

FROM HECATAEUS TO HERODOTUS: THE EXPANSION OF THE GREEK WORLD-VIEW

Topics:

- ***Herodotus the Man***
- ***The Nature of His Investigations***
- ***Herodotus and Other Investigators***
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1. Herodotus the Man

Most of what we know about Herodotus can be inferred from his own book, known to us as *The Histories*. His main theme is the conflict between the Greek and Persian worlds, and the background to that conflict. Herodotus himself did not fight in that conflict, living approximately a generation after the Persian Wars, but he certainly spoke to eye-witnesses for many of the events he records.

The name Herodotus means gift of the goddess Hera. (Burns 1972, p13). He was probably born around 484 B.C.E., and died some time after 430 B.C.E., since some of the events of the following Peloponnesian War are known to him, e.g. he does not mention even indirectly the great Athenian expedition against Syracuse. He was born in the Ionian town of Halicarnassus. This town, situated towards the south of the Ionian coast of Asia Minor, would have allowed him to hear stories from Caria, Lydia, and the regions further East. It was a Dorian settlement, but used Ionic dialect in its official documents, the language used in Athens (Briggs 1985, p272). In this environment, too, he would have possibly inherited some of the critical thought which had been developed by the Ionian philosophers since the 6th century B.C.E., and as we shall see, along with myths and humorous stories he used a critical and rational method in trying to assess the validity of some of the traditions he preserves.

A later source, bearing the name of Suidas, dating to the eleventh century C.E., describes Herodotus as coming from a prominent family of Halicarnassus and going into exile to the island of Samos because of the tyrant Lygdamis, who had put to death one of Herodotus' relatives. Apparently Herodotus returned to help expel the tyrant. These events, if true, would have occurred around 464-454 B.C.E. However, it seems that in the aftermath of this political turmoil he left Halicarnassus again. The later Christian historian, Eusebius, believes that he gave public readings of parts of his work in Athens during 446-5 B.C.E., a notion supported by the smoothness and beauty of his Greek prose (Hunter 1982). Herodotus later on became a colonist in the settlement of Thuria in southern Greece, a dominantly Athenian re-settlement of the destroyed city of Sybaris (destroyed by nearby Croton). This would have occurred in 443 B.C.E. (Burns 1972, pp11-14).

Herodotus states that he saw many of the countries he describes with his own eyes: he seems to have travelled the Mediterranean widely. He visited Egypt, Tyre, and then perhaps traveled eastward to visit Babylon, though this has been disputed by modern historians (Ravn & Tovborg-Jensen 1942, p84, p95). If he didn't go himself, then he at least received a quite good eye-witness account of the city of Babylon, which includes details of the walls and temples.

Herodotus probably migrated to Athens circa 450 B.C.E. but failed to become a citizen due to a restrictive law of 451 B.C.E., though his account as a whole shows strong 'sympathies' towards that city (Briggs 1985, p275). Herodotus seems to have left Athens sometime after 430 B.C.E., probably to escape the plague that was devastating the city and the onset of the *Peloponnesian War*. Apparently he died in Thuria, where he was later honoured with a mausoleum in the marketplace, though this monument may have been built at a much later date when Herodotus' reputation was firmly established (de Selincourt 1962, p14).

2. The Nature of His Investigations

Herodotus' work is known by the Greek word '*historia*', which essentially means researches, or inquiry, though the word later on came to mean 'story', or account. Thus the classical Greek '*historia*' mean 'a learning by inquiry: knowledge or information obtained by inquiry' and also 'a narration of what one has learnt' (see Liddell & Scott 1987, p335). This word, of course, became our word 'history', and in this sense the modern discipline of history was born directly from the long tradition established by Herodotus (though reborn with new archival and rationalist inputs after the Renaissance). If so, Herodotus is one of the most formative thinkers ever born, since for history as the systematic analysis of past events remains one of the dominant paradigms of modern thought.

