



## XANTHUS THE LYDIAN

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**XANTHUS THE LYDIAN**, Greek historiographer, son of a certain Kandaules, probably born in Sardis, and a Hellenized Lydian. He lived sometime after [Hecataeus of Miletus](#) and was an older contemporary of [Herodotus](#), but the information of the *Suda* (s.v.) that he was born at the time when [Cyrus II the Great](#) took Sardis, is not reliable. The preserved fragments of Xanthus's works, which seem to tell fewer historical facts than those of cultural history, do not provide any substantial information about him.

In antiquity Xanthus was regarded as an important source and an authority for Lydia and the Lydians, owing to his knowledge of the country and its people. His relevant work (in four books) is usually cited as *Lydiaká* by later authors who referred to it, but this title probably is not the original one. Only few fragments of the *Lydiaká* are recorded (collected by Jacoby, no. 765), and only part of them are substantial extracts (one single piece, fragment 16, being a literal quotation), whereas the majority is found in the *Ethniká* of Stephanus Byzantius (fl. 6th cent.) as evidence for geographical names and ethnics. Apart from those excerpts, the work must have been one of the major sources of historian Nicolaus of Damascus, who in a number of passages (concerning mainly Lydian history) extracted Xanthus, whose accounts he obviously embellished rather intensively (Diller; von Fritz). That dependence is ascertained by closer reminiscences, but the differences between the simple, natural style of Xanthus as a typical exponent of Ionian historiography and the more narrative and emotional performance of Nicolaus (who never seems to mention Xanthus by name) make it difficult to judge the manner and extent of



that adaptation. Whether a Hellenistic epitome is involved here is still a matter of dispute.

As regards methodology, it may be remarked that Xanthus obviously introduced aspects of natural history into the historiographical description. For instance, in fragment 12, he mentions a great drought during the reign of [Artaxerxes I](#) (apparently his own lifetime) and says that he himself saw fossilized mussel shells and the like far inland in Armenia and Phrygia, which caused him to think that there must have been a sea there in former times. He referred also to linguistic phenomena that show that he had a knowledge of the Lydian language; thus he could maintain (in Frg. 16) that the languages of the Lydians and the related Torrhebian differed only a little and could compare this difference with that between the Ionian and Dorian dialects. In fragment 23, he is given as the source of Sardis' original name *Xuáris*, which form goes well with epichoric Lydian *śfar(i)*.

The main concern of Xanthus's *Lydiaká* is Lydian history from the earliest times up to the sixth century BCE, in all probability up to the capture of Sardis by Cyrus the Great. The author may have chosen this topic in order to preserve the memory of the Lydian past, because he felt himself a proud Lydian, even if he was Hellenized.

Although Lydia (OPers. *Sparda-*) was part of the [Achaemenian](#) Empire since the reign of Cyrus, Xanthus provides virtually no information of relevance for Achaemenian Iran. But, as far as we can establish, Xanthus is the first author to have mentioned [Zoroaster](#) in Greek. Whether he actually had written a work about Persian religion, however, is not conclusively proven, although *Magiká* is recorded as the title of one of his books (Frg. 31) by [Clemens of Alexandria](#) (*Stromateis* 3, 11, 1). Due to the lack of adequate reliable documentation, scholars are undecided whether it is authentic at all, a work of its own, or part of book IV of the *Lydiaká*. The only piece of information on Zoroaster explicitly connected with Xanthus's name is that he lived 6,000 years before Xerxes' crossing of the Hellespont, which date may be a mere round number as well as an echo of Iranian theories on cosmic periods (cf., e.g., Gnoli). In any case, those speculations cannot be taken seriously.

Regrettably the transmission of Xanthus's *Lydiaká* is rather unsatisfactory, so his significance for the development of Greek historiography cannot be judged with certainty.



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