

## ARTEMISIA I

### Ionian Greek queen (r. c. 480 B.C.E.)

*Artemisia I was a brilliant military strategist and commander who advised Xerxes I during his campaigns in the Persian Wars.*

**BORN:** Late sixth century B.C.E.; probably Halicarnassus, Caria, Asia Minor (now Bodrum, Turkey)

**DIED:** Probably mid-fifth century B.C.E.; place unknown

**ALSO KNOWN AS:** Artemisia of Halicarnassus

**AREAS OF ACHIEVEMENT:** War and conquest, government and politics

#### EARLY LIFE

Nearly all the information on Artemisia I of Halicarnassus (AR-teh-MEE-see-ah) comes from Herodotus, also of Halicarnassus, the historian who wrote about the Persian Wars in *Historiai Herodotou* (c. 424 B.C.E.; *The History*, 1709). Halicarnassus was one of the city-states under the Persian Empire that was culturally Greek. (In the eighth century B.C.E., many of the Greek city-states had sent out colonies to Asia Minor. Eventually the majority of those colonies were conquered and incorporated into the Persian Empire.) Artemisia was the daughter of Lygdamis, ruler of Halicarnassus. She also reportedly had a brother, Pigres. Herodotus also says that Artemisia's mother was Cretan. Artemisia assumed the throne of Halicarnassus on the death of her husband, whose name is unknown.

Herodotus does not supply her date of birth but does report that Artemisia had a grown son at the time of the Battle of Salamis (480 B.C.E.). Therefore, she was probably in her mid-thirties during the Persian Wars; thus Darius the Great would have come to power in Persia during Artemisia's youth. In 521 B.C.E. Darius seized the Persian throne and ruled until 486. Darius's reign was characterized by many changes meant to strengthen the Persian Empire. He centralized the government and moved the capital to Persepolis as well as creating an administrative and financial infrastructure stable enough to last for two centuries. He built a canal that linked the Nile River and the Red Sea, thus improving trade and commerce. He was the first Persian king to mint his own coins. Darius expanded his borders to the Indus River and Gandhara in the west and conquered Thrace.

#### LIFE'S WORK

Artemisia is best known for her role in the Persian Wars, most notably the naval Battle of Salamis. In 499 several

city-states on the Greek mainland, most notably Athens, supported a revolt of the Ionian Greek city-states against their overlord Darius. After quelling the rebellion, Darius invaded mainland Greece in 490 in retaliation. He was utterly defeated at the Battle of Marathon by a coalition of Greek city-states. Ten years later, in 480, the new king, Darius's son Xerxes I, invaded Greece again. Artemisia, as queen of Halicarnassus, personally led a fleet of five ships in Xerxes' navy.

Before the battle, Xerxes asked all of his chief admirals their opinion on whether he should attack Salamis. All of them urged him to attack, except for Artemisia. After reminding her audience that she had fought bravely at Euboea, Artemisia, as recorded by Herodotus, advised Xerxes not to attack the Greeks by sea:

Master, my past services give me the right to advise you now upon the course which I believe to be most to your advantage. It is this: spare your ships and do not fight at sea, for the Greeks are infinitely superior to us in naval matters—the difference between men and women is hardly greater. In any case, what pressing need have you to risk further actions at sea? Have you not taken Athens, the main objective of the war? Is not the rest of Greece in your power? There is no one now to resist you—those who did resist have fared as they deserved. Let me tell you how I think things will now go with the enemy; if only you are not in too great a hurry to fight at sea—if you keep the fleet on the coast where it now is—then, whether you stay here or advance into the Peloponnese, you will easily accomplish your purpose. . . . I hear they have no supplies in the island where they now are; and the Peloponnesian contingents, at least, are not likely to be very easy in their minds if you march with the army towards their country—they will hardly like the idea of fighting in defence of Athens. If on the other hand, you rush into a naval action, my fear is that the defeat of your fleet may involve the army, too.

Thus, Artemisia gave not only her recommended course of action but also the reasoning behind it. After she gave Xerxes this advice, Artemisia's allies feared that Xerxes would be angry with her, but instead her counsel pleased him. However, he chose to listen to the majority of his advisers and attack Salamis.