The opening lines of the *Histories* reads; -

Herodotus of Halicarnassus, his Researches are here set down to preserve the memory of the past by putting on record the astonishing achievements both of our own and other peoples; and more particularly, to show how they came into conflict. (I.1)

This simple statement may seem very ordinary; it is exactly what we would expect an historian to do. This is what is surprising: the first Western historian whose work has come to down to us in any detail demonstrates a self-conscious role in relation to posterity, i.e. the preservation of an understanding of the past for present and future generations. This suggests that there had been considerable shifts in thinking and awareness in the fifth century B.C.E. to allow this mode of analysis to develop. Notice also that Herodotus has provided himself with three rather distinct tasks; 'a general concern with the preservation of records of human affairs; the more particular interest in the deeds of Greeks and barbarians; and the aetiological or scientific interest in discovering the cause of conflict' (Usher 1970, p5). Beyond this, however, Herodotus is also concerned to provide an investigation of the moral claims and values of his key protagonists; the Persian kings Darius and Xerxes are both imbedded in the theme of dangerous and unjust military campaigns which rebound against them (Hunter 1982).

Arnaldo Momigliano argues that the works of the two first major Greek historians known to us, Herodotus and Thucydides, are 'rooted in the intellectual revolution of the fifth century and derive their full significance from it. This is the time in which tragedy, comedy, medicine, philosophy and eloquence were either created or transformed. Even if we did not know that Sophocles was a friend of Herodotus, we would perceive the latter's connections with the

former in moral, religious, and political feelings.' (1978, p6). Eloquence, here, refers to the arts of oratory of public speaking, which were a crucial part of Greek education and the political life of the Greek city-states. However, there are very real differences between history in its method of investigation and expression to these other disciplines, even though it was influenced by their achievements. In particular, the assessment of causes, and the distinction between mere symptoms and underlying 'real' causes may have been influenced by the body of medical practice and medical tracts which emerged in the 6th and 5th centuries, perhaps especially influenced by Ionian medicine. This trend, however, is stronger in the later works of Thucydides than in Herodotus (see Kurke 2001, p129).

Herodotus wrote in 'simple speech', that is, prose rather than the poetic forms preferred by Homer, Hesiod. As well as other early philosophers and poets (for the linkages between Homer, Herodotus and Thucydides, see Rood 1998). Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a later literary critic who wrote during the age of Augustus, stated that Herodotus had several predecessors and contemporaries in this kind of writing. They wrote accounts of their own and other cities, of Greek and foreign peoples, and published official records as well as legends (Burns 1972, p23). Unfortunately, little survives of these earlier writings.

3. Herodotus and Other Investigators

The only one of these writers quoted regularly by Herodotus was Hecataeus of Miletus. Herodotus respected him as a senior statesman during the Ionian revolt (499-494 B.C.E.), but criticizes him as a writer (VI.137). The surviving fragments of Hecataeus, though extremely limited and deriving mostly from Herodotus, suggest that Hecataeus made important contributions in 'genealogy, ethnology, demography and history' (Usher 1970, p2). His study of the different regions of the known world, the *Periegesis*, included the first clear statement of the different divisions of Europe and Asia. Usher argues notes that Hecataeus represents a clear break from earlier poetic traditions: -

Hecataeus employed prose because he was writing in a spirit of scientific enquiry and with the purpose of presenting factual material, not of exercising creative imagination. But it is not in this departure from literary tradition that his main importance lies: he possessed the chief quality which distinguishes the mere story-teller from the true historian - scepticism. He undertakes to tell only what seems to him credible for, as he says, 'the stories of the Greeks are many and ridiculous, as it seems to me'. In practice, the principle turns out to be more impressive than its application, so that on occasion Hecataeus seemed gullible and naive even to his contemporaries . . . However, it is probably not an exaggeration to credit Hecataeus with the first attempt at reconciling mythology with history in his Genealogies, and of his being the first writer to observe and record systematically the topography and historical traditions of several cities of the Greek world. (Usher 1970, pp2-3)

