



HERODOTUS I. INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORIES

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Philologists of Hellenistic times divided Herodotus's *opus magnum* into nine books and subdivided these into chapters. The Histories cannot be characterized perfectly according to modern principles of literary genre, because such genera did not yet exist in Herodotus's time. From a modern point of view it comprises historiographic, ethnographic, geographic, and topographic aspects, also including fairy tales, gossip, legends, anecdotes, and mythographic parts. The main theme of the work is the struggles between Greeks and Barbarians, as is explicitly stressed in the prooemium. After a short introduction to legendary times, the Histories start with the conflict between Lydians and Greeks. When the Lydian king Croesus is defeated by Cyrus the Great, the expansion of the Persian Empire becomes the backbone of the work. Herodotus develops a high literary technique of references back and forward, presenting many digressions—the so-called *logoi*. These *logoi* are arranged according to the Persian conquests, and they show that Herodotus is highly interested, not only in history, but also in geography and ethnography. The work proceeds to the Persian Wars, with the conflict between Xerxes and the Greeks comprising nearly one-third of the entire Histories. It ends with the Greeks' conquest of Sestus in 479 B.C.E. Thus Herodotus does not describe



contemporary history, for he published his work in the 420s.

Important for the qualification of his work and his life are the many source quotations Herodotus presents, basing his accounts on indigenous informants. If these quotations are taken quite literally, as has been done for the most part since Felix Jacoby's influential article (1913) in the Pauly-Wissowa *Real-Encyclopädie*, then Herodotus is regarded as an eyewitness, and one has to reconstruct wide-ranging travels on his part to obtain this information. He would have had to visit the Black Sea area, Asia Minor, Thrace, Macedonia, Magna Graecia, Egypt, Cyrene, and, in the Near East, such places as Babylon and Tyre. Persia proper would not have been included. If the source quotations are doubted, whether qualified as a literary technique and fictitious (Fehling, 1989) or classified as mere references to where Herodotus thought the relevant information could be found (Fowler, 1996; see now also Luraghi, 2001), the alleged travel activity becomes much less (Rollinger, 2004). The character of the work was already debated in antiquity, as is summarized by Cicero. He not only was the first to denote Herodotus as *pater historiae* but also noted that the Histories included *innumerabiles fabulae* (many stories). These discussions are still going on in recent scholarship (cf. Jacoby, 1913; Bichler and Rollinger, 2000, pp. 111-19, 130-32).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

See HERODOTUS xi. SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY.