

In Heliodorus' *Aithiopika*, a 4th century C.E. novel, the dichotomy between the Greek West and the non-Greek East is a pervasive theme which surfaces in various forms throughout the novel and is apparent in the author's elaborate descriptions of the foreigners, geographical features, and languages which the protagonists Charikleia and Theagenes encounter. The most direct treatment of this theme, however, is in the Arsake episode of Book 7. Arsake is the sister of the Persian king and wife of his satrap Oroondates who is stationed in Memphis, Egypt. While her husband is away at war against the Ethiopians, Arsake rules Memphis, issuing decrees and judgments, with the full support of her people. She is described as a "tall, beautiful, and highly intelligent woman of noble birth," who nevertheless leads a "blameworthy life devoted to pure, perverted pleasure" (7.2.1). While performing her official duties, she spies Theagenes, a Greek youth descended from Achilles, and falls instantly in love. Determined to possess him, she makes him her unwilling slave and keeps him prisoner in her house, along with his betrothed Charikleia. Through the convergence of these characters, Heliodorus sets the scene for a Greek vs. non-Greek encounter, which Heliodorus formulates along gender lines.

Arsake's presence in the narrative can be interpreted simply as a plot device which delays the action of the story, a foreshadowing for the final court scene in Ethiopia, or an example of a destructive type of love, contrasting with the true love between Charikleia and Theagenes. Although Arsake does, to a certain extent, serve all these narrative needs, I argue that the main function of Arsake's character in the *Aithiopika* is to address directly the polarities of East vs. West and female vs. male. Arsake represents the East, whose characteristics are irrationality and an attachment to excessive luxury. It is defined as stereotypically female. In direct opposition to these is the figure of Theagenes, a hyper-male who is emphatically identified as Greek in both his appearance and manner. When he refuses to bow to her, Arsake mollifies her offended courtiers by saying that Theagenes should be forgiven for being too Greek and for scorning all things Persian (7.18.2). The battle between this pair manifests various points of perceived difference between Greek and Eastern cultures (Persian and Egyptian) through the lens of the male-female relationship. While Arsake and Theagenes enact the archetypal East vs. West separation, Charikleia's character represents a more nuanced and complex relationship between East and West. Charikleia, although female, takes on masculine roles throughout the novel and is likened to Artemis whose power lies in her ability to unify male and female elements. By privileging Charikleia's hybridity of gender and ethnicity, the Arsake episode may suggest a fourth-century C.E. shift in attitudes towards both the East/West and female/male oppositions.

Suzanne Dixon writes that ancient authors introduce women into their work to make a moral point (Dixon 2001). This is particularly true in Heliodorus' Arsake episode which revives the stereotypes of East vs. West, present in earlier Greek literature – particularly Herodotus – and crystallizes the Greek vs. foreign debate in gendered terms, while also offering a new resolution to this separation of identity. Instead of being at odds, the best characteristics of the female East and male West are merged into the figure of Charikleia, whose identity, in many ways, transcends sexual orientation and ethnic identity. The seeds of this union are woven into the episode with Arsake's attraction for Greek ways (7.13), but are ultimately realized when Charikleia returns home to claim her identity as an Ethiopian princess, consolidating the East-West relationship. In the end, Heliodorus' *Aithiopika* suggests that peaceful coexistence is possible between elements of female and male, East and West.