author in his own right. All dates in the book, unless otherwise noted, are BCE.

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Introduction

1. HERODOTUS' LIFE AND WORK

Not much is known of the life of Herodotus and the few items that have come down to us are not above suspicion. A late source, the eleventh-century Byzantine lexicon known as the *Suda*, preserves a number of biographical details: that Herodotus was born in Halicarnassus, the son of Lyxes and Dryo, and the brother of Theodorus; that he was the nephew or cousin of an epic poet Panyassis, who wrote on historical themes (such as the foundings of Ionian cities); that he was exiled by the tyrant of Halicarnassus, Lygdamis, to the island of Samos, where he learned the Ionic dialect of Greek (in which his *Histories* are composed); that he afterwards returned to Halicarnassus, assisted in expelling Lygdamis, and then, seeing himself hated by his fellow citizens, went into exile and joined in the foundation of Thurii, an Athenian-led pan-Hellenic colony in southern Italy; and that he died there or perhaps in Macedonia at Pella.

It is impossible to say how much of this is reliable. We know that the biographies composed of ancient poets were made up largely of inferences from remarks made in their writings, and much the same thing may have happened in Herodotus' case.[1] He may thus have been thought a tyrant-slayer because of his obvious love of freedom as evidenced in his work, and Samos was assumed to be the place of his exile because he shows a great deal of knowledge about the island and its monuments, and is favourably disposed towards the Samians in his work. (Indeed, the assertion that he learned Ionic Greek there is patently absurd, since his own Dorian community of Halicarnassus

used the Ionic dialect for its public inscriptions.) Finally, the tradition of exile may be an explanation for the wide travels that Herodotus portrays in his work; and since exile was not uncommon for historians of later times (Thucydides, Xenophon, Polybius, to name a few), this may have been retrojected onto Herodotus, the 'father of history'.[2]

We hear that Herodotus approached both the Thebans and the Corinthians to request their patronage for his work but was rebuffed, and in return for this he wrote disparagingly of them in his history. By contrast, we are told, the people of Athens were so delighted with his work that they voted to give him the sum of ten talents – a fortune – from public funds to show their gratitude. These remarks, with their anachronistic notions of patronage and local pride, clearly come from a later time and are meant to explain why Herodotus wrote favourably towards one group and not another. Since ancient critics always maintained a keen eye for bias, it was not difficult for them to suppose that Herodotus' treatment of the participants was directly related to how he himself had been treated by them.[3]

A sojourn in Athens is also part of the traditional biography. In Athens Herodotus is said to have been a friend of the tragedian Sophocles: Plutarch records a poem that the playwright wrote for the historian and scholars have noted several correspondences between Herodotus' work and Sophocles' plays. There is a strong pro-Athenian bias in Herodotus' narrative, either in explicit praise or in implicit acceptance of the Athenian viewpoint in his evaluations of other states. Yet while there is no reason to doubt that he spent time in Athens, this does not mean (as is so often claimed) that he must have been friendly with the Alcmaeonids, a prominent Athenian clan, or that he must have admired and approved of the policies of Pericles, the Alcmaeonid who enjoyed an unparalleled influence in democratic Athens from 445 to his death in 429 BCE.[4]

Herodotus himself states that he came from Halicarnassus, a Dorian town on a promontory in the southwest corner of Asia Minor, the western coast of modern Turkey, which in antiquity was filled with Greek cities and Greek culture. There is abundant evidence that Halicarnassus, although a Greek city, had close

contact with the non-Greek Carians who occupied the hinterlands and were subject to Persia. It has been thought, not improbably, that this less insular atmosphere influenced the young Herodotus, broadening his inquisitiveness and tolerance towards Persians and non-Greeks in general. The exact date of his birth is unknown; the ancients put it in 484 and the date, although conjecture, is nevertheless not likely to be far off.

Herodotus gives every indication in his work of having travelled widely throughout the Mediterranean. He claims explicitly to have journeyed as far south as Elephantine at the first cataract of the Nile (II. 29), and as far north as the Black Sea area in his research on the Scythians (IV. 76–81). He says he visited Dodona in northwest Greece (II. 55), Zacynthus off the western coast of the Peloponnese (IV. 195) and Metapontum in southern Italy (IV. 15). He inspected temples in Phoenicia and at Thasos (II. 44), observed the remnants of a battle in the Egyptian Delta (III. 12), inspected monuments in Palestine (II. 106) and viewed the majestic Thessalian plain (VII. 129). By other remarks not as explicit, he strongly suggests that he travelled as far east as Babylon and as far west as Cyrene in Libya (I. 193; IV. 154). He saw inscriptions in Theban temples (V. 59), and his descriptions of the treasures at Delphi and Miletus indicate that he saw them for himself. Elsewhere he uses geographical comparisons that demonstrate his knowledge of Athens and the Peloponnese as well as Asia Minor (not surprisingly) and even the 'heel' of Italy. Given the difficulty, danger and expense of travel in the time of Herodotus, we should be justified in concluding that he must have been from the upper class. Although some scholars doubt the extent of Herodotus' travels (see below, pp. xxix–xxxi), the general opinion is that he was a man of indefatigable character, who spent many years researching the material that he eventually brought together in his *Histories*.