Hecataeus seems to have been fulfilling a real interest of Greeks, who by this stage had extensive trade routes throughout the eastern Mediterranean. Likewise, the idea of a regular 'travel-logue' which included Egypt and Phoenicia, may have already begun to form in the Greek mind (see Casson 1974). The Athenian poet and statesman Solon apparently had visited Egypt, while legend ascribes visits to 'ancient Egypt' by figures as diverse as Odysseus and Plato. Greek interest in Egypt, and especially in Egyptian religion and wisdom, far predates the classical period. Visits by Greeks to Egypt seem to have occurred for at least three reasons during this early period of contact: trade, Greeks acting as mercenaries, and for the purposes of learning from Egyptian 'wisdom'. Several prominent Greeks are said to have visited Egypt, beginning with Menelaus, who according to Homer's *Odyssey* stayed a considerable time in Egypt

and accumulated valuable possessions which he brought back to Greece (IV.81ff & 128ff). Odysseus himself is claimed to have visited Egypt in the company of roving pirates (*Odyssey* XVII.425), though we should not place too much reliance on these literary accounts (Stubbings, 1975, p354). Possible visitors include Hecataeus (likely), Solon (possible), Herodotus (likely) and Plato (improbable) in order to benefit from Egyptian learning, especially from the wisdom of her priests. In later periods we know that Polybius, Strabo, and Juvenal visited or resided in Egypt, though by second century these visits might be better termed 'sight-seeing' (see Casson 1974). It is interesting to note that in both the cases of Solon and Plato, though this desire for learning was the main reason cited, the method for financing the trip was through trade (Plutarch *Solon* 2). The point here is that by the time of Herodotus a country such as Egypt was still a distant country, but well within the ambit of Greek traders and more adventurous travelers.

Other possible sources for Herodotus include Charon of Lampsacus, Dionysius of Miletus, Xanthus (who wrote a history of the kingdom of Lydia), and Hellanicus of Lesbos; but we know very little about these writers except what has been preserved in a few fragments, largely in Herodotus' work itself (Burns 1972, pp24-5; Usher 1970, p3). It is therefore impossible to assess them independently, and we are unsure of how dependent Herodotus was on their accounts. The general project of *The Histories* may owe something to the form of geographical accounts and travel-journal developed by Hecataeus, but so far as we can tell none of these earlier works are on the scale or level of sophistication of the *Histories* itself. Herodotus usually only specifically mentions the name of Hecataeus when he chooses to specifically disagree with him (Briggs 1985). Indeed, the major influence on Herodotus may have remained Homer. Oswyn Murray argues that it was from Homer that he borrowed his epic theme of the war between two cultures, and that ancient writers (e.g. Longinus *On the Sublime*, XIII, 3) regarded Herodotus as the most Homeric of writers (Murray 1973, p463).

4. The Conflict Between East and West

Herodotus sets out to describe the war between the Greeks and the Persians, which he saw as part of a great conflict between east and west. Starting with a history of Greece and its relations with Lydia and the East in the generation of King Cyrus, who founded Persia's power, he builds his account through 64 years until the great invasion of Greece in 480 B.C.E. (Burns 1972, p16). This certainly was one of the pivotal periods in Greek history, and it laid a foundation for the future development of Greek history for the next 200 years. It created the pre-conditions for the later *Peloponnesian War*, and the Persian sacking of Greek temples was the explicit *causus belli* for the invasion of the Persian Empire by Alexander the Great in the late 4th century and perhaps for the destruction of Persepolis (see Arrian *Anabasis* III.18.12; Strabo XV.3.6; Diodorus XVI.89.2, XVII.4.9 & XVII.70-72). It is probable that many ancient temples in Athens aside from the Acropolis had been destroyed by the Persians, e.g. temple of Olympian Zeus, of Pythian Apollo, of Earth, and Dionysus in Limnae were at least looted, and probably destroyed (Thucydides II.15), while the wealthy temple of Apollo at Branchidae (Didyma) near Miletus was also plundered (Herodotus VI.19). The theme of the heroic Greeks verses the decadent empires of the east would be taken up as a narrative-form from the Roman Empire through to the 21st century.

