



H E R O D O T U S

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# **The History**

## *Herodotus*

TRANSLATED BY  
**David Grene**

The University of Chicago Press  
*Chicago & London*

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All rights reserved. Published 1987  
Paperback edition 1988  
Printed in the United States of America  
06 05 04 03 02 01 00 99 98 8 9 10 11

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Herodotus.  
The history.  
Includes index.  
1. History, Ancient. 2. Greece—History.  
I. Grene, David. II. Title.  
D58.H4713 1987 930 86-13635  
ISBN 0-226-32770-1  
ISBN 0-226-32772-8 (pbk.)

∞ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1992.

eISBN: 9780226327754

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*To Wendy*

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# Acknowledgments

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I have given a great many classes and tutorials on Herodotus' *History* over the years. Indeed, he has been a lifelong interest of mine. But since I undertook this translation, four years ago, I have read him more constantly with students than ever before. I therefore very gratefully acknowledge what I owe the graduates of the Committee on Social Thought who took part in those discussions of the text, from 1980 on, at the University of Chicago.

I wish also to express my gratitude for the opportunity to express my views at Northwestern University's Wallace A. Bacon Conference on Interpretation in 1981, where I gave the inaugural lecture, entitled "Herodotus: The *History* and Its Presentation," and I am very grateful, too, to Virginia Hastings Floyd, who generously furnished funds for its subsequent publication.

During two of the past four years in which I have been engaged in the work of translating Herodotus I have received valuable financial help from the Earhart Foundation, for which I am extremely grateful. I am glad to recognize especially the kind interest of Richard Ware and Anthony Sullivan who at different times were responsible for granting me these funds.

My friend Arthur Adkins tirelessly advised me on the nuances of Greek idiom when I consulted him, and, besides this, he and my friend and former student Tony Yu read large portions of the completed manuscript and helped me with criticism and praise.

My indebtedness to the fine two-volume *Commentary on Herodotus* by W. W. How and J. Wellman (first published in 1912 by Oxford's Clarendon Press and reprinted many times since) will be evident to the reader in the footnotes to my translation. I am grateful, also, to Harvard University Press for permission to reprint the maps that appear in the Loeb Library edition of Herodotus and for permission to use an abridged version of the Index that appears in the Loeb edition.

Finally, and most importantly, I acknowledge with delight all that the participation of Wendie O'Flaherty in this book has meant to me; in the four years of preparing this English Herodotus I owe far more to her than anyone or anything else. It was not only that she made perfect typescripts of my messy drafts. That in itself was a tremendous labor, of a value not easy to assess, for a clean copy stimulates one to see clearly where the style and the vocabulary are headed. But that big job is the least of what she has done. She has again and again seen where the English faltered or was obscure. Her sense of the spoken word has helped immensely in a text that originally was intended largely for reading before its contemporary Greek audience. Last and most important, she has grown to love Herodotus' *History* and the writer it reveals, and her feeling for him has illuminated and deepened my own. I have dedicated this book to her as a token of some part of all that she has given me.

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# Introduction

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Herodotus' only slightly younger contemporary, Thucydides, rejects the historical account of remote events in very telling terms; he does so at about the date of Herodotus' probable death. Thucydides says that even such a careful (and barely sketched) account as he is forced to give of an earlier Greece as background for his own times, is only moderately satisfactory. "For," he says, "most of the events of the past, through lapse of time, have fought their way, past credence, into the country of myth (perhaps the Greek *epi to muthōdes eknenikēkota* in Thucydides 1.21.8 is fairly translated as this). Thucydides conceived of acts and even words and thoughts as existent at a given moment and ideally recapturable in that form. They will, if allowed to do so by the lapse of time, become transfigured and so be useless to history. The word *eknikan*—"fight its way through completely"—implies that there is a natural tendency in the event so to do, and the perfect participle looks at the finished product: "they have got to the country of myth and there they stay."

Thucydides' preference for contemporary history as the only likely true history is to be followed with few exceptions, for centuries by Western historians, as is also his conception that only military and political events constitute true history. In both respects, Herodotus runs against the current. Herodotus certainly also thought that acts and words fought their way through into the country of myth if you left them enough time. Indeed, he thought that the country of myth for acts and words was just around the corner from them the moment they were done or uttered. But he was very far from thinking that this rendered them valueless for history. He had chosen for his subject the enmity of the Greeks and the barbarians—by "barbarians" meaning the peoples of Asia Minor—which culminated in the great battles of Herodotus' childhood, Salamis and Artemisium and Plataea, in 480 and 479 B.C. But the beginning of the story, the origins of the enmity, as he saw it, stretched all the way back almost to what was known as the beginning of the civilized world. To this vast area of the past Herodotus had no key, or almost none, other than oral tradition; for there were few written records, and, for such as existed, he almost certainly lacked the necessary languages to understand them. Probably most of his informants as to myths and folklore were either Greeks settled in Asia or native inhabitants, probably a considerable number, who spoke Greek. This oral tradition constituted for him the imaginative record of the past as it mattered to the present.

