia was a resolute, courageous, and heroic woman with great presence of mind and

pragmatism, and one of the wisest advisers to Xerxes (Herodotus, 7.99.3), whereas she “was for fifth-century Greeks the historical reincarnation of the mythical Amazon” (Munson, 2001, p. 255; cf. Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 671ff.).

From Pausanias (3.11.3) we learn that there was a marble figure of Artemisia in the so-called Persian Hall in the Agora of Sparta which had been built out of the loot of the Persian Wars.

The stratagem leading to the capture of the town of Latmus told by Polyaeus (8.53.4) actually relates to Maussolus’s sister, wife, and successor (353–351 BCE) of the same name.

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