A brief over-view of the plan of the *Histories* will help explain the nature of this work.

Book & Contents (Adapted from Burns 1972, pp17-19):

- I, 1-5: East verses West
 I, 6-94: The kingdom of Lydia till the Persian conquest (includes discursus on Greek and Spartan ethnology)
 I, 95-216: The Growth of the Power of Persia under King Cyrus, Persian culture and customs, Persian conquests
- II: Egyptian geography, anthropology and history
- III,1-38: Cambyses' Conquest of Egypt
 III, 39-60: Contemporary Greece
 III, 61-97: Persian affairs
 III, 98-117: Travels to distant lands
 III, 120-49: King Darius and the West
- IV, 1-143: Description of Scythia
 IV, 145-205: North Africa and the Greek colony of Cyrenaica
- V, 1-27: Ethnology of the Balkans and the north
 V, 28-126: Ionian Revolt and its Repression by Persia
- VI, 1-42 Ionian revolt continued
 VI, 43-120: Persian advance into Greece until battle of Marathon
 VI, 120-140: Factions and affairs in Athens
- VII: The Great Invasion of Greece by Xerxes
- VIII: Invasion Continued: Battle of Salamis, withdrawal of Persians.
- IX: Invasion continued. Land battles and Battle of Plataea. Continued operations against Persians in Ionia. Concluding moral.

This division into nine books was first made by the scholastic librarians of Alexandria in the Hellenistic period (Briggs 1985, p273), but is logical in showing the main themes. Notice several factors about this structure. Firstly, the *Histories* really is an account of the Persian War, describing both sides in depth, including social and historical factors. It therefore includes a detailed account of regions of the Persian Empire, including their boundaries. Thus Egypt, Persia, Babylonia, the Balkans, and the Scythians (nomadic groups found on the plains around the Black Sea) are discussed in some detail, as well as accounts of Greek affairs, traditions, and diplomatic relations.

This means that Herodotus' narrative includes much more than political history. It provides a detailed analysis of geography (partly based on Hecataeus), a description of the customs and stories of other nations (ethnology), as well as brief histories of these nations. The numerous so-called 'digressions' are part of Herodotus' overall plan. On occasions, however, these digressions seem little more than the desire to preserve or tell a good story for its own sake. Remembering that Herodotus may have performed parts of his work in public, this was probably an effective way of making his account more popular. On occasion Herodotus notes that he doesn't believe the story he has felt obliged to preserve, and that neither he nor the reader should feel obliged to regard it as true (Usher 1970, p5; Herodotus II.123, VII.152). Historical narrative, it seems, had not broken away from older story-telling structures, but this remains true to some extent today,

where historical accounts often have a narrative structure with flows and climaxes informed by literary rather than factual demands (see White 1973).

Last, it seems that the *Histories* underwent several revisions and may not have been entirely finished. As noted by A. Burns, there is no treatment of Greek affairs from 489-481 B.C.E.; this may indicate that the work was not quite complete (1972, p18).

5. Herodotus as the Father of History

As indicated above, the origin meaning of the word *historia* had been that of an investigation. The discipline of history as we know it today simply had not existed in Greece before this time. Nor were the religious records and king-lists of Egypt and the Near East anything like what we would call history, though the royal annals of the later Hittite Empire do come close in the critical recording of information (see Ferguson 2008).

