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HERODOTUS

ii. THE HISTORIES AS A SOURCE FOR PERSIA AND PERSIANS

An evaluation of Herodotus's treatment of Persia and the Persians is a difficult task. The subject is not limited to a specific *logos* but is ubiquitous in the Histories. One may define the passage 1.131-40 as a kind of "Persian Logos"; nevertheless the Persians, their customs (*nomoi*), and their history are the backbone of the whole work. To deal with Persia and the Persians means a consideration of the whole work, which is huge in its dimensions. Furthermore the scientific community is still far away from sharing a general consensus on fundamental questions concerning the Histories and their value as historical source (see in detail Bichler and Rollinger, 2000, pp. 161-65). There is still debate on the crucial questions whether he primarily used oral sources or also had a considerable amount of written sources at his disposal. (Cf. Evans, 1980; Cobet, 1988; Rösler, 1991; Thomas, 1989, 1992, 1993; Tsakmakis, 1995; Johnson, 1994; Ruschenbusch, 1995; Murray, 2001a, b. For the *Medikos Logos* and the story of Cyrus's childhood in Herodotus, see Helm, 1981; Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 1987, 1994; Rollinger, 2000b, pp. 100 f.)

After a close look at these considerable difficulties, one may not be surprised that, although modern treatments of Herodotus's work are already in the myriads (see recently, e.g., Bakker et al., 2002; Bichler, 2000; Dorati, 2000; Derow and Parker, 2003; Harrison, 2000; Luraghi, 2001; Mikalson, 2003; Munson, 2001; Schulte-Altedorneburg, 2001; Thomas, 2000; West, 2002), "the Persians" as a subject in itself is nearly neglected. (For important aspects see Bichler, 2000; Bourriot, 1981; Briant, 1990, 1996, pp. 28-32; Dandamayev, 1985; Diller, 1962; Drews, 1969, 1973; Harmatta, 2000; Konstan, 1987; Lewis, 1985; Reinhardt; Thordarson, 1996, 1997; Wolff, 1982a; Walser, 1984.) There are many recent treatments of the Scythian, Lydian, Babylonian, and Egyptian Logoi; but a "Persian Logos" seems not to be present in recent research. (Even Bakker et al., 2002 does not deal with the matter, presenting only a treatment of the "Persian Invasions"; cf. Harrison, 2002.) Of course this absence is due to the fact that the topic of Persia and the Persians is deeply woven into the entire fabric of the Histories. Therefore the following treatment of the topic has two primary goals. The first is to present an overview on the status of research concerning Persia and the Persians in the Histories with a special focus on more recent literature. The second is to lay the foundations for a broader treatment of the topic, taking into consideration the "Persian Logoi" as a whole.

To achieve these ends, it is important to reveal the structure of the Histories as it relates to all aspects in which Persia and the Persians have a crucial role. This must not be confused with simply retelling the contents. Rather, internal links and cross-references are to be stressed, thus exhibiting the major guidelines of the author. Such an approach is a crucial first step in analyzing the work as a whole and in revealing its characteristics, not only as a sourcebook, but also as a masterpiece of literary composition (see Bichler, 2000). While we accept Herodotus's treatment of the topic as seminal in view of its character as a source for Persia and the Persians, its reception history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) and the modern view of early Persian history must not obscure the fact that it is not a treatment without bias. Interpreting it as a source from (far) outside, from the fringes of the Persian Empire and its centers of power, and taking it as one of originally many viewpoints (*portraitscroisés*:for the method, see Briant, 2003, pp. 133-286)—even if other perspectives, such as the Persian one and to some degree also Greek ones (for Ctesias's account see Momigliano, 1931; Bichler, 2000b, 2004; Melammu, 2004) are not detectable anymore—seems much preferable to "evaluating" the Histories in a way which many of the recent treatments of the Persian Wars

still tend to pursue, e.g., reducing the implausible numbers of Persian troops to plausible ones and deleting the dubious involvement of divine powers. (For the importance of the dreams, oracles, and divine signs in Herodotus, see, e.g., Kirchberg, 1965; Klees, 1965; Frisch, 1968; Lévy, 1997.) That approach gains history as fact without considering that the work is still Herodotean history (see Young, 1980; Rollinger, 2001b; Barkworth, 1993).

Herodotus's influence on our view of the history, not only of Persia and the Persians, but also of the Ancient Near East generally, is ubiquitous. As Stephanie West put it: "For the events which brought the end of Lydia's existence as an independent nation, as indeed more generally for the rise of Persia to world power status, we depend on Herodotus for a continuous narrative. The Old Testament, Near Eastern documents, and other archaeological discovery can often illustrate Herodotus's account, fill in some gaps, or show that the situation was more complex than he supposed. But for a continuous narrative of events we rely on Herodotus, and modern handbooks largely reproduce his account, occasionally warning the reader that his standards were not those of a modern historian (though this is no more than a pious formula if there is no indication of the nature of differences). We thus become familiar with Herodotus's version of events before we realize that it is his, and it is difficult to view his narrative with properly critical detachment" (West, 2002, pp. 15 f.).