During the Battle of Salamis, Artemisia distinguished herself by sinking what Xerxes believed to be an enemy vessel. In actuality, Artemisia, finding herself sur-

rounded by Athenian ships, used a clever and ruthless trick to ensure the survival of her crew. She deliberately rammed the ship of Damasithymus, king of the Calyndians, another ally of Persia. The Calyndian ship was lost with all hands. This convinced the Athenians on the ship pursuing her that she was actually an Athenian ally. Xerxes, seeing only that Artemisia had sunk a ship while surrounded by Athenians, believed her to have destroyed an enemy ship and praised her for her bravery.

Apparently Aminias of Pallene, the general who pursued Artemisia's ship, would not have stopped his pursuit had he known that Artemisia herself was on that ship. The Athenians, offended and outraged that a woman would go to war against them, offered a reward of ten thousand drachmas for her capture. Also, according to Plutarch in his biography of Themistocles, when Ariamenes, Xerxes' brother and one of his admirals, was killed at the Battle of Salamis, it was Artemisia who recognized the body and brought it back to Xerxes.

After the Persians' disastrous defeat at Salamis, Xerxes again called on his commanders to advise him. This time he singled out Artemisia for consultation because she alone had given him wise advice the previous time. Xerxes presented Artemisia with two possible courses of action and asked her which she recommended: Either Xerxes would lead troops to the Peloponnese himself, or he would withdraw from Greece and leave his general Mardonius in charge. According to Herodotus, Artemisia responded as follows:

I think that you yourself should quit this country and leave Mardonius behind with the force he asks for, if that is what he really wants, and if he has really undertaken to do as he has said. If his design prospers and success attends his arms, it will be your work, master—for your slaves performed it. And even if things go wrong with him, it will be no great matter, so long as you yourself are safe and no danger threatens anything that concerns your house. While you and yours survive, the Greeks will have to run many a painful race for their lives and land; but who cares if Mardonius come to grief? He is only your slave, and the Greeks will have but a poor triumph if they kill him. As for yourself, you will be going home with the object for you campaign accomplished—for you have burnt Athens.

Once again, Artemisia had given the reasoning behind her advice, which appeared to be sound. After Xerxes decided to take her advice, he asked her to accompany his illegitimate children to Ephesus. This is the end of

Herodotus's account of Artemisia, but she also appears in other ancient sources.

Thessalus, a son of Hippocrates, described her in a speech as a cowardly pirate. In his speech, he relates that Artemisia led a fleet of ships to the Isle of Cos to hunt down and slaughter the Coans, but the gods intervened. After Artemisia's ships were destroyed by lightning and she hallucinated visions of great heroes, she fled Cos with her purpose unfulfilled. According to Polyaeus, Artemisia carried two different standards on her vessels and would fly the Persian standard while chasing Greeks but would fly a Greek standard when she was being chased.

The only account of Artemisia's death is a rather dubious one. Apparently, she fell in love with a younger man and threw herself off a cliff after he broke her heart. It is improbable that a woman strong enough to rule in her own right and lead soldiers in battle would do such a thing. Because ancient literature is full of myths of women who commit suicide because of unrequited love, it seems more likely that the author adapted Artemisia's story to fit the literary traditions of the time. It is known that her grandson, named Lygdamis after her father, ruled Halicarnassus in time and was the reason Herodotus had to flee the city.

#### SIGNIFICANCE

In an era in which the dominant culture limited the roles of women to those of wife and mother, Artemisia successfully assumed the throne of Halicarnassus after the death of her husband, ruled the kingdom, and led troops in battle. She was highly intelligent, as evidenced by her tactics in the Battle of Salamis and her advice to Xerxes. Xerxes recognized her intelligence and rewarded it. She was not afraid of giving tactically sound advice, even at the risk of angering her overlord or sounding cowardly. The fact that her grandson later ruled Halicarnassus suggests that her rule was stable and, if not well liked, at least tolerated. Too often historians are apt to generalize about the roles of women in the ancient world. The accounts of Artemisia and others like her show that exceptional women could attain and hold power.

—Caitlin L. Moriarity

#### FURTHER READING

Cook, J. M. *The Persian Empire*. New York: Schocken Books, 1983. This history provides a thorough background on the Persian Empire of the fifth century and the Achaemenid Dynasty.

Dewald, C. "Women and Culture in Herodotus's Histories." In *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*, edited by Helene P. Foley. New York: Gordon and Breach