Exactly what history is and should be is a debate which has raged from ancient times (see *What is History* by the Roman satirist Lucian) through to major contemporary debates. For some history is basically a kind of social science which deals with past events in a meaningful way (e.g. Carr, *What is History?*), while for others history is an interpretative art which can never quite achieve a scientific status (Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*). Without discussing these positions in detail, we can note that there were there are three significant ways in which Herodotus does something very similar to modern historians: -

- 1) Herodotus preserves a range of evidence, accounts and opinions, even if he is doubtful of some of this information, or in the end disagrees with the received account. In this way, *historia* is not merely a personal viewpoint on past events, but an investigation from which others can profit even if they don't agree with that particular historian's conclusions. His notion of preservation of 'data' shifts Herodotus away from a presenter of mere opinion to a preserver of evidence and viewpoints.
- 2) The historian, even though he looks at a wide range of information, is nonetheless selective in what he includes in his account. This selectivity should not be based so much on personal bias, but as part of an attempt to structure a meaningful narrative which can provide some coherent picture of past events. If the historian in the end is unable to completely explain what has happened, he is still obliged to provide as accurate a description as possible of the relevant events.
- 3) The historian is able to critically assess the evidence he marshals by a variety of means; either through the use of logic and common sense, through personal inspection of whatever evidence remains, or by critically comparing different accounts which he has received.

Herodotus at times engages in each of these three critical activities, though his account is still tinged with religious and mythical viewpoints. However, he will sometimes cite a source, such as Hecataeus to explicitly disagree with them, and at other times recounts stories but states that he doesn't believe them (Briggs 1985).

In brief, Herodotus is quite effective in meeting the first two criteria: his evidence is both extensive and molded into a large-scale account of the background and the conduct of the

Persian War. He also begins to look at this evidence critically; for example, he assesses the idea that Egypt is the gift of the Nile by quoting soundings from ships which show that silt from the Nile extends for many miles out to sea north of the Delta, indicating that most of southern Egypt had been built up from the layers of silt brought down by the river over aeons, i.e. the Delta really is 'a gift of the Nile' (in Book II). Likewise, he will not accept that there is a sea to the north of Europe because he has not been able to speak to someone who has seen it with his own eyes (although Herodotus in the end was wrong on this point, his principle of research remains valid). It is this critical assessment of the evidence which allows an advance in the systematic analysis of the past.

Herodotus was also one of the first Greek writers, along with Hecataeus, to effectively build an extended prose narrative. So far as we know he "was the first European historian and remains, in many respects among the greatest; he was also . . . the first European writer to use prose as an artistic medium. The art of Greek prose was Herodotus' invention." (De Selincourt 1962, p26) At the same time his prose was not without poetic phrasing. Thus he is often viewed as the most Homeric of writers, using a wide range of expression that would make aid his reading aloud of sections of the work (Briggs 1985).

Momigliano states that Herodotus 'seems to have been the first to produce an analytical description of a war, the Persian war. Furthermore he was probably the first to use ethnographical and constitutional studies in order to explain the war itself and to account for the outcome.' (1978, p3). Beyond this, his study represents a major shift away from mythical and poetic narratives as a means of experiencing the past. He attempts to explain events in the light of a wide-ranging study of cultural, political and military affairs, making him something of the 'social historian'. Many of his comments may seem rather naive to us today; but this does not reduce the fundamental break between the type of account provided between Homer and Hesiod on the one hand, and Herodotus and Thucydides on the other. Furthermore, Herodotus tends to build up complex accounts where different events in Egypt, Persia, Asia Minor and Europe all converge to create a great period of crisis. Instead of a narrow view of immediate causes, we have a much stronger picture concerned with 'social facts' and with a 'structural causality' where historical processes rather than a mere chronology are fundamental (Hunter 1982a & 1982b).

History and the writing of history (historiography) is one way of capturing the present for the future, and alternatively of making the present more meaningful by relating it to the past. It is both a powerful and dangerous tool - used properly, it empowers us with a deeper perspective of the relationships in our world, misused, it can become a kind of trap from which holds us in an invented and biased past. It is for this reason, perhaps, that Herodotus was sometimes harshly attacked as the 'father of lies'.