Herodotus is the writer of Greek history who comes between Homer the epic poet, some four hundred years before him (as he himself thought), and Thucydides, the till now almost "modern" historian, who died perhaps twenty-five years after Herodotus. Herodotus, no less than Thucydides, thought of his *History* as a thing different from epic poetry—as much more bound by the necessity of covering the actual great events truly. For instance, he says that he believes (with some good evidence) that Homer knew that Helen had gone to Egypt and had in fact been there all through the Trojan War (2.116).<sup>1</sup> But, says Herodotus, because Homer found the other version of the story (Helen's stay in Troy) more suitable for his poetry, he chose it. Herodotus certainly sees his *History* as something not so malleable as this. Thucydides certainly knew Herodotus' *History* and regarded him as a very loose kind of historian. When in recommending his own work as "a possession for ever" he couples this with the remark that "it has not been composed for the pleasure of the hearers of the moment" (Thucydides 1.22.4), it is not difficult to identify the rival historian and his audience listeners, especially when Thucydides follows his remark by criticizing two so-called "errors" in Herodotus' *History*.



Of course, there are facts given him by his informants that Herodotus rejects almost in the Thucydidean way. He corrects what he regards as false geographical statements by some of his predecessors (2.42). He expresses total disbelief in the existence of goat-footed men to the north of Scythia while accepting (one supposes correctly) the other physical oddity, snub-nosed bald-headed men (4.24). He stakes his reputation on his account of the course of the Nile, telling us how far he has checked this personally (2.29). He denies the possibility of the sacrifice of Heracles on the grounds that the Egyptians never practiced human sacrifice (2.45).

But all these rejections are criticisms of single facts. It is when Herodotus is giving us folklore and myths that his opponents say he is uncritical. He does, in fact, never criticize the skeletons of his mythical stories. He accepts a story based on some historical act but conforming to a widely known psychological pattern, which is certainly not singular. It does not strike him that he ought to ask: Did this happen on this occasion, or is it the *kind of thing* that people describe on many such occasions? It is exactly because he does *not* ask that question that he is interesting and important as the unique kind of historian he is. I want to discuss in detail two such stories. The first concerns the birth of Cyrus, perhaps the greatest of the Great Kings of Persia and the founder of the Persian Empire.

Cyrus' birth was heralded by a prophecy that he would displace his grandfather, Astyages, King of Media, from the throne of Media (1.107 ff.). Astyages promptly married his daughter to a nobleman of the then socially inferior race of the Persians in the hope that this would render such a succession improbable. Moreover, when the child was born, he ordered it to be exposed, to become a prey to wild beasts. Through a breakdown in the chain of command, this order failed, and Cyrus survived through the kindness of a herdsman, who had been told to destroy him, and through the love and care of the herdsman's wife.

Herodotus very probably accepted the imaginative core of this story as something *real* when describing the survival of the royal child—a child, moreover, with a great destiny inside the setting of the court of the Great King, who was, in the minds of his subjects, a being unique and set apart. The herdsman's wife, “as God would somehow have it so, . . . gave birth when her husband had gone to the city” (1.111), and her child was born dead. This stillborn child is to be the necessary link in the survival of Cyrus, and, in the phrase “as God would somehow have it so,” Herodotus indicates that he in some sense accepts the Persian story at face value. At least he certainly does not see the tale of Cyrus' survival, *de haut en bos*, as a trick practiced on a superstitious population. By contrast, that is exactly how he describes the pageant of the political agents who brought back Pisistratus, the tyrant of Athens, from exile (1.60). The tyrant was reintroduced to his state by a huge woman dressed up to look like Athena, and Herodotus comments on the silliness of this stratagem and its most unlikely success, which it all the same achieved. For these were Greeks, to whom a belief in the sanctity of rulers was entirely alien, and therefore the deception was all the more remarkable. The story of Cyrus lived among the Persians. Herodotus knows that the deepest sentiment of sacredness on the part of a people can actually alter the relationship of king and subjects on both sides. Herodotus bears witness to this for the Great King throughout his *History*. He cannot be born like other people (Cyrus); he cannot die without portents and elaborate coincidences (Cambyses) (3.64). Most striking of all, when the royal family becomes extinct and, in defect of hereditary claim, a new Great King must be *chosen*, the elevation of Darius is preceded by a unique debate among the nobles of Persia on the merits of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. Herodotus tells us that the Greeks do not believe this debate took place but that he knows it did (3.80). The authenticity of this great moment is vouched for by him personally. I think that for Herodotus the Persian monarchy in its typical form, the essential antagonist of Greece in his story, has the very quality of Fate in it. Its individual kings are strangely protected or deluded by the gods. But there is human choice in the matter of the monarchy too; for it is guided to a majestic and terrible end, as when, much later than this, the dream of Xerxes

on the eve of his invasion of Greece, drives him on to the tragic conclusion of that expedition (7.12-18). As I read it, this earlier scene of the choosing of Darius is of a similar kind. The Persian noble delivered from the hereditary claims on their religious sentiment by murders and deaths within the royal family, deliberately choose autocracy and absolutism under Darius after a prolonged debate as to the merits of the other systems, aristocracy and democracy. Of course, we do not know what specific evidence Herodotus may have had for the existence of the debate. But it is certainly of the order of events he believed in, which necessarily included the significant shape of history in tragic terms, the powers (whatever they are) outside of man, the choices men themselves make, and the conjunction and interaction of all these as an uneasy blend in the making of destiny.

