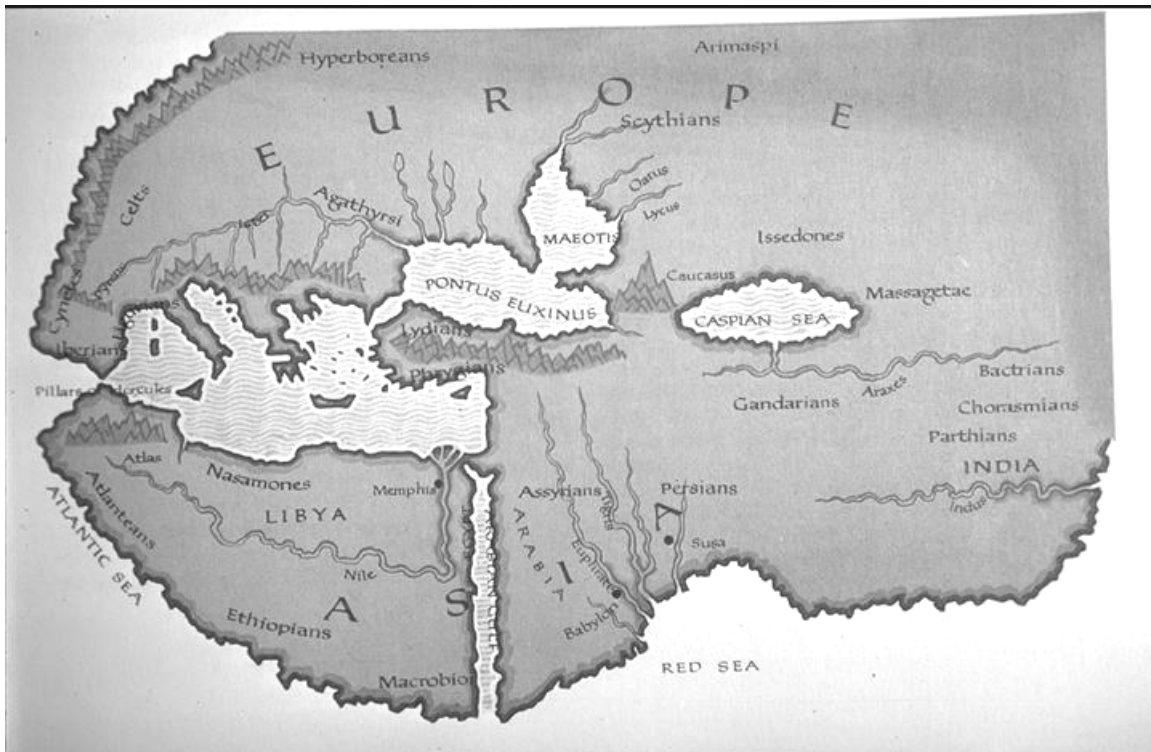


Herodotus, *Histories*

Author, Date, and Historical Context

- Herodotus (ca. 484-425 BCE) wrote the *Histories* in Greek approximately between 450-430 BCE.
- As he tells us at the outset, he is from the Dorian Greek colony of Halicanarsus in Asia Minor. Halicanarsus (on the western coast of what is now Turkey) was at the crossroads between the Hellenistic (i.e., Greek) world and the Near East. When Herodotus was born, for instance, the city was under Persian rule. Herodotus also had close connections with Athens (e.g., he seems to have been a friend of the tragedian Sophocles).
- The *Histories* were written to a pan-Hellenic audience (i.e., including Greeks from all different city-states, those who spoke Dorian, Ionic, and Attic dialects). Although Greek cities were distinct and often in conflict previous to the Persian Wars, Greeks then united against the Persians. Not only do the *Histories* aim to tell the history of the Persian Wars, but these events shape the concept of a unified Greek culture that Herodotus there discusses and contrasts with “barbarian” cultures (“barbarian” meaning non-Greek and including Persians, Egyptians, Scythians, Ethiopians, Arabs, etc.).
- Although Herodotus’ pro-Greek bias is clear, so too is his curiosity about other cultures, and his account is often surprisingly sympathetic, even towards the Persians. He seems to have been very well-traveled, having visited places all around the ancient Mediterranean world. For instance, he claims to have visited Egypt and implies that he also went to Babylon. Some of his knowledge of non-Greek culture seems based on legend and hear-say, but it remains impressive that he sought to know about the entire “known world” of the Greeks.