What audience Herodotus envisioned and what form the 'publication' of his work took are not easy to determine.[5] He certainly saw himself as writing for a pan-Hellenic audience, and although better informed about some states than others, he presents in his work numerous perspectives and traditions without strict allegiance to any school of thought and for the

most part avoiding the promotion of any one group's political claims. His work is not in any sense provincial, and this is even more impressive when we consider the general insularity of the individual Greek city-states. The form in which he communicated his researches was the recital or public performance. Since he lived in a largely oral society where the level of functional literacy cannot have been high,[6] most would have known of his work from oral presentations or performances. We may imagine that Herodotus gave readings from his work at religious festivals or in smaller intellectual gatherings such as symposia, of the sort familiar to us from Plato's *Symposium*.[7] In the earlier books it is possible to see independent and almost detachable 'performance pieces', in which the author, with great emphasis, criticizes previous treatments of a subject and with much fanfare substitutes his own solution to a problem: the discussion of the Nile's inundation (II. 19–27) or the revisionary account of the Trojan War (II. 113–20) are good examples. This kind of performance, which finds parallels in the philosophers and medical writers of Herodotus' time, is part of the intellectual ferment of the fifth century, where reciters would lay claim to wisdom and openly debate issues before citizens and professionals.[8]

There is some uncertainty whether the *Histories* as we have them are complete. The chief grounds for doubt are three unfulfilled promises: two refer to a history of Assyria (I. 106; 184) and one to the capture of a Greek traitor (VII. 213). The failure to fulfil the promises may, however, be nothing more than lapses of memory, since in Herodotus' day the physical act of writing researches down would have involved long and cumbersome rolls of papyrus, and it would have been difficult to go back and revise once he had begun. Moreover, in supporting the argument that the work is finished, one might adduce the ending, which has a strong sense of thematic closure.[9]

The date of Herodotus' death is unknown. He makes several unmistakable references to the Peloponnesian War, the great war between Athens and Sparta that lasted from 431 to 404, with a period of nominal but suspect peace (the so-called 'Peace of Nicias') from 421 to about 414. The latest datable reference

in his work is to the year 430, and a remark that he makes about the Athenian *deme* of Decelea (IX. 73 with n.) implies that he was probably not alive in 413 (unless we assume that only this passage is unrevised). The traditional date for his death is some time between 430 and 425. The latter date is chosen because it is assumed that a passage from Aristophanes' *Acharnians* (performed in 425) is a parody of Herodotus, and that therefore the work must have been published before that date. Others find allusions to Herodotus in the same poet's *Birds* (performed 414) and suggest therefore that the *Histories* were published around 415. These assume, then, that Herodotus lived through the first part of the Peloponnesian War (known as the Archidamian War) and died during the Peace of Nicias, which would put his death somewhere between 421 and 415. Such notions as 'publication' are probably anachronistic, and both passages attest only that Herodotus' work was well known in Athens, no doubt as a result of his own reading of it there.[10]

Whatever date we assign to his death, it is more important to recognize that Herodotus was doing most of his research, writing and performances from the 450s up to the 420s. This was a time not only of exciting inquiry carried out in many fields (some of which finds its place in Herodotus' own work) but also of increasing conflict between Sparta and Athens, which were then the two great powers in the Greek world – the powers, in fact, that had combined not so long before, in 490 and again in 480–479, to repel the Persians and ensure Greek freedom. It was in this environment, and perhaps because of it, that Herodotus decided to look back from his time of growing tensions and internecine strife to an era when the major powers and many of the Greeks had united, even if only temporarily and uneasily, in a common and glorious enterprise.[11]

2. THE SUBJECT-MATTER OF THE *HISTORIES*

The variety of wares at the Herodotean bazaar is truly staggering. Given the title *Histories*, the modern reader might expect to find a linear narrative of battles, rulers and political upheavals. This description would barely do justice to the work we have. Our word 'history' comes from the Greek *historia*, which originally meant 'inquiry, investigation', and only later came to be applied specifically to the investigation of the past.[12] Herodotus, however, lived in a time when categories of knowledge had not been rigidly separated, and his work ranges over many fields and includes geography, anthropology, ethnology, zoology, even fable and folklore. His work defies easy categorization: like Homer, Herodotus is a world unto himself.

In his preface he claims that he wishes to preserve 'human achievements' (*ta genomena ex anthropon*), thus distinguishing his work at the outset from epic poetry, where gods and humans both are characters and act in concert with each other. He wants also to be sure that the 'great and marvellous deeds' (*erga megala te kai thomasta*) done by both Greeks and barbarians (by which Herodotus means, without prejudice, non-Greeks) have their proper share of glory. These 'great and marvellous deeds' are not only those done on the battlefield, but include monuments, temples, memorable actions by people in all situations – even the works of nature, such as the Nile's flood and the gradual creation of its Delta.[13]

In his search for great and memorable deeds, Herodotus extended his view beyond the Greek world to the lives, ways and beliefs of the people with whom the Greeks and the Persians came into contact. When treating a people, it is Herodotus' habit to comment on their monuments, religious beliefs, customs, livelihoods and the natural wonders of their country. An interest in foreign ways is evident in the earliest Greek literature, and these descriptions, known as ethnographies, did not originate with Herodotus.[14] But in Herodotus these descriptions are

woven into the historical narrative and form an integral part of his conception of the world and human action. More importantly, these ethnographies were a useful tool in helping the Greeks to define their own character and notion of themselves.[15] The Greek world, as we might expect, forms the norm used by Herodotus: those nations that differ the most receive the largest treatment, whereas nations rather similar to the Greeks are only briefly described.[16] Egypt, for example, receives an entire Book of its own, in part due to the Greek fascination (evidenced long before Herodotus) with that country: its wealth, its monuments, its astounding river and the antiquity of its civilization, in comparison with that of the Greeks, all contributed to its uniqueness. Scythia too receives extended treatment, because the Scythians' way of life was antithetical to that of the Greeks.[17]