In the story of Cyrus' birth and survival Herodotus is playing with our sense of wonder or potential miracle, now almost guaranteeing our right to credulity, now drawing us back. He is also flavoring our sense of the meaningful with his sense of the meaningful by supplying realistic detail of his own invention for the tremendousness of the archaic myth.

The herdsman had been summoned unexpectedly to the palace. His wife was heavy with child and near her time. They were both much in each other's thoughts, the man thinking of the forthcoming birth, the woman of the reason for the surprise summons of her husband to the palace. Herodotus describes the scene when the herdsman returns. He had gone to the palace and been amazed to receive orders to expose a child, which he found all decked out in gold and embroidered clothes. To his terror he learned from the palace servants that the child was royal, the son of Mandane, daughter of his own lord, Astyages, king of Media. He received his orders, of course, through an intermediary, Harpagus, a great noble of the court. The herdsman comes home, much troubled in his mind, with the future Cyrus in a box, dressed in all his glory.

When his wife saw the child so big and beautiful, she burst into tears, and taking her man by the knees she besought him by all means to expose it. He said he could not do otherwise.... [Then the woman said:] "I too have given birth, and the baby I bore was dead. Take then the dead boy and expose it, and let us bring up as our own this child of Astyages' daughter. So you will not be detected in cheating our masters.... The dead child will have a royal burial, and the survivor will not lose his life."...[So the herdsman took up] his own child that was dead and placed [him] in the box wherein he had brought the other. He put on the dead body all the ornaments of that other child and bore it off to the loneliest part of the hills and left it there. [1. 112-13]

Of course, the details, so skillfully, so evocatively, inserted, come from Herodotus the artist. They have no place in the *History* if, by history, we mean verifiable facts. They are there as additions to the myth pattern, made by Herodotus as he feels himself inside its reality and leads us to the moment of belief.

But in this story Herodotus appears also as the omniscient and seemingly common-sense intermediary between us and his informants and explains away another aspect of the traditional account, apparently one commonly given. Herodotus says (1.122) that the true parents of the child, the royal parents, in order for their own ends to make the birth seem even more miraculous, set afoot the rumor that the child, when exposed, had been suckled by a bitch and so had survived. This, he thinks, was suggested to them by the name of the herdsman's wife, the foster mother, to whom the boy was repeatedly referred. Her name was Cyno, which is vaguely like the Greek word for dog (*kuōn*).

It is customary to regard such aspects of Herodotus' treatment as his "rationalizing tendency." This misses the point. For Herodotus, the basic elements of the myth attract to themselves other explanations, other aspects of the ordinary or the marvelous; one overlies the other. It is his job to report them all so that the nature of the belief and rejection that attend the myth comes before us in all its fullness. This, I think, is why he so often disowns responsibility for the truth or accuracy of his statement. It is its being thought or voiced that counts in the end, as it comes down from the past to us. The original facts, whatever they were, have taken to themselves a supervening shape—universal, cultural, or, in the deepest sense, religious. It is then that Herodotus thinks they have assumed the

closest relation to reality, which is not for him coterminous with what happened in the physical world but rather what was released by the act into the world of thought and feeling and continued thereafter.

I doubt if Herodotus made an effective distinction—except about particular, singular facts, such as the course of the Nile or the sacrifice of Heracles—between the reality of verifiable truth and imaginative reality. He is a man who probably lived easily with myths. He certainly lived easily with the rationalized trappings that his age found conventional as the clothing of myth, much as Elizabethans and Jacobean found Renaissance costumes natural for the representation of classic heroes and indeed for the kings and noblemen of any age or time. But I see no evidence that such rationalizing is designed by him to diminish the intrinsically incredible quality of the myth and make it into something nearer credibility. The credibility comes from something shared by him and his informants, the depth of meaning in the myth. The sheer unlikelihood—in many cases the sheer impossibility—of stories like that of Cyrus' exposure and survival is in no sense disarmed by the excision of the seemingly supernatural element. The degree of magic or the want of it, the direct intervention of the divine or its aloofness from the particular event, renders the story modish or the reverse for his informants, for himself, and for the audience who listened to his readings. It is the myth itself that reaches down through the impossible stretching of probability and guarantees its own truth. This and some of the other stories belong to the *dreams* of mankind, impossible, delightful, or in other cases fantastic and horrible. In their rationalized form (to borrow the nomenclature), they are being represented in their special costume of a given moment in history, as belonging to it, as part of what it finds “natural.”