Persian Wars – During the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, the Persian Empire expanded greatly, first under the rule of Cyrus the Great. Under Cyrus, for instance, this Empire conquered the Babylonian Empire (539 BCE, at which point Israel, which had been conquered by the Babylonians would be granted return from the Babylonian Exile). “Persian Wars” is the Greek term for the related conflicts between Greeks and Persians in the fifth century BCE, beginning w/the Ionian Revolt in 499 BCE, when Persian-ruled Ionian Greek cities (i.e., those which had been conquered by Cyrus) rebelled with the help of other Greeks at the ascension of Darius. This led to two Persian attempts to conquer Greek domains (first by Darius and later Xerxes), but Greeks successfully united against the Persians (e.g. forming the Delian League, led by Athens, in 478/7 BCE).



Literary Genre

- Herodotus writes in first-person, telling the reader information about himself, how he learned the details that he records (sometimes first-hand, sometimes through others – noting sometimes even his degree of confidence in his sources), how he interprets events and their causes (often in contrast to others), why he deems these events important, and so on.
- We can say simply that the genre is “history” – although it would be misleading to hold this work up to our modern concepts of history-writing (e.g., as motivated mainly by the desire accurately to report important events, esp. political and military events), not least because our notions of history have been shaped by a process of development largely begun by Herodotus himself!
- At the time when Herodotus wrote, there was no concept of History as we now have it. The term *historia*, prior to Herodotus, had the general meaning of “inquiry.” Only afterwards did the term come to mean inquiry *into the past* in particular.
- Herodotus has been famously called the “father of history,” and the *Histories* were extremely influential in shaping our concept of “history” as a genre of writing and mode of investigation.

The aim of the *Histories*, as spelled out in the first line = “Herodotus of Halicarnassus here displays his inquiries [*historia*], so that human achievements may not become forgotten in time, and great and marvelous deeds – some displayed by Greeks, some by Barbarians (i.e., non-Greeks) – may not be without their glory; and especially to show why the two peoples fought each other.”

Scope and Approach

- He was also, interestingly, called the “father of lies,” due to his integration of materials later deemed legendary or otherwise suspect in accuracy. For Herodotus, however, the inclusion of all obtainable information (including incorrect interpretations and legendary tales) seems to have been significant in

Hdt 3.38 (on customs) = “Thus it appears certain to me, by a great variety of proofs, that Cambyses was raving mad; he would not else have set himself to make a mock of holy rites and long-established usages. For if one were to offer men to choose out of all the customs in the world such as seemed to them the best, they would examine the whole number, and end by preferring their own; so convinced are they that their own usages far surpass those of all others. Unless, therefore, a man was mad, it is not likely that he would make sport of such matters. That people have this feeling about their customs may be seen by very many proofs: among others, by the following. Darius, after he had got the kingdom, called into his presence certain Greeks who were at hand, and asked- “What he should pay them to eat the bodies of their fathers when they died?” To which they answered, that there was no sum that would tempt them to do such a thing. He then sent for certain Indians, of the race called Callatians, men who eat their fathers, and asked them, while the Greeks stood by, and knew by the help of an interpreter all that was said - “What he should give them to burn the bodies of their fathers at their decease?” The Indians exclaimed aloud, and bade him forbear such language. Such is men's wont herein; and Pindar was right, in my judgment, when he said, “Custom is the king over all!”

itself, revealing something at the very least about those who told the stories.

- Later historians (beginning esp. with the influential work of Thucydides) would aim towards more focused explanations of the causes and effects of events and would focus increasingly on wars and other political and military events. By contrast, Herodotus’ approach is one of radical inclusion. At the time that Herodotus wrote, there were no clear dividing lines between what we now think of as “history,” “anthropology” or “ethnography,” “geography,” “zoology,” etc. His *Histories* includes all of these types of materials.
- When dealing with the history of the conflicts between Greeks and Persians, he is interested not only in battles, kings, etc., but also in the customs, past histories, religions, myths, societal structures, geographical contexts, animal worlds, and achievements of these and all other involved cultures (e.g., Egyptians, Scythians, Ethiopians, etc). For him, there are a variety of wonders worthy of reporting. Accordingly, he has a broad and multifaceted concept of historical causality – and hence digresses quite often from his main tale!