A conceptual mapping of the world and the Greeks' place in it also motivates Herodotus' interest in geography and the natural world. There are long descriptions and explanations of such things as the sources of the Nile, the reasons for its flood, the rivers of Scythia or the oases of Africa. He discusses the number and nature of the continents, and what can be gathered about their size and relationship to one another. Here again, Herodotus was not the first in the field, and was only laying claim to the legacy of the Ionian natural scientists and travellers, who had also collected information about the natural world. But some of this material is part of Herodotus' attempt to include in his work what could be known of the entire *oikoumene* (the inhabited world) and to better his predecessors by introducing new information they did not have. Other lands, their positions and their relationship to Greece were all of importance in helping the Greeks to understand their own place in the world. This was true not least because a nation's geography and climate were felt to be important factors in the character of its people, as a reading of the roughly contemporary ethnographical essay *Airs, Waters, Places* (which is included in the Hippocratic medical corpus) shows.[18]

The reader will often find in Herodotus stories that can only be described as folktales, the type of literature known from the collections of the brothers Grimm. Stories of this kind, which

are found all over the world, often have a whiff of the marvellous about them. One reads of the child who is supposed to be destroyed at birth, but survives and grows up to be king; of the clever thief who outwits all attempts to catch him, and who is rewarded in the end with marriage to the king's daughter; of the destructive promise, with someone being bound by necessity to choose between equally bad alternatives; of magical recoveries and supernatural escapes. Herodotus was probably drawing here on a long tradition of Ionian story-telling, but he took this and brought it to a level of inspired brilliance. Many of Herodotus' readers can sense that whatever his shortcomings as a historian (in the modern sense of the word), he is a story-teller of the first rank.[19]

Herodotus' strong sense of the marvellous can be found as well in his interest in the unusual or the fantastic. These marvels can be of many types. In nature they are best seen in geographical features or in the world of animals. Man-made marvels can be extraordinary monuments, such as the Egyptian pyramids or the Labyrinth, or the temple of Hera at Samos; they can be ingenious inventions, like the boats of Babylon that sail down the river but are then disassembled and carried back on donkeys. They can even be human actions and actors who display great wit, character or bravery. It is because of his love for marvels and the unusual that his reputation, even in antiquity, was tarnished, and he was often reproved as a tall-story teller: he was both 'father of history' and 'father of lies'.[20]

Above all, Herodotus is the historian of Persia's wars with Greece. He identifies this as an important concern at the conclusion of his preface, where he says that he will investigate 'especially why the two peoples fought with each other'. Herodotus' choice of the war as a subject was certainly due in part to his admiration for the extraordinary achievement by which a small and cantankerous group of city-states defeated not once but several times the might of the Persians, the most powerful empire that had existed up to that time. Nevertheless, Herodotus' *Histories* are not primarily a military narrative. Even his accounts of the famous battles of Marathon, Thermopylae and Salamis have little on strategy and tactics, and the battle descriptions tend to focus on individual prowess and achievement or on interesting and unusual details. The focus here as elsewhere was on great and marvellous deeds, deeds that Herodotus wished to invest with fame.

Moreover, by choosing a war between east and west, Herodotus was consciously emulating the greatest of Greek poets, Homer, and his narrative of the Greek war against Troy. Herodotus' debt to Homer is profound, and may be seen in his choice of subject, his language, his conception of his task, as well as in many occasional observations and verbal echoes. At the outset of the work Herodotus says that he does not want the great deeds of Greeks and barbarians to be without their glory (*kleos*), a reference to the scene in the *Iliad* where Achilles takes pleasure in singing of the 'glories of men' (*klea andron*, IX. 189). Like the poet of the *Iliad*, Herodotus records and immortalizes the actions worthy of remembrance. These actions, however, were not those of heroes long ago, but rather of men whom Herodotus may have met and whose descendants were still to be found in the Greek city-states. By placing himself in this tradition, Herodotus makes the bold claim that the actions of the Persian Wars were every bit as glorious and memorable as those of Homeric conflict. Nor was Herodotus' debt to Homer limited to the *Iliad*; part of his work, like the *Odyssey*, is full of adventures and tales, and the historian himself, like Odysseus, is an experienced traveller.[21]

On one very important level Herodotus saw the Persian Wars as a conflict between freedom and slavery, between oriental and arbitrary despots on the one hand, and on the other hand free Greek communities in which men were required to persuade their fellow citizens and to be responsible for their actions.[22] In Herodotus the Persians are portrayed as driven on by the whip, while the Greeks fight for themselves. The portrait is subtle and without jingoism or malice, but its assumptions occasionally rise to the surface, as in the explanation of Demaratus to the Persian king Xerxes, who does not understand how the Spartans (and, by extension, the Greeks) can fight well if they do not put on, in Aeschylus' memorable phrase, the 'yoke of necessity'. Demaratus emphasizes that the Spartan master is Law – what

the community has agreed upon and chosen to follow. And in Herodotus' account of the wars, that law is superior to one-man rule, no matter how great the disparity in numbers between the combatants.[23]

Lands, peoples, nature, war, memorable deeds: Herodotus' work is a vast canvas, filled with the variety of his own interests. We can be fairly certain that before Herodotus the Greeks already possessed narratives of the foundings of cities, accounts of the customs of non-Greek peoples, and even treatments of the events of the Persian Wars. There were geographical studies, which attempted to mark out the Greeks' place in the world. What makes Herodotus unique is the range of his interests and his attempt to unite human and natural phenomena, and in so doing to discover the causal interconnection of widely disparate events.

3. HERODOTUS' SOURCES AND METHOD

We naturally wish to know where and how Herodotus got his information for all this material. In antiquity Herodotus was seen as the last in a long line of chroniclers who had written histories of their individual city-states, a genre that Herodotus then subsumed and superseded.[24] In the extreme form in which it was found in the ancient sources, that approach must definitely be rejected: many of the supposed 'sources' named for Herodotus can be shown to have written later than he did. On the other hand, it is possible to identify several prose writers who were predecessors or contemporaries of Herodotus. Pride of place must be given to Hecataeus of Miletus (fl. c. 500), the most important prose-writer before Herodotus and the only one to whom Herodotus refers by name in his own work. A product of the intellectual ferment of Miletus, Hecataeus wrote two works rather different in character but both of profound importance for the future of historical writing in Greece. In the *Genealogies* (or *Histories*) Hecataeus tried to bring order to the various and contradictory genealogies that existed in the Greek mythic tradition.[25] His other work, entitled *Circuit of the Earth* and

divided into two Books, 'Europe' and 'Asia', described the coastal settlements of the Mediterranean region, proceeding in a clockwise direction and giving for each place some description of the climate, people, customs and perhaps the hinterlands.[26] What makes Hecataeus important, despite the sparse remains of his work, is that he was the first Greek to attempt in prose to order (not simply to chronicle) the mass of Greek traditions, and to investigate the customs and peoples of the Mediterranean, using his own inquiry and rational analysis. Herodotus learned the method and, we can be fairly certain, drew upon some of the information which his predecessor had gathered.[27]

Besides Hecataeus, we may name the following, although the reader should be aware that the dates for these authors are in many cases uncertain. Dionysius of Miletus wrote in the early fifth century a work entitled *Persian Matters* (*Persica*). The work most likely covered some material from Persian history, and there is no reason to think that it did not include the wars of Darius and Xerxes, although almost certainly not on the scale of Herodotus' treatment. Xanthus of Lydia wrote a four-book work entitled *Lydian Matters* (*Lydiaca*), which may have been known to Herodotus in writing his own brief treatment of the Lydian kings. A later fourth-century historian, Ephorus of Cyme, said that Xanthus had given Herodotus his 'starting-point' (or perhaps 'spur'), but so little survives of Xanthus' work that we cannot make any worthwhile judgement. Another possible predecessor is Charon of Lampsacus, to whom are attributed works on Ethiopia, Persia, and the foundations of cities, but the fragments are meagre, and there is no evidence to demonstrate that Herodotus used his works (which is not to say that he did not use them). Finally, there is Hellanicus of Lesbos, a polymath best known as the author of the first local history of Athens, but who also wrote works entitled *Customs of the Barbarians*, *Lydian Matters*, *Egyptian Matters*, and *Persian Matters*. The intersection of Hellanicus' work with that of Herodotus is unclear, and it must suffice to note that Herodotus' activity coincides with a flourishing interest in foreign nations, particularly those of the Ancient Near East.[28]

There were also poetic treatments of historical themes on

which Herodotus may have drawn. The best known, Aeschylus' *Persians*, produced at Athens in 472, has within it a messenger's speech describing the engagement at the battle of Salamis in 480. Herodotus himself mentions Phrynichus' *Fall of Miletus* which recounted that city's fate at the end of the Ionian revolt in 494, and other poetic treatments of historical events include a history of Smyrna by Mimnermus, Xenophanes' *Foundation of Colophon*, Semonides of Amorgos on the early history of the Samians, Panyassis' *Ionian History* and Simonides' *Seabattle of Salamis, Seabattle of Artemisium* and *Battle of Plataea*. Of this last work in particular we have come to know something more because of the recent publication of papyrus fragments of the work. Each one of the lines of the poem is fragmentary, and the whole must be heavily restored. Caution is decidedly in order, since in restoring the fragments scholars have been largely dependent on Herodotus' text, and so the danger of circular argument is great. Nevertheless, it seems clear that Simonides made a correlation between the great heroes of the Trojan war with (specifically) the Spartans' performance at the battle of Plataea, and the tone, to the extent that it can be recovered, seems to have been encomiastic. Although Herodotus nowhere mentions this and the other poetic works, it can hardly be doubted that their contents were familiar to him.[29]

Predominantly, however, Herodotus based his work on his own observation, inquiry, conjecture and rational analysis. He is explicit about this only at times (II. 99, 142) but there is no doubt that he meant his audience to assume that this was his procedure throughout his work. Different matters, of course, would have called forth different methods. He could use his own eyes (autopsy) for geographical information, buildings, monuments, artworks and the observance of customs. For past deeds, however, and for people who lived at the edge of the known world, autopsy could not be employed, and he would have to turn to oral inquiry, to what reliable informants had to say. Sometimes the methods complement each other, and something seen – dedications of a king in a temple, the statue of a man riding a dolphin, the practice of circumcision – corroborates an account learned orally or formed by conjecture. Where

data are lacking the historian may have recourse to analogy, to arguing from the known to the unknown. Sometimes he uses reasoned inferences, sometimes rather more tenuous opinion. All these are employed as needed, and their use marks Herodotus out as a pioneer in the field of historical research and method.[30]

Herodotus presents his work as a collection of oral traditions, and his method is frequently to allow native spokesmen to present their case: 'the Persians say', 'the Egyptians say', 'the Athenians do not agree', 'the Spartans alone maintain', and so on. More than once he refers to his role explicitly as 'to say what is said' and he cautions that he reports more than he believes (II. 123; VII. 152). These source-statements in most cases (Book II is the exception) are not meant to emphasize that he has heard these for himself (though he may well have), but rather that these are the traditions that exist in each of these cities or lands.[31] The Egyptians had written records of their past and the Persians a vast bureaucracy, but we must emphasize that Herodotus needed here and elsewhere to use intermediaries, for there is no evidence that he knew any language other than Greek. Occasionally, by the use of qualifiers – 'learned' Persians or the Heliopolitans who are 'the most devoted to memory' – Herodotus indicates people with a special knowledge of the past, an 'expert' as opposed to a layman.[32] Naturally, we wonder who these unnamed Persians or Phoenicians (or indeed even Athenians) are, and much scholarship has been concerned with identifying both general and specific sources of Herodotus.[33]