My second story comes from Herodotus 1.8, which deals with Candaules, the last member of the family of the Mermnadae, which lost the Lydian throne to Gyges, who was the ancestor of Croesus. Croesus is a very important monarch in Herodotus, for he is the man who (according to Herodotus) first began unjust actions against the Greeks (1.5). His ancestor, Gyges, is a very important man in Herodotus, for he is the one whose guilt in stealing his master's, the king's, wife and murdering the king, Candaules, was finally punished in the fourth generation—that of Croesus. Croesus pays for the sin of his ancestor and himself and is displaced by Cyrus. So it is Cyrus and the Persians who finally take the lead of the “barbarians” (Asiatics) against the Greeks when they come to invade Europe. Croesus therefore stands at the very front of the theme in Herodotus: he is the first man to molest the Greeks, the decisive figure whose displacement brought the Persians to Greece, and the first and greatest example of the downfall of a king through the action of fate based on past offenses. The way Herodotus tells of the primal sin is as follows:

This Candaules fell in love with his own wife; and because he was so in love, he thought he had in her far the most beautiful women. So he thought. Now, he had a bodyguard named Gyges, the son of Dascylus, who was his chief favorite among the women. Candaules used to confide all his most serious concerns to this Gyges, and of course he was forever overpraising the beauty of his wife's body to him. Some time thereafter—for it was fated that Candaules should end ill—he spoke to Gyges thus: “Gyges, I do not think that you credit me when I tell you about the beauty of my wife; for indeed men's ears are duller agents of belief than the eyes. Contrive, then, that you see her naked.” [1.8]

The bodyguard protested, and Herodotus includes his evidence of how shameful it is among the barbarians for even a man, much less a woman, to be seen naked. But despite Gyges' objection, Candaules arranges that he should be hidden behind the open door of the bedroom when the queen is undressed. Inevitably the lady spotted him when, departing, he slipped from behind the door; but despite her outrage she kept silent until the next day, when she offered Gyges the unpleasant alternative of killing the king and winning the queen or being killed himself. “So,” says Herodotus, “he chose his own survival” (1.11). Hence the destruction of the dynasty of the Mermnadae, who were the descendants of Heracles, and the fulfillment of the oracle declared at Delphi, that retribution would come for this offense upon the Lydian king Croesus in the fourth generation after Gyges.

We know another version of this myth in Plato, and it is instructive to compare the two. In Plato's *Republic*, Gyges is a shepherd who one day, straying in the hills, comes upon a cave with a dead man in it and on the dead man's hand, a ring. Gyges steals this. Later, accidentally turning it on his finger, he discovers that it renders him invisible. By this power he contrives to lie with the queen and afterward to murder the king and take both queen and throne. In the *Republic*, where the story occurs, it is cited by the interlocutors of Socrates, who request him to take Gyges as the extreme case for justice that they want to make. Assuming that the just man had the ring of Gyges and his invisibility, would he persist in justice, as the true health of the soul, and ignore the potentiality of scatheless villainy? (Plato, *Republic* 359D).

There can be no doubt that these are two versions of the same story. The significant common mythic element would seem to be the relation of invisibility to guilt or guiltiness. This has shrunk in Herodotus from the magical ring to spying from behind the door and accepting the connivance of the husband. There is also, in both, the fantastic crime-stained rise to supreme power by someone who has no claim to it. There is, as bedrock in Herodotus' version, the murder of the king-father and the incest with the mother in a wholly paternalistic eastern monarchy. There is also in Herodotus the certainty that the crime will later be paid for as a crime, though not in the person of the criminal who committed it. I suggest that these are indeed the deep mythical elements, and, again in this instance, the absence of the magical ring does not affect the appeal of the fantasy in which it is rooted, nor does it diminish significantly the area of improbability or unreasonableness of the story. What we may guess is that the difference between the two stories lies in the disinclination of Herodotus' informants for overt magic. The magic is dropped out exactly in order to admit the entry of fantasy, which at that time balked at the vocabulary of magic. We are made to see the princes and kings of the distant days of the East as people like ourselves, in their most private human moments, in their most denationalized, declassed reality. But it is not as our ordinary selves that we see them; we see them rather, the way we see David against Goliath, or Cinderella in the Cinderella story. What is being rejected for Herodotus' contemporaries is not only the remoteness and impersonality of the potentat but also their assimilation into a fairy-story world like that of the enchantresses of the *Odyssey*, Circe, and Calypso. Admittedly, it is sometimes hard to see why Herodotus rejects a specifically magic form—for instance, of animal intervention—in one case and not in another. For Arion is rescued by a dolphin, who carries him home on its back (1.23). True, this is classified as a “wonder,” the greatest that befell Periander during his reign. Herodotus is, of course, also recollecting the representation of the scene on a coin. But “wonder” though it is, Herodotus does not support disbelief in this instance as he does in that of the suckling bitch. The key is certainly in what his informants felt to be the proper dress of the myth. But perhaps we can go further. Plato's tyrant, as he arises in the democratic state, is someone who transfers into the daylight his dream fantasies (Plato, *Republic* 371A–375A). But scarcely literally. He did not go around sleeping with his mother or having sexual relations with beasts and gods. Perhaps the current form of the myth, as in the Herodotean Gyges story, is a bridge between an earlier form, nearer to the literal expression of the fantasy, and the daylight implementation, as Herodotus' informants and contemporaries saw it.

For this particular myth also presents in its mythical elements a funny and undignified reality that may, paradoxically, coincide (in its origin, at least—in the psychology of the action) with something that once happened. Today we are no longer completely convinced, like the more solemn academic historians of the nineteenth century, that history is invariably made by strategy and economics. It is conceivable that crowns have been lost by something as frivolous as Candaules' peculiar voyeurism. Totally improbable though it is, this tale may strike as deep in presenting a general human truth. As does the tragedy of another destroyed king Herodotus tells us of, one who knew that the greatest suffering was too great for tears—that tears belonged to the next-lowest grade of sorrow (3.14–15).

For in the story of Candaules, as in only a few of the myths, the very tone of the myth strikes home. This one convinces and illuminates as much by the humorousness of its suggestions *as to cause* as it does in stating the causes themselves.

There are two very terrible stories in book 1 of men being made to eat, unknowingly, human flesh—in one instance, the flesh of the man's own child. They are then confronted with the truth. One of the “feasts” was the revenge taken on King Cyaxares of Media by some nomad Scythians he had hired as hunters and who, after a dispute with him, kidnapped one of his pages, killed and cooked him, and served him up to Cyaxares (1.73). The other (1.119) involved the revenge that Astyages (the king who tried to expose the infant Cyrus in the story I have recounted) took on his servant, the nobleman Harpagus, who was indirectly responsible for Cyrus' survival. Herodotus reports each of the instances in detail.

Let us again recall Plato, who affords us a generalized psychological insight into these horrors. He says, in his account of the tyrant in the corrupt states, that the tyrant is one who enacts in daytime with delighted license the fantasies that alternately tempt and terrify ordinary men in sleep, when the rational part of them is not in control (*Republic* 574E–575A). One part of this dreamworld, according to Plato, is “abstaining from *no* sort of food.” This license goes on the list along with incest and miscegenation. Apparently, the temptation to cannibalism had this fantastic bent in the Greek mind of the time, for we also know, from Aeschylus and others, of Thyestes' feast, where again a father in ignorance is made to eat the flesh of his children. Clearly, this fantasy had currency enough to figure in great plays written for public exhibition in fifth-century Greece.

Herodotus' informants reported both instances of cannibalism in book i as events that actually happened. Herodotus is probably indifferent to the Thucydidean question “But *did* they happen?” because, like Plato, he knew very well that men's fantasies and deeds live terribly close to each other and often move interchangeably. Besides, for Herodotus it is what the Greeks and barbarians *believe* had happened that counts, rather than anything so unique as to depend on Herodotus' personal verification.

All of this explains the preponderance of myth patterns in the first four books of the *History*, where the mental background of the Asiatics is being covered. For this background is one half of the *why* of the enmity between Greeks and barbarians, and that is one reason why Herodotus tells us at such length of the political climate of the court of the great Asiatic despots, the implicit obedience of the subjects, and the submerged but ever-threatening hatred of possible rivals for power.

Clearly, one big question mark is how right Herodotus is to transfer the fantasies current among fifth-century Greeks to Asiatics living two and three centuries earlier. To answer that, one can say only that Herodotus certainly believed in the universal characteristics of the human imagination and hence in the inevitability of certain patterns in human dreams and fantasies. Strong as he is on the side of the importance of local customs, and interested as he is in the eccentricities of men's beliefs and practices, he is sure of a certain common core where men think and feel alike. For instance, he says that all men “in my opinion” know equally about the gods (2.3). (Their differences of belief affect only the applicability of this knowledge to names and places and customs.) It is this attitude of his that would constitute his defense (if he thought of making one) for using, as authentic evidence for Asiatic folklore, what his Greek-speaking informants tell him. Nor would he be without additional support for this defense in *our* terms, such as the fact that most of the peoples from whom the folktales are derived are Indo-Europeans, so that what is drawn on may well be a common Indo-European mythology. Moreover, these peoples lived in a relatively small area of the earth's surface and had been in constant cultural contact for a long, long time. But, in the end, whether we think Herodotus is a significant historian or not depends on our acceptance or rejection of his thesis that in logic or illogic the mental and passionate structure of the human mind is the same, though separated and superficial.

diversified in time or place.

It is overwhelmingly evident that Herodotus makes no effective discrimination in his *History* between the skeletal act—for instance, the murder of Candaules by Gyges, which is “historical”—and the imaginative reality toward which the story reaches. His *History* is that of a storyteller who is never quite out of the frame of the narrative and never quite within it. The broad lines of the *History* are shaped like those of a Greek tragedy. But it is never an acknowledged artistic fiction; it is never an artistic fiction, completely, at all. It has another dimension, this creation of his. It lies in a threefold relation to reality: reality as ordinarily perceived, reality as coming to a special meaningful pattern, myth, and reality as expressed in the original creation of a tragic writer. For the author who builds the story of the Persian attack on Greece under the shadow of the text “It is always the greatest houses and the tallest trees that the god hurls his [lightning] bolts upon” (7.10) is a Greek tragic writer. It is a new art form, a kind of history. We dare say that, now that military and political history is no longer looked on as the sole lifeline by which to connect ourselves to great events of the past. But it is history that nearly always suggests the observer within the framework. No doubt Herodotus actually checked the course of the Nile as he says he did. He certainly took notice of and recorded the customs of the Lydians and the Egyptians and all the peoples he visited. Such matters as these are the givens on which he rests the superstructure. This superstructure is the creation of his own dramatic imagination and partly consists of materials that are *imaginatively* dramatic in man's *remembrance*, man's myths and folklore, where the understanding is deepest and most explosive and least committed to the singular fact. These myths were certainly there for him in the mouths of his informants. Think, for example, of the miraculous birth and survival of the baby Cyrus and the vengeance taken by the cowgod upon the impious Cambyses, who mortally wounded her with his dagger but then himself perished through an injury in the selfsame part of the body where he had struck the god he sneered at as mortal (3.64).