6. The Reliability of Herodotus

The reliability of the information contained in Herodotus has often been strongly doubted, in both ancient and modern times. Rather than being called the father of history, he has sometimes been called the 'father of lies'. Plutarch, the biographer of the 1st century C.E., wrote an essay *On the Malice of Herodotus*, which strongly criticized him. A.R. Burns also reminds us that Plutarch was a Boeotian, i.e. he came from the region of Thebes, and Herodotus had castigated Thebes in his account because they had Medized, i.e. gone over to the Persian side during the war (1972, p15). Even though Thebes had little choice due to the presence of overwhelming Persian forces in northern Greece and the decision of the Spartans to make their main defensive

land position at the Isthmus of Corinth, this became a serious charge against them during later periods.

Thus Plutarch, though recognising Herodotus' skill as a writer, argued that: -

The style, O Alexander, of Herodotus, as being simple, free, and easily suiting itself to its subject, has deceived many; but more, a persuasion of his dispositions being equally sincere. For it is not only (as Plato says) an extreme injustice, to make a show of being just when one is not so; but it is also the highest malignity, to pretend to simplicity and mildness and be in the meantime really most malicious. Now since he principally exerts his malice against the Boeotians and Corinthians, though without sparing any other, I think myself obliged to defend our ancestors and the truth against this part of his writings, since those who would detect all his other lies and fictions would have need of many books. (Plutarch *The Malice of Herodotus* I)

When Herodotus did not actually travel to a foreign country that he discussed, we might ask how he got his information. He certainly doesn't know any language other than Greek in any depth - his few attempts in giving foreign derivations of names are disastrous. Even local languages of Asia Minor were not known to him:

It is probable that Herodotus could not read or speak any language other than Greek. We might have expected a Halicarnassian to have been able to understand Carian. Herodotus does tell a story of how the promantis of the oracle of Apollo Ptöos, when consulted by the European Mys on behalf of Mardonius, spoke in a 'barbarian language' (8.135.2): at first, those three Greek-speakers who had been deputed to take notes were at a loss at this marvel, but then Mys snatched the wax tablet from one of their hands and began to write, for he understood that the oracle was in Carian. Elsewhere Herodotus introduces the question of whether the Carian language derives from the Caunian or vice versa, but cannot settle it (1.172). A glance at the range of remarks made by Herodotus on other foreign languages shows, however, that there is nothing here to suggest a special knowledge or even a special interest in Carian. Nor can we merely take for granted from Herodotus' Carian background that he was able to understand the Carian language.

In the case of other languages, he shows himself ignorant by his interest. Famously he asserts that all Persian names end in the letter sigma, so revealing that he knew all his Persian through its Greek forms (1.139) - and also ignoring his own evidence of the names of Persian women such as Atossa or Phaedyne. . . . Herodotus seems to have mistaken all pictographic scripts for Egyptian, so that the discovery of various Hittite and other near-Eastern monuments convinced him that he had found traces of the campaign of Sesostris, a semi-mythical Egyptian king, in Asia Minor, Phoenicia, and even Thrace. He also claims to have seen, and to have been able easily to read, examples of 'Cadmeian letters' inscribed in the temple of Apollo Ismenias in Thebes (5.59-61); these inscriptions, in immaculate Greek verse, he believed to have been inscribed by contemporaries of Oedipus and his father Laius. (Harrison 1998)

For Egypt he seems to have relied upon Egyptian informers, sometimes priests, and specifically mentions translators as a caste (Briggs 1985), perhaps meaning scribes. We can only assume that bilingual speakers, i.e. translators were available in some of these places, though some may have used crude subsets of language for the purposes of trade. Certainly Greek trade centres, e.g. the city of Naucratis in the Nile Delta, and the cities of Phoenicia and Syria would have had some Greek speakers due to the extensive trade that had gone on since the 8th and 7th centuries B.C., or Greek traders might have picked up enough of local tongues to begin a primitive discourse. This local knowledge of Greek or other languages may have been at the level of other trade languages; i.e. a kind of pidgin polyglot. When used to translate historical and cultural information many misinterpretations, and much misinformation, would also have been passed on. It seems unlikely that Herodotus would have had access to the highly trained interpreters and scribes that served the Egypt or Phoenician royal courts.