Written records in Greece, aside from the literary works mentioned earlier, would have been rare if they existed at all. Greek traditions would have been almost exclusively oral, preserved either by individual families or the community as a whole. Aristocratic clans would have maintained traditions about their founders or important ancestors, but we must not imagine that they had a monopoly, and there is sufficient evidence in Herodotus of traditions hostile to ruling families. Religious centres, too, such as Delphi and Didyma, preserved traditions, of varying accuracy, associated with the numerous dedications made by Greeks and non-Greeks alike in their sanctuaries.[34] Sometimes these traditions were contradictory, apologetic or

exculpatory. On occasion Herodotus takes a stand, but in many cases he realized that there was no way to judge between irreconcilable traditions, and his solution was to place competing accounts side by side and allow his audience to choose.[35]

We must admit that if Herodotus, with few exceptions, did not use written sources, then his achievement is impressive indeed, for it was put together from vast researches done over the better part of a lifetime on travels throughout the Mediterranean world. These sources can be generally, if not specifically, identified, but what Arnaldo Momigliano wrote in 1960 is nevertheless still true today and likely to be true for some time to come: 'Herodotus' success in touring the world and handling oral traditions is something exceptional by any standard – something that we are not yet in a position to explain fully. The secrets of his workshop are not yet all out.'[36]

4. STRUCTURE AND THEMES IN THE *HISTORIES*

Perhaps the greatest challenge to Herodotus was to give order and structure to the mass of material that he had assembled. Here again it was Homer who provided a useful model for a monumental composition.[37] Herodotus decided to make the guiding thread of his work the advance of Persian power, but, like Homer, he gave variety and movement to an underlying linear structure. He moves forward and backward in time (usually a difficulty for the modern reader), while often stopping to examine people or events in detail. Few of these digressions are without importance, and behind the fiction of an informal style lies a recognizable and carefully articulated structure. The ethnographies, for example, are not randomly given, but usually placed where the relevant group comes into contact with the advance of Persia. Egypt is described on the eve of Cambyses' invasion, Scythia and Libya when Darius sets out against them. Other patterns suggest careful consideration by the author. In Book I, for example, the Lydian king Croesus in his quest for

allies against the Persian king Cyrus sends inquiries to Sparta and Athens. This provides the occasion for Herodotus to say a little of Spartan and Athenian history to about 650 (the time of Croesus' inquiry). Later, in Book V, Aristagoras leads Ionia in a revolt from Persia. In his quest for allies he goes to Sparta and Athens and at this point Herodotus brings the history of those states down to about 500, shortly before the Persian invasion of the mainland.

Thematic patterning also gives structure: despite the enormity and variety of Herodotus' work, certain themes and concerns appear regularly enough to indicate the conscious choice of the historian. Many of these themes are interconnected, and the historian uses them to give order and meaning to the random and at times meaningless mass of historical actions.

The theme of retribution and vengeance – that those who commit evil deeds will pay for them now or in the future – pervades the *Histories* from first to last, and is deeply woven into Herodotus' view of human action and historical causation. His work begins with a series of abductions of women, first by men from Asia, then in retaliation by men from Europe (I. 1–5). Demands for satisfaction from the injured parties are unmet and keep the cycle of vengeance alive. Even Paris' seizure of Helen, the event that set off the Trojan War, is seen by Herodotus within this framework, for Paris was 'confident that he would not have to pay for the venture any more than the Greeks had done'. In the first story, that of the Lydian king Candaules and the usurper Gyges, the injured party is told by the Delphic oracle that they 'would have their revenge on Gyges in the fifth generation' (I. 13). This desire for retributive justice (*tisis*) motivates individuals and states. Herodotus presents the Persian attack on Athens in 490 as retribution for the Athenians' participation in the burning of the Persian provincial capital of Sardis in 498. In a memorable image, Darius, having heard of his city's destruction, 'called for his bow . . . set an arrow on the string, shot it up into the air and cried, "Grant, O God, that I may punish the Athenians"' (V. 105). Xerxes is later told by his general Mardonius that the Greeks 'will be brought to account for the injuries they have done you, now and in the past' (VIII.

100). The Athenians in turn portray their actions as a desire to pay back the Persians for their burning of the Acropolis and its temples (VIII. 144). This notion is so deeply ingrained in Herodotus' thought that it is carried over even into nature: when flying snakes mate, he says, the female latches on to the male's neck and kills him; but the female 'has to pay for her behaviour, for the young in her belly avenge their father by gnawing at her insides, until they end by eating their way out' (III. 109).[38]

Herodotus also shared the common Greek belief that any act of insolence or overweening pride (*hybris*) inevitably leads to some destruction (*nemesis*). Solon, who had written of these very things in one of his poems,[39] is the spokesman in Herodotus for this viewpoint, as he tells the wealthy Lydian king Croesus, in the first extended narrative of the *Histories*, that 'God is envious of human prosperity and likes to trouble us' (I. 32). The idea is expanded by Artabanus in his later warning to Xerxes: 'It is always the great buildings and the tall trees which are struck by lightning. It is God's way to bring the lofty low ... For God tolerates pride in none but Himself' (VII. 10e). Herodotus even invokes *nemesis* to explain Croesus' fall from prosperity: 'After Solon's departure nemesis fell upon Croesus, presumably because God was angry with him for supposing himself the happiest of men' (I. 34). And most clearly of all, one can see in the destruction of Troy 'that great offences meet with great punishments at the hands of God' (II. 120).

In Herodotus *hybris* is frequently manifest in the expansion of empire. Often enough a campaign to a distant people involves some transgression of natural limits, as when Cyrus crosses the River Araxes to conquer the Massagetae at the ends of the earth (I. 205ff.), or Darius bridges the Danube to bring over the Scythians to his empire (IV. 83ff.), or (in the climax of the work) Xerxes yokes the Hellespont, joins Europe and Asia – which God had separated – in his attempt to conquer the Greeks (VII. 54ff.). All three expeditions fail and Themistocles after the Greek victory at Salamis comments explicitly that the gods and heroes 'were jealous that one man in his godless pride should be king of Asia and of Europe too' (VIII. 109). No

doubt the thought was not original (there are strong traces of it in Aeschylus' *Persians*, e.g. 353–63, 472–3, 739–51); but in Herodotus this recurrent theme suggests the inevitable destruction of any far-reaching empire, while at the same time serving the practical purpose of giving a recognizable pattern to events.[40]

Related closely to this is the theme of the instability of human fortune. In delineating the scope of his work, Herodotus says that he will tell of small cities and great, for the cities 'which were great once are small today; and those which used to be small were great in my own time' – from which Herodotus judges that 'human prosperity never abides long in the same place' (I. 5). This belief is given substance again by Solon to the wealthy but short-sighted Lydian king Croesus. As Croesus prods Solon to concede that he is the happiest man whom Solon has ever seen, the Athenian warns that the sum total of a human life from beginning to end is necessary in order to calculate happiness, since 'often enough God gives a man a glimpse of happiness, and then utterly ruins him' (I. 32). Nor is it many pages later that Croesus has lost all and is about to be immolated by his Persian conqueror Cyrus. Here too it is the recognition by Cyrus of 'the instability of human things' that persuades him not to destroy 'another who had once been as prosperous as he' (I. 86). Motivated by the same knowledge, the Egyptian king Amasis renounces his alliance with the tyrant Polycrates, because he saw that Polycrates had unbroken good fortune and would therefore come to a miserable end (III. 43).

A recurring figure in Herodotus' stories of limits and the reversals of fortune is the 'tragic warner' or 'wise adviser'. These figures serve in the narrative to dramatize the important choices before individuals, to give advice to those who lack a larger perspective, and to suggest a proper way to behave. They appear at crucial points, and despite the usefulness of their advice they are usually ignored, and the disaster they warn of comes true. From Solon and Croesus to Artemisia and Xerxes, wise advisers are reminders of what might have been. They form part of the theme evident elsewhere in Herodotus that warnings are never believed until too late.[41]

Warnings are found as well in oracles and dreams. Despite Herodotus' focus on human actions and his occasional statements of ignorance about divine matters,[42] these oracles and dreams – which are supernatural and come from the gods – appear throughout the *Histories*. The most important oracle, both in the Greek world and in Herodotus' narrative, was that of Apollo at Delphi, and before taking any important action individuals and cities alike consulted what the god had to say through his priestess. Frequently Herodotus quotes these oracles in part or in full. Although the god always speaks truthfully, he often speaks ambiguously or metaphorically. When Croesus wishes to attack Persia he is told by the Delphic Oracle that 'he will destroy a mighty empire', but the headstrong king does not recognize the ambiguity in this pronouncement. Croesus is also warned of sufferings 'the day that a mule shall sit on the Median throne' (I. 55), but he fails to interpret the metaphor properly; whereas the Athenians, when advised to take refuge behind the 'wooden wall', are fortunate to have Themistocles, who understands that the god is indicating their navy (VII. 143). In these and many other cases the oracle speaks enigmatically, and it is the task of human beings to discern the actual, as opposed to apparent, meaning. In some cases the correct interpretation is discovered too late; in others, such as the wooden wall prophecy, a person of keen wit and insight may see into the god's meaning; not infrequently, individuals and whole communities suffer until they discern what the god wishes them to do. For in Herodotus the oracles are never wrong, even if their real meaning is misunderstood. They suggest a gulf between divine and human knowledge that can only partially and imperfectly be bridged.[43]

Dreams too come from the gods and, like oracles, urge some action or predict the future. Some dreams, like oracles, are couched in metaphor, as when, for example, the Median king Astyages dreams that his daughter urinates so greatly as to inundate all Asia: the dream indicates that her child will be king over the whole continent (I. 107). Cyrus dreams that Darius has wings on his shoulders and with them covers Europe and Asia, again a dream that indicates the enormous rule he shall have as

Persian king (I. 209). Like oracles, dreams come true: when Cambyses dreams that his brother Smerdis sits on his throne he executes him, unaware that a usurper who has the same name will take the throne (III. 64). In this type of dream the dreamer is alarmed and takes precautions based on his own or his experts' interpretation, but to no avail. Another type of dream urges a particular course of action, as when Xerxes is commanded to invade Greece (VII. 12ff.). This one is particularly notable in that the dream's purpose is to order the king not to try to avert 'that which must happen' (VII. 17).

Such a phrase suggests that Herodotus has some notion of a pre-existing divine ordinance, which for convenience we usually call 'fate'. Several times he explains that a character was 'doomed to a bad end', but in some cases this is the mark of a story-teller, pointing out for the audience the decisive moment, or fixing their attention on a fatal choice.[44] Yet in other cases, Herodotus certainly seems to have a notion of some pre-existing ordinance. When Apollo defends himself to Croesus, the god says that 'he had been unable to divert the course of destiny' (I. 91), a remark in keeping with the abilities of the gods as we see them in contemporary and earlier Greek literature: for although they manoeuvre and manipulate as best they can for humans they favour, the gods too, in the end, are beholden to fate and must yield to it. None the less, Herodotus allows an active role to gods and heroes, even if he avoids describing them within the narrative. When a violent storm destroys many Persian ships off Euboea, Herodotus comments that 'God was indeed doing everything possible to reduce the superiority of the Persian fleet and bring it down to the size of the Greek' (VIII. 13), a remark that reminds us of the jealous god who brings down those who become too great. When the Persians try to attack Delphi (VIII. 37) the weapons from the temple mysteriously appear outside it and the attacking Persians are struck by thunderbolts as a voice within is heard. Demaratus and Dicaeus see a mysterious cloud of dust from Eleusis, which indicates divine help coming to the Greeks (VIII. 65). In the battles themselves, Herodotus reports the stories of eyewitnesses who claimed that men of superhuman size – heroes – were assisting

them. While Herodotus carefully distances himself from these occurrences by remarks such as 'it is said', he nevertheless includes the incidents and does nothing to lessen their credi-ility. His mixture of caution and belief in divine matters is neatly summed up in a remark he makes to explain why the bodies of none of the Persians who fell at Plataea were found in Demeter's sanctuary: 'My own view is – if one may have views at all about divine matters – that the Goddess herself would not let them in, because they had burnt her sanctuary at Eleusis' (IX. 65).[45]