The older editors, such as Sayce, respond to what they constantly refer to as the charm of Herodotus' stories, but they are far from seeing in what the charm consists. They regard the myths and folklore in the *History* as something removed from the very nature of reality, as the food of the child's mind before he grasps the conditions of the mature world. They understand nothing of the compelling pattern of the imagination to which the child and the adult alike respond. So they fail to grasp the magnitude of Herodotus' achievement. He has written a history of the greater part of the then known world, and backwards and forwards in man's then known span of civilization, with guidelines set by the archetypes of joy and sorrow, truth and falsehood, strength and feebleness as these live in *narrative form*, in the great primary stories. He supports this structure by scenes he himself had witnessed and by accounts of customs and places that are undeniably personally observed. There is thus a continuum from the palpable and checkable to the familiarity of the fantastic—familiar because it is the fantasy of all of us revisited. The *History* of Herodotus in its use of the human imagination is perhaps the solidest historical structure ever written. But the solidity is not that of reconstructed and verifiable fact but of the interaction between experience and dreams—between the uncommitted personal eyewitness and the generalized committedness of the patterns of fantasy and dreaming.

This is his famous introductory statement of purpose in book 1:

I, Herodotus of Halicarnassus, am here setting forth my history, that time may not draw the color from what man has brought into being, nor those great and wonderful deeds, manifested by both Greeks and barbarians, fail of their report, and, together with this, the reason why they fought one another. [1.1]

Two points in this statement should be noted. The first is that Herodotus sets himself against the power of time. Time is the destroyer, Herodotus is the preserver, of what man has created. This involves “saving,” to some extent, monuments and moments of entire civilizations (“What has con-

into being through men”). It shows us a Herodotus keenly aware of the huge remnants of civilization, such as the Babylonian, among which he has to potter in the hope of finding the key to its significance and power. As a subject of the Persian Empire and a great traveler, at a time when records and archeological research were almost nonexistent, he sees nakedly the possibility of obliteration of whole systems of life and their accompanying buildings, customs, languages. Second, what he is doing on presenting in his fight with time, as it concerns the hostility between the Greeks and barbarians, is the *kleos*, what men say and hear about the subject. In Homer, *kleos* means the glory that the heroes’ great deeds have attracted to themselves, and it remains for his descendants to enjoy as the quintessence of their ancestor. However, in the history of the Greek language, the word has a broader application than “glory” as we understand it. It is nearer “report,” which is the way I have translated it here. It is connected with words that mean to “call out” and “to be heard.” It is a misconception, I think, to render, as some translators do, “that such deeds may not fail of their meed of glory”; for what is involved is not only the glory (in our sense) of the story of the Greek-Asiatic hostilities and the gallantry shown on both sides in the battles but what men tell and hear about the typical acts (or what they regard as typical acts) of both sides—and this is very often *not* what we see as glory, particularly when it deals with deeds of the enemy. King Xerxes, having been entertained by the richest of his subjects, tells the man he can ask for any boon and he will grant it (7.29—39). The man asks for his eldest son to be left behind when the Persian army marches to Greece. Xerxes complies by cutting the boy’s body in two and marching his army away between the two parts. This deed belongs to the reputation of the Persians as the Greeks received it. It is the monstrousness of the act that counted, the arbitrariness and savagery of the Eastern despot and the submissiveness of his subjects. This is a most important aspect of the way the Greeks saw the conflict between the two political systems, if one can call them that, and certainly between the two “nations,” the Greeks and the barbarians, where our nomenclature is on much safer ground.

Probably no Greek writer makes so strong an impression of talking directly to us as Herodotus. Certainly, no Greek historian does. Undoubtedly, this is related to the known fact that most of his “publishing” was done by public readings from his text. It is intensely exciting to hear the echoes of his voice still and the conscious appeal to us as we listen. In speaking of his book on Egypt, Herodotus distinguishes among several kinds of materials. “So far it is my eyes, my judgment, and my searching that speak these words to you; from this on it is the accounts of the Egyptians that I will tell to you. I heard them” (2.99). The Greek for “my eyes etc. that are speaking” is as strong and grammatically unusual as the English makes it appear direct and almost colloquial. Nor is the personality addressing us a matter even principally of style. There is the extreme boldness of many of the denning sentences of themselves. He tells us about the people of Heliopolis, who “are the greatest chroniclers among the Egyptians.” “Now, the part of their account that deals with the divine, and to which I listened, I am not anxious to set forth, save only the matter of the gods’ names; for I think that all men know equal things about the gods. When I do mention the gods, it will be because my history forces me to do so” (2.3).