A recent re-evaluation of Herodotus's information on Media and the Medes has exhibited how even the more and more available indigenous sources are treated according to the conceptions of the *pater historiae* (cf. the various contributions in Lanfranchi, Roaf, and Rollinger, 2003). This is also true for various aspects, not only of the Persian Wars (cf., e.g., Walter, 1993; Georges, 2000), but also of early Persian history itself, for the perception of which Herodotus provides the leading guidelines. Thus, e.g., if cuneiform documents note the estates of a high-ranking Persian noble called Mardonius in 478 B.C.E., this cannot be the commander of the Persian troops in Greece, because Herodotus reports his death in the battle of Plataeae (Stolper, 1992). How difficult it is to look for different sources in order to check Herodotus's information and not to interpret them according to Herodotean preconceptions has been shown many times (cf., e.g., Froschauer, 1991; Rollinger, 1993; Jacobs, 1994; Jacobs, 2004; Kienast, 1999; Wiesehöfer, 1999; Rollinger, 2003; Liverani, 2003). Some indigenous sources of the Ancient Near East present at least an opportunity to evaluate the quality of Herodotus's

account of Median and early Persian history. On the one hand it has been observed that the names of many protagonists, be they Median or Persian, are indeed good indigenous ones. (Cf. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 1994; Lewis, 1985; Schmitt, 1967, 1971, 1976 [1979], 1990; Hegyi, 1973. See also Vallat, 1999. For the Median "kings" see now the various entries in the *Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire* [vols. 1/I-3/I, Winona Lake, Ind., 1998-2002].) On the other hand, the same cannot be said for the stories associated with these names. Cuneiform sources on the Medes in the Zagros present a totally different picture than the *Medikos Logos* does (Lanfranchi, 2003; Liverani, 2003; Radner, 2003). The so-called Median Empire seems to be a Herodotean conception, one which simplifies the more complex political affairs in the first half of the sixth century B.C.E. (Rollinger, 2003; differently Roaf, 2003).

Similar difficulties occur in the interpretation of Herodotus's account of early Persian history. Modern scholarship was deeply impressed when the famous Cyrus Cylinder verified Herodotus's statement that Cyrus the Great had a grandfather of the same name (cf. Bichler and Rollinger, 2000, p. 137), but the problems start when one takes a closer look at the stories behind the names. The Cyrus Cylinder presents Cyrus as King of Anshan with an impressive and royal lineage (for text and translation, see the new edition presented by Schaudig, 2001, pp. 550-56). Whether the Kuraš in one of Assurbanipal's inscriptions (Borger, 1996, pp. 191 f., 250: [H 2], II' 7'-II' 13') can be equated with one of Cyrus's ancestors is highly doubtful (Rollinger, 1999b).

The conquest of Babylon is dealt with by the Cyrus Cylinder, as well as by the Chronicle of Nabonidus (cf. Grayson, 1975, pp. 104-11) and the so-called "verse account" (Schaudig, 2001, pp. 563-78) in terms completely different from those Herodotus uses (Rollinger, 1993, pp. 19-66). The position of the Persians as vassals of the Medes does not find support in the available sources. An inscription of Nabonidus and the Nabonidus Chronicle draw a different picture of this relationship. There Astyages seems not to have been overlord of Cyrus, and Median domination did not include Persia proper (Kienast, 1999; Rollinger, 1999b). From cuneiform sources we know that Cambyses was well introduced to kingship by his father, being for some time vice-king of Babylon (Peat, 1989; Petschow, 1988; Zawadzki, 1996). As Egyptian documents show, he was much more concerned with Egyptian traditions than the Herodotean caricature wants to make us believe (Cruz-Uribe, 2003). On the other hand, Herodotus seems to have had excellent knowledge of Darius's official account, in which he presents his legitimation for ascending the Persian throne. The

closeness to Darius's report in the Behistun inscription [see BISOTUN] is striking. He may have come into contact with one of the many versions of the inscription which were sent all over the empire (Seidl, 1999a, 1999b; Rollinger, 1998 [1999]; Schmitt, 1992, 1993, 1998). However, there are also obvious differences, and the Herodotean modelling of the material available can hardly be denied (Köhnken, 1980, 1988; Erbse, 1992). Herodotus does not focus on the many usurpations against Darius, which the Persian king deals with in detail in his Behistun inscription. He merely reports an uprising in Babylon, in an account which is dominated by the story of Zopyrus and his ruse in conquering the town. Babylonian usurpation against Darius is also confirmed by cuneiform documents; but, as in the Behistun inscription, they testify to two uprisings in Babylon. With the exception of the mode of execution by impaling the rebels, neither Zopyrus and his cunning nor any other part of Herodotus's anecdote is present in these sources. For these reasons modern scholarship has proposed that Herodotus's Babylonian revolt may reflect instead two uprisings against Xerxes, which also are represented in cuneiform documents. However, this theory seems even more questionable than attempting to reconcile the source discrepan-cies (Rollinger, 1998, 1999a).

Even if these indigenous sources merely exhibit some glimpses of the history of Persia and the Persians and if their interpretation is sometimes a difficult task, they show the basic problems connected with Herodotus's account and provide the caveat not to simply accept his report as history without serious discussion. This point must also be true for the the main topic of the Histories, even if there the possibilities for checking the quality and bias of Herodotus's informations are much more limited. The Persian Wars are not reflected at all in official documents of the Persian kings. Yet the conceivable argument that the Persian kings may not have treated of the defeat and may thus have kept silence on the subject is not tenable, since with the exception of Babylon the great conquests also are not announced in the official inscriptions. Political matters were not a subject of Old Persian royal inscriptions (Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 1999).

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