It would, however, be a serious error to suggest that Herodotus has no sense of human choice. The vast majority of actions taken in his narrative are decided without divine intervention and with wholly human motives. Herodotus has been criticized for writing 'too theological' a history; perhaps so, to modern taste. But this level of religious explanation, and even the employment of 'fate', does not replace or cancel out human explanation and motivation. Rather, it parallels it, by furnishing the larger perspective within which human actions with their purely human motivations – fear, greed, desire, bravery, obedience to custom, love of glory – find their place. The greed of Cyrus in his urge to conquer the Massagetae explains his campaign against them, but it cannot explain why empires rise and fall, why human prosperity never abides long in the same place, why man, in Solon's words, is completely a creature of chance. Only a larger perspective can suggest answers to these profound questions.[46]

Finally, a word about narrative manner. In Herodotus, more than any other ancient historian, one finds a prominent use of the first person, and a narrator by no means reticent. The historian comments on himself and his findings, explains the structure of his composition, and directs the reader's attention and judgement to matters he deems important. By contrast, later historians (and their modern descendants) with few exceptions write primarily third-person narratives, and a historian such as Thucydides goes to great lengths to conceal his authorial presence.[47] Not so Herodotus. As the writer of the first prose work of such enormous size, he gave order and structure to the narrative not least by maintaining his own presence throughout it. To be sure, it is more pronounced in some places than in others, but it is never far from the surface.[48]

Despite this presence, the greater part of Herodotus' work employs imitation (*mimesis*): characters are presented to us as they act. This is a legacy from Homer. So too is the use of direct speech, by which characters defend their actions, reveal their intentions and motivate others to act. Unlike the speeches in Homer, however, which can be quite lengthy, Herodotus' speeches are usually short and dramatic. For most, if not all, of these speeches, it was Herodotus himself who invented the words and gave the structure. No doubt he was guided by intuition and imagination, by placing himself in the situation and reproducing what his characters 'must have said'. When he records speeches of a more public nature, he may have had more information on the gist of what was actually said. But even if he did, here too the structure and the actual words are those of Herodotus himself. These speeches mark one of the great differences between ancient and modern historiography, and yet they were a natural consequence of Herodotus' desire to do in prose what Homer had done in poetry.[49]

5. HERODOTUS' LATER REPUTATION

Herodotus' work was an immediate success, and its influence is already discernible in the next century. It was recopied through the ages and at some point it was divided into the nine books that appear in our editions. (Each of the books was given the name of one of the nine Muses.) Herodotus was for the ancients as well as for us the 'father of history', and he and Thucydides were considered by later Greeks and Romans to be the founders and best practitioners of the genre of history, the appropriate models to be emulated and imitated. But whereas Thucydides was rarely criticized in antiquity, no historian (except perhaps the dyspeptic Timaeus) was more censured than Herodotus. These criticisms took many forms: charges of inaccuracy, of bias, of telling tall tales and of general dishonesty.

Criticism began early: Thucydides uses two errors of Herodotus' as evidence that the majority of people spend little energy in investigating the past (I. 20). Thucydides did not name Herodotus; that was left for later writers. Most famous (or perhaps infamous) was Ctesias of Cnidus, who was court physician to the Persian king Artaxerxes II and who claimed to have used his position at court to study Persian records and correct Herodotus. His work (which does not survive) is summarized by a later reader in this way: 'in his Books VII–XIII, he goes through the events of the reigns of Cyrus and Cambyses and the Magus, and of Darius and Xerxes, writing things opposed to Herodotus on nearly every matter, refuting him as a liar in many things, and calling him a fable-monger (*logopoios*) as well.'[50] The tall tales – gold-digging ants, dog-headed men, people who never dream – were a common point of attack by later writers, who ignored Herodotus' careful withholding of his own belief when reporting such matters. After Thucydides, who was reserved in his treatment of marvels and generally confined his work to politics and war, Herodotus' approach seemed unserious by comparison. Yet there was often a certain hypocrisy in the complaints of later writers, since many of them, Ctesias included, had a love for the fabulous and went far beyond Herodotus in their stories of marvels and natural wonders.[51]

A different type of criticism may be seen in the essay *On the Malice of Herodotus* by the first-century CE biographer Plutarch.[52] In this work Herodotus is accused of slander, spite, partiality for the barbarian and general maliciousness. Plutarch's main concern is with Herodotus' treatment of the Persian Wars but he finds fault with the entire history, underlining what he sees to be Herodotus' prejudice and errors. Despite the fact that Plutarch cites much useful evidence, his account, with few exceptions, has nothing to add to Herodotus. This work, nevertheless, and the copious criticisms served up throughout antiquity, merely remind us of Herodotus' popularity and the fact that for all the criticism his work was read and debated, and no one ever replaced him.