Perhaps the most startling of all his statements on how his *History* is constructed runs as follows (he has been commenting on the various stories of the Persians and Phoenicians about the traditional hostility between Greeks and barbarians):

For my part I am not going to say about these matters that they happened thus or thus, but I will set my mark upon that man that myself know began unjust acts against the Greeks, and, having so marked him, I will go forward in my account, covering alike the small and great cities of mankind. For of those that were great in earlier times most have now become small, and those that were great in my time were small in the time before. Since, then, I know that man’s good fortune never abides in the same place, I will make mention of both alike. [1.5]

These sentences correspond exactly to the manner of a very brilliant speaker, whose aphorism sticks

in one's mind and forces one to wonder whether one has grasped all the implications of what one has heard. These are not the forms in which an expositor declares the nature of his argument or makes clear the grounding of his evidence. They sometimes look like this, but they are not. What they build is an illusion of a discussion between a storytelling friend and his listeners. The "I" who thinks divine stories uninteresting or dangerous in comparison with the human is accepted as a person like ourselves, only a little more surprising in attitude, more paradoxical in expression. (Is he saying all men know "equally much" or "equally little" about the gods?) As he stood before his audience, he comes before us on the page, invisibly watching us, presenting himself as clever, whimsical, at times naive and impulsive, at times reflective and tragic in emphasis. This history is designed to give the feeling of a personal appearance on the scene, to mediate between the great events and the audience. Sometimes the personal appearance is indeed personal; sometimes it is highly formalized. Herodotus is sometimes rather like the reader in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* or the actor-commentator in Tennessee Williams' *Glass Menagerie*. He is introducing us to his great theme—the achievements of the war of Greeks and Persians at one another's expense and the cause of their quarrel, together with all the more general features of the civilizations of the world of his day—as a thing which, with all its hugeness, can be seen as a unity and expressed as the vision of one man who, as a child, was contemporary of the last of the great acts in this universal drama. Here is the man in front of us seizing the myths, the folklore of the countries involved, the relevant bits of his own (the chronicler's) history, weaving them all together and constantly even appearing himself, to explain that he has checked this but not that. Paradoxically but very naturally, he does not account for his knowledge of such things as the conversation between Croesus and Cyrus when Croesus is upon the pyre and, at the last minute, the words he utters induce Cyrus to take him down and spare his life, nor does he tell us how he came to know the thoughts in the mind of the shepherd's wife, who exchanged her own dead child for the royal baby Cyrus. What one has here is the writer, akin to Homer, who exists throughout the work, acknowledged, but with no formal attribution.

This personality, then, formalized as speaker, commentator, intermediary, is integrated into the *kleos*, the report that attends on all the events and through which they live for future times. Some of the *kleos* that goes to create the artistic effect are the echoes of the human voice, the undress of personal interest, the glory of rhetoric, the joking comment.

The *kleos* itself is multifarious, as the different people who contribute to it bring in their different hopes and antagonisms, all of which are utilized for the total effect. This past carries with it the multiple hopes and thoughts men have invested in it. Moreover, Herodotus himself has a ranging mind and an incorrigible sense of distant relevancies, which further extend the relation of everything to everything else and can only very hardly be controlled within any cramped confines of immediate applicability. He has often enough been taken to task for this by serious critics, of which he himself was the first. "This history of mine," he says somewhat ruefully, "has from the beginning sought out the supplementary to the main argument" (4.30).

But the extraordinary farrago of motifs, stories, geographical excursus, and reported observations and artistic objects, strange customs, and miraculous events has a deeper and, it seems to me, more serious reason for being what it is than comes out in any of the explanations I have given so far. Herodotus is in a very strong degree an uncommitted observer even as he creates his *kleos* of the past, and he is so for reasons that are startling and perhaps, in the end, convincing. Here is an illuminating comment on the theories of the Egyptians on various religious practices and also on the transmigration of souls (2.123): "As for the stories told by the Egyptians, let whoever finds them credible use them." Throughout the entire history it is my underlying principle that it is what people have said to me, and what I have heard, that I must write down." It is impossible to be sure what he means by "use" here. Because it is linked to what is persuasive, I should think it must mean something like "adopt as true."



for him.” What is certain is that Herodotus is divorcing himself from the capacity or will to declare that one thing is true and another false, as beliefs go. One overlies another for the *use* of the different observers. This is exactly what is implied in his remark about the gorge in Thessaly: it is the result of an earthquake or the work of Poseidon—if you think that earthquakes are the work of Poseidon (7.129). It is the job of the historian, in Herodotus' terms, to identify objects, events, and thoughts in various ways, offending as few people as possible by strictness in psychological dogmatism. But there is always some fundamental matter that is thus being variously identified, and one cannot tell which system of nomenclature is most useful or especially will be so in the days to come. The passage on the transmigration of souls (2.123) is not in the narrative as a probing of the nature of man's soul and its pilgrimage. Herodotus wants us to realize that in it we have one more important addition to the way man saw his cosmos. How this belief affected the Egyptians in dealing with the Great King he does not say and perhaps does not know. In short, it is beliefs and traditions and practices in their totality that characterize each national unit in his story. This belief about the soul is clearly relevant, probably important, and so in it goes.

I am convinced that this is what underlies the oddest statement of this kind in the whole lot—the one in 1.5 that I have already quoted on the principle of all-inclusiveness in his treatment of cities without concern for stricter differences of importance.