Myth and History, Gods and Humankind

- When we read his *Histories* in the context of his own time, however, what is striking is not necessarily his inclusive approach and his integration of what we now consider distinct domains of knowledge (indeed, we shall see something similar in Plato's *Timaeus*!). Notable, rather, is his choice to focus on the deeds of humankind, rather than the interactions between the gods and humankind.
- Like earlier epic works (esp. Homer), he considers events that he deems of monumental significance and people who gained glory; his tale, however, is not of the far past but of his own time. Moreover, gods are secondary; they are not presented as the only or the main motivating factors in human history; myths about gods are recounted as just one type of a variety of explanations for customs and/or events, for which the more rationalizing, human-oriented explanations are usually treated as the more plausible.
- At the outset, furthermore, history-writing is presented as a task predicated on – and, in a sense, fighting against – human mortality (cf. Gilgamesh) and the inevitable passage of time and memory.

Outline of Herodotus' *Histories* from How and Wells *Commentary*

Book I

1-5 - Introduction (rationalized myths)
6-94 - Lydian History (56-70 digression on Greeks at time of Croesus)
95-140 - Median and Persian History, incl. customs
141-176 - Persian Conquest of Asiatic Greeks
177-216 - Story of Cyrus, digression on Babylon up to death of Cyrus

Book II

1-4 - connect Egypt to previous narrative
5-18 - origin, dimensions, boundaries of Egypt
19-34 - the Nile
35-98 - Account of Egypt
99-146 - History of Egypt according to Egyptians
147-182 - History of Egypt according to others

Book III

1-16 - re-connect Egypt to Persian narrative
17-26 - **Cambyses'** expedition
39-60 - Polycrates, Samos, Fate(520's)
61-87 - Death of **Cambyses**, accession of **Darius**
89-117 - Persia as organized by **Darius**
118-128 - **Darius'** difficulties at home
129-138 - Democides; **Darius** linked to Europe
139-149 - Persia conquers Samos
150-160 - Revolt of Babylon, capture by **Darius**

Book IV

1-144 - Account of Scythia
145-205 - Account of Cyrene

Book V

1-46 - Persians conquer Thrace, with digressions
17-22 - Persian embassy to Amyntas of Macedon, their murder
23-27 - **Darius** takes Histiaeus to Susa
38-38 - Causes of **Ionian Revolt**; Aristagoras to Sparta
39-48 - Digression on Sparta
49-54 - Aristagoras fails to persuade; digression on geography, size of Persia and the Persian Royal Road

55-96 - Greek History after Peisistratus

55-61 - Hipparchus, and digression

62-65 - Expulsion of Peisistratids (510)

66-69 - Reforms of Cleisthenes, digression on elder Cleisthenes

70-76 - Cleomenes invades

77-78 - **Athenians** vs. Boiotians and Chalcis; glory of democracy

79-89 - Aigina and Thebes vs. Athens. digression

90-93 - **Spartans** fail to restore Hippias

94-96 - Hippias to Sigium, digressions. Artaphernes insists that Athens receive Hippias back.

97-102 - Aristagoras gets Athenian aid to Ionia; Greeks burn Sardis, are defeated at Ephesus (499)

103-107 - Revolt spreads

108-115 - Persian victory at Cyprus

116-123 - Persian victory in Hellespont

124-126 - Death of Aristagoras

Book VI

1-5 - Ionian intrigues of Histiaeus

6-17 - Battle of Lade(494)

18-21 - Fall of Miletus

22-25 - Exiled Samians in West; submission of Samos

26-30 - Last adventures and death of Histiaeus

31-32 - Final Reduction of Ionia(494)

33-41 - Reduction of Hellespont, Establishment of Elder Miltiades; Younger Miltiades to Athens

42 - Settlement of Ionia by Artaphernes

43-45 - Reduction of Thasos; **Darius** demands earth and water; Aigina Medizes

51-60 - Story of Dual kingship of Sparta; royal privileges

61-70 - Birth, deposing, exile of Demaratus

71-2 - Leotychidas

73-84 - Cleomenes, incl. digressions

85-93 - Refusal of Athens to restore Aiginetan hostages; War between Athens and Aiginea

94-101 - Datis, Artaphernes sail across Aegean, defeating Naxos, Cyclades, Carystus, Eretria (490)