In modern times, too, Herodotus' credibility has been questioned, but in a different way. Archaeology has given us new evidence for the cultures of Egypt and the Ancient Near East, which can then be used to test Herodotus' narrative. Early in the twentieth century doubts were raised that Herodotus ever went to Egypt, and more recently some have suspected that he never travelled anywhere at all. Detlev Fehling has argued in a wide-ranging study that Herodotus' source-citations ('the Persians say', 'the Spartans say'), which most scholars assume to be a report of a genuine native tradition, were invariably invented by Herodotus himself, who adorned his tale with the devices of a story-teller to give it greater credence. In his view, Herodotus is more a writer of fiction than of history. Working in a different way, O. K. Armayor has argued that Herodotus' presentation of foreign marvels and exotic peoples owes more to Greek influences – his predecessors such as Hecataeus and his literary models such as Homer – than it does to any serious research on his part into the real world of the Ancient Near East. And pursuing yet a third line of inquiry, François Hartog has claimed that Herodotus' account of the Scythians in Book IV is an idealized 'other', constructed by Herodotus as an opposite pole to his own Greek world of the city-state with its notions of permanence and fixity.

These works have predictably called forward an array of counter-arguments designed to show that Herodotus is an historian in our sense of the word, not a writer of fiction. One must observe, for example, that some evidence from the Near East or Greek sources supports Herodotus, and in some cases he is more reliable than later historians, who claimed to have access to more reliable traditions and sought to correct him. Unfortunately, both sides in the debate have painted with rather broad brushes, and have simplified what are complex issues of narrative and identity. Even so, it may be worthwhile to note that Fehling has identified a number of features of Herodotus' work that must raise some important questions about his work. For example, he demonstrates that Herodotus' source-citations follow predictable rules, and that they often occur just where the question of 'native' tradition is most problematic, when, for example, it is the Lydians who relate the story of Croesus saved

on the pyre (I. 87) or the Persians, who report on Xerxes' dream (VII. 12) when he decides to invade Greece. Fehling has also pointed out that numbers in Herodotus follow certain patterns, and that certain numbers, such as 10, 30 and 300, may be called 'typical numbers'. Even if one does not follow Fehling in his particular interpretation of these phenomena, one must acknowledge that the phenomena are there, and they must at the very least give pause when we try to evaluate what Herodotus was doing.[53]

Some scholars have pointed to the importance of the fact that Herodotus was working in an oral tradition. The study of oral, or largely oral, societies by modern anthropologists has opened up a new world of possibilities and problems. The nature of oral tradition – the ways in which oral societies preserve, hand down and modify their traditions – is seen to be very different from that of written tradition. Assumptions that we make as members of a society where writing is an everyday part of life may be invalid when applied to the very different cultures of the ancient world. Those things that we find unusual in the traditions reported by Herodotus may owe much to the fact that they were preserved without the aid of writing. Moreover, it has come to be seen that the interaction between an inquirer and his source is not simple and straightforward but is conditioned by and dependent on the cultural presuppositions of both sides. Inquiry, it seems, is not a simple matter of asking questions and getting answers.[54] Yet explanation by recourse to oral tradition will not answer all of our questions, since oral societies, too, have clear notions of what is true and false. There is no reason to doubt that the question of Herodotus' reliability will continue to exercise scholars, and one expects that new studies with greater sophistication and nuance will be brought to the debate in the future.

Such studies should help us to arrive at a fairer estimation of Herodotus and his achievement. In the past he has too often suffered from inappropriate comparisons with his successor Thucydides and with modern notions of how history should be written. If, however, we eliminate these preconceptions and expectations, we may be better able to see Herodotus as a

complex writer, who viewed the past not exclusively through the narrow prism of wars and politics, but in the variety and richness of what human beings had sought to achieve.[55] Of course, we are not the Greeks and Herodotus' world is not our world. And yet, as with any great writer, it is possible to enter that world, helped by the inclusiveness of the author's vision and the wide compass of his humanity. Herodotus called the deeds narrated in his history 'great and worthy of wonder': it is a description that just as easily applies to the historian himself. For he did nothing less than attempt to fashion for his contemporaries (and, in a different way, for those who still read him) a portrait of themselves and of others, and of the vast world, both physical and metaphysical, within which their actions take place.

NOTES

1. On the fictional lives of poets see M. Lefkowitz, *The Lives of the Greek Poets* (London and Baltimore 1981).
2. For H.'s life see HW i. 1–4; Evans (1982) 2–15; Gould 17–18; Myres 1–16; T. S. Brown, *Ancient World* 17 (1988) 3–15, 17–28, 67–75.
3. See Plut. *Mal. Her.* 26, 31; Dio Chrysostom, *Oration* 37 for the traditions mentioned; on bias as crucial in determining truth for ancient historians and critics, see Woodman, *passim*, esp. ch. 2; Marincola 158–74.
4. On H. and Sophocles see HW i. 7; S. West, 'Sophocles' *Antigone* and Herodotus Book III', in J. Griffin, ed., *Sophocles Revisited. Essays ... H. Lloyd-Jones* (Oxford 1999) 109–36. Explicit praise of Athens: VII. 139; see also the speeches given to the Athenians at VIII. 143–4. Implicit assumptions: see H.'s remarks about the Aeginetans, Thebans and Corinthians: VII. n. 68, VIII. n. 33, IX. nn. 30, 34; the Alcmaeonids: HW i. 42, but this has been demolished by Fornara (1971) ch. III and Thomas 264–72. See also J. A. S. Evans, 'H. and Athens: the Evidence of the Encomium', *Ant. Class.* 48 (1979) 112–18.
5. On H.'s audience see S. Flory, 'Who Read H.'s *Histories*?', *AJP* 101 (1980) 12–28; Evans (1991) 94–104; cf. A. Momigliano, 'The Historians of the Classical World and their Audiences: Some Suggestions', *Sesto contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico* (Rome 1980) 361–76.