On the other hand, Herodotus is sometimes surprisingly accurate. Thus he correctly records 6 of the 7 names of the Persian conspirators against the Magian usurper, King Gaumata in 522 B.C. (Olmstead 1978, p107-8; Burns 1972, p22). Likewise, he accurately reports that the Caspian is an inland sea, even though later geographers argued that it was open to the ocean to the north. Even though his history of the land of Egypt and his account of their religion is full of errors and rather fragmentary, it is the sort of thing a tourist to Egypt might have picked up on a brief trip, especially since he was unable to speak or read Egyptian, and in local Egyptian eyes he would have been of too low a status to be received officially. Nonetheless, his description of Egyptian embalming for the period is roughly accurate (II, 86). Likewise, he has a quite reasonable understanding of certain aspects of Greek religion associated with Osiris and the funerary cult (Avdijev 1977).

We must also remember that Herodotus also preserves numerous interesting stories, even ones which he explicitly states that he does not believe. He states that; -

My business is to record what people say, but I am by no means bound to believe it - and that may be taken to apply to this book as a whole. (VII.152).

We should avoid using these stories to judge Herodotus - their very preservation gives us much insight into the mentality and attitudes of the time. Furthermore, some of his unlikely stories have turned out to be verified by modern archaeological investigations, e.g. that the Scythians embalmed their dead in honey, and that Nile flood is caused in part by melting snows in the mountains far to the south of Egypt (preserved but disclaimed in II.22). However, for Herodotus stories are either all correct, or all wrong, and this does mean he is sometimes uncritical in his use of literary and poetic sources (Burns 1972, p25).

A more difficult question is to what extent was Herodotus subtly biased by his own viewpoints in the account he has provided. Certainly he is pro-Athenian, and frankly believes that it was the Athenian fleet that really turned back the Persian invasion of Xerxes, rather than the land power of Sparta, or the naval forces provided by maritime powers such as Corinth. But his position is still respectable historically. Corinthian and other Greek navies might not have fought at the island of Salamis if it hadn't been for the determination of the Athenian leaders to break the enemy at this point. Furthermore, Herodotus does not accept the Athenian version that the Corinthians broke and fled during this battle, since he records both versions (VIII.94). He is much more scathing about the Aeginetan involvement in the land battle of Plataea, claiming that their burial cenotaphs were a sham, since they had no casualties (IX.83). However, the Athenians had long had disputes with the island of Aegina and were likely to discount their efforts.

One area where Herodotus and most ancient historians are notoriously inaccurate is in their assessment of numbers; whether of soldiers, money, or the populations of cities. Herodotus' assessment of 2.5 million in the Persian army is no doubt inflated. However, though the assessments of modern historians of a force closer to 300,000 (de Selincourt 1962, p41) may be more correct, it is based on reasonable estimates derived in part from a circumstantial reading of Herodotus rather than hard evidence.

There is one more aspect of Herodotus that might worry a modern reader. There are numerous stories of precognition concerning the future, certainly via the use of oracles, especially from the oracle of Apollo at Delphi. Herodotus quotes these oracles quite often, e.g. the oracle saying

that the Athenians should stand fast behind their wooden walls, which could either mean the wooden walls surrounding the temples on the Acropolis, or the wooden walls of their fleet. The modern historian might feel that such tales cannot be part of a serious analysis - but there is no doubt that the Greeks took them very seriously. For the oracles tell the future as decided by fate, *moira*, a dealer out of portions according to necessity (de Selincourt 1962, p57) which even the gods couldn't really change (and Zeus won't change). Here we see Herodotus responding to religious dimension in history that we can only regard as a kind of objectified morality. Yet certain accounts in the book retain the atmosphere of a religious world-view which, though alien to us, makes a strong narrative. One of the most effective is when the Persian army marches into holy Delphi and thunderbolts break large rocks off the surrounding mountains which fall upon the invaders (Herodotus VIII.36). Nonetheless, taking a leaf out of Herodotus' own methodology, we should use such stories as evidence of the attitudes of the time, rather than dismissing them out of hand.