- 102-117 - Battle of Marathon
- 118-120 - Return of Persians to Asia; **Spartans** arrive
- 121-131 - Shield signal, defense (and history) of Alcmaeonids
- 132-6 - Miltiades' end
- 137-140 - The Pelasgi; Miltiades secures Lemnos

Book VII

- 1-4 - Further preparations against Greece; death of **Darius**, dispute over succession (485)
- 5-6 - Counsellors urge **Xerxes** to war
- 7 - Suppression of Egyptian revolt
- 8-11 - Persian council, speeches
- 12-18 - Dreams of **Xerxes** and Artabanus
- 19-25 - Size of expedition; preparations; Athos canal
- 26-32 - March to Sardis
- 33-37 - Bridges over Hellespont
- 37-43 - March to Abydos, order of march
- 44-56 - review of troops; dialogue **Xerxes**/Artabanus; crossing of bridge
- 57-60 - To Doriscus; the numbering of the troops
- 61-99 - List of tribal contingents of army and fleet
- 100-108 - **Xerxes** and Demareteus
- 108-126 - Advance to Therma; trouble feeding the army
- 128-130 - King to Tempe
- 131-127 - Return of the herald; list of Medizers; story of Sperchius
- 138-144 - Services of Athens to Greece. The Oracle of the "wooden walls," Themistokles, and the building of the fleet.
- 145-147 - Congress of the Greeks; dispatch spies to Sardis
- 148-152 - Negotiations with Argos
- 153-167 - Negotiations with Gelon, with digressions
- 168-171 - Fruitless embassies to Corcyra and Crete
- 172-4 - Failure to hold Tempe
- 175-178 - Position of Greeks at Thermopylae, Artemisium
- 179-195 - First Naval operations
- 196-198 - **Xerxes** in Thessaly, Halus
- 198-239 - Battle of Thermopylae
- 198-201 - Topography of Thermopylae
- 202-7 - Greeks under Leonidas
- 208-9 - Persians at Thermopylae
- 210-225 - Three days of fighting at Thermopylae
- 226-233 - exploits, epitaphs, cowards, surrender of Thebans
- 234-9 - Message of Demaratus after Thermopylae

Book VIII

- 1-23 - Battle of Artemisium
- 24-26 - **Xerxes** and the Dead at Thermopylae; games
- 27-30 - Feud between Thessaly and Phokis
- 31-34 - Advance of Persians through Phokis to Boiotia
- 36-39 - Miracle preserves Delphi
- 40-112 - Battle of Salamis
- 40-49 - Evacuation of Attica; Greek council of war
- 50-55 - **Xerxes** pillages Attica; portents
- 56-65 - Councils of war; anecdotes, portents
- 66-69 - Decisions
- 70-82 - day before battle
- 83-96 - day of battle
- 97-99 - **Xerxes** considers flight. News sent to Susa
- 100-102 - Advice of Mardonius and Artemisia
- 104-106 - Hermotimus and his revenge
- 107-112 - Retreat of Persian fleet; Themistokles & bridge
- 113-130 - Retreat of **Xerxes** to Thessaly and Sardis
- 121-125 - Thank offering; fame of Themistokles
- 126-129 - Winter 480/479. Artabazus takes Olynthus, Potidaia
- 130-132 - Persians at Samos; Greeks to Delos
- 133-144 - Mardonius in Macedon; Athens will not yield.

Book IX

- 1-89 - Battle of Plataia
- 1-5 - Mardonius to Attica
- 6-11 - Athenian embassy to Sparta
- 12-15 - Mardonius leaves Attica for Boiotia
- 16-18 - Banquet at Thebes
- 19-24 - Greeks to Kithairon
- 25-32 - Greeks take 2nd position; battle array
- 33-37 - Seers on either side
- 38-40 - Reluctance to attack
- 41-46 - Eleventh day
- 47-51 - Twelfth day; change positions
- 52-57 - Night of twelfth day
- 58-75 - Battle of Plataea
- 76-79 - Assorted stories about the battle
- 80-85 - Booty, dedications, tombs
- 86-89 - Siege, surrender, fate of Thebes
- 90-95 - Samian envoys reach Delos
- 96-107 - Battle of Mycale
- 108-113 - News to Persian Court
- 114-122 - **Athenians** besiege and take Sestos