7. Herodotus and the Expansion of the Known World

The last crucial innovation of Herodotus was that he greatly expanded the world to which the Greek mind had access. It is true that travelers such as Solon had gone to Egypt, that traders now roved the shores of the entire Mediterranean and Black Seas, and that Hecataeus' travel accounts may have been a model for Herodotus' writings. However, Herodotus' account penetrates more deeply into several hinterlands; up the Nile beyond Egypt, across Asia Minor to Babylon and the Persian homelands, northwards into the Scythian lands surrounding the Caspian and the Black Seas, as well as the northern Balkans. This geography was matched with a dawning knowledge of these foreign affairs, customs and histories.

Aubrey de Selincourt (1962) argues that the Greek were never really interested in the barbarians around them. It is true that the Hellenes always regarded the 'barbarian' as inferior, except perhaps the Egyptians in the area of religious wisdom. But the Greeks were a curious people, and after the huge cataclysm of the Persian war, this curiously became something of a survival trait. Through their knowledge of the Persian Empire and its limitations, they were able to avoid repeated invasions and force the Persian sphere of influence eastwards away from the coast of Asia Minor. In this Herodotus was much more than an entertainer or story-teller. He provided a real education and a political service to the Greeks of his own generation. It was also this opening up to foreign accounts and actions, of course, which meant they that could no longer remain content with traditional Greek views of affairs or how things 'were'. By providing a range of foreign accounts and histories, Herodotus allowed a comparative, and therefore an implicitly critical approach, to the world around them.

This opening up of horizons can be shown by the geographical extent of Herodotus' investigations, as well as the diversity of his interests:

His world was not 'the little frog pond' of the Mediterranean, as Socrates once described it, but reached out in the south to Ethiopia and beyond, in the east to India, in the north to what we now call Russia, and in the west to the Pillars of Hercules – the Straits of Gibraltar and beyond. He devoted several pages to the river Nile and the problems of its source, and without knowing about the equator noted how travelers round Africa had found themselves returning with the sun on their wrong side. (Briggs 1985, pp274-275).

Unfortunately, inter-Greek rivalries were soon to override what should have been learnt from the Persian Wars: that only a Hellas in which the different city-states co-operated without being

dominated by each other, could any of them remain free. It was their relative ignorance or indifference to the importance of the minor kingdom of Macedonia, and the seemingly distant Roman republic, which were to spell their downfall into political subservience from the late 4th century onwards.

Herodotus' achievement has been summarized by Aubrey de Selincourt:

He was able (surely the first quality of a good historian) to see his subject as part of a larger process and to be constantly aware of the threads which linked his country with the vast and mysterious lands of Egypt and Asia. He was able to keep before his reader the sense that Greece, the centre of his interest, was still only one country in an immense and diverse world which it was yet to dominate by virtue of certain qualities which that world lacked, above all by that passion for independence and self-determination which was both her glory and her bane; to be aware of the past, not only the immediate but the most remote, as a living element in the present; and to find - unlike, in this, most historians writing today - a continuing moral pattern in the vicissitudes of human fortune the world over. (1962, p23)

In this sense Herodotus' writing is a universal history (a term used by de Selincourt without full explanation, 1962, p37); though that term is usually only applied to later and less original writers such as Diodorus of Sicily. The tapestry of the confrontation between Europe and Asia is still one which haunts European thought. It is a somewhat mythologized pattern, reaching back into the types of confrontation portrayed by Homer's accounts of the Trojan War, which Herodotus knew very well. But this confrontation was not merely a war 'by land and by sea', and sometimes to 'win' was not enough. The Greeks in a very real sense won the Persian War; but they also won a sharper definition of themselves as a relatively free and vigorous people (Usher 1972, pp8-10; see further Balcer 1983) who should be able to maintain that freedom against all and any other peoples. This viewpoint, of course, was not forgotten by the modern Greeks.

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