For Herodotus there is a real truth, that is, a line of true causation, involving many causes. Because the threads of this true causation lie in the hands of some supernatural power or some nonhuman order of the world that embraces all its multiplicity, Herodotus thinks it cannot be understood by men in its altogetherness. But there is at least a sequence of events that constitutes a unity (that may be a unity even within the gods' range of meaning), an episode framed of events that match one another in some system of counterpoise. At some point a significant conclusion can be drawn about success or the reverse, about happiness or the reverse, as far as man is concerned. (It is remarkable how much Herodotus' presentation of history openly deals with its illustrative or even pedagogic value for human happiness or its failure.) But the verdict of importance on what actually *has happened*, made at too early a moment, is very fallible. The great towns of Herodotus' own day had many of them come to their greatness from an earlier era of insignificance. Many of those now insignificant will one day be great. In that day the story he is now telling will not only look different but *be* different. The backward glance from the place of vantage the intervening years have given affords more evidence of what was taking place that made the previously great cities unimportant and vice versa. The principle on which all this operates is that it is impossible for human *well-being* to remain, established in one environment. The historian must then watch for its shifting, and how it shifts, and try to survey the conceivable factors, and conceivable possibilities, barely understood at an earlier moment, that were the potential major occasions for change. Herodotus' *kleos*, to be any good, must contain as many as possible of the seeds of the importance and *real* meaning of events—that is, their final consummation in time. For the present, it tries to show us a reasonable estimate of such a truth. But, as to the future, Herodotus is always hedging his bets. With Sardis and Susa, Babylon and Athens, and Sparta, the great centers of power, to the fore, he tries to retain in the picture some of the little towns: the rejection of emigration by the Ionians, the migrations to Italy. Some day, he implies, these may prove to have been the definitive places and the definitive events of the *History*. In the same willful jettisoning of simple and more sharply defined standards of importance, he includes in his account of Periander of Corinth “the greatest wonder in all his life,” the dolphin's rescue of Arion, the minstrel, by carrying him home over the sea, on its back (1.23). A “wonder” means for Herodotus a disturbance of the psychic atmosphere. Who knows what this portends? Or even what it *does* to the world? Really to me Herodotus is to realize how expansible the connections between events and thoughts can be when these connections are surveyed by the mind of a genius.

The famous meeting of Solon and Croesus (which, historically, probably never took place) has crucial meaning for the *History*, occurring right at its beginning. It is at this meeting that Croesus learned from Solon, the Greek statesman and poet, to look on death, the last event of man's life, as the one necessarily overwhelming piece of evidence for the success or failure of that life. Because, says Solon, man's life, set at seventy years, contains so many months, days, etc., and because no day ever brings anything like any of its fellows, man is altogether what happens to him (*sumphorē*) (1.32). Death, since it stops the process, allows one to look on the life as an intelligible unit or at least as one that can be reckoned up. The life of a man or a city or a nation is composed of strips of reality (6.27). Each has its *telos*, which does not here mean, as it does in Aristotle, a perfection or crowning point but the end from which the unit as a whole makes sense. What Herodotus was doubtful of and sought for constantly and widely was this definition of the *telos* or end of the unit that was larger than the single unit—namely, the city or nation. In the service of this, he is surveying the interaction of the cities and nations in the history of the world. He looks at the past and builds a formidable list of contributions to his sense of the total reality of man in his world. Thus in his huge narrative he glances, in the past, at the oldest language spoken (2.2), the beginning of Greek religion (2.53), the oldest people (2.2), the youngest people (4.5), the potentially most powerful nation (5.3), the cleverest people (2.121), the stupidest people (4.46—those in the lands by the Euxine Pontus, except for the Scythians), the true way of life in a community (3.21—the Ethiopians), and so on. All of these conditions, fully realized only in man's hopes or thoughts, lie on a continuum of existence, and that existence endlessly accommodates itself to the total span of reality. Hence the ambiguity of the importance of big cities as opposed to small ones, which will one day be big, and vice versa. Hence the inclusion of particular elements in wonders and miracles and what men believe and the stories they tell of their wonders and beliefs. In the end, these elements of the total scene, which a narrower mind would neglect or subordinate, may have a bearing on the result out of all proportion to what the common sense of Herodotus' contemporaries would afford them. So Herodotus has a duty to these antiquities and to his own intuition in discovering them. The reality that the stories and the myths reveal, both those in the early accounts of Asia Minor and later, in the account of the invasion itself, is hardly, finally, the regular series of victories and defeats and the rise and fall of thrones. These indeed constitute the substance of actions through which Herodotus works, dealing with our sense of wonder and its arousal into excitement and joy. What the *History* is really about lies behind this: man, giant-sized, seen against the background of the entire world, universalized in his conflict with destiny, the gods, and the cosmic order. The medium that is most fertile in showing the true nature of reality is the human mind remembering, reflective, and fertile most of all when its memory and reflection are put at the service of its dreaming and fantastic side.

When Herodotus examined man in a historical setting, he apparently thought of human nature as possessed of a number of logical choices that are differently exploited. What determined the choice that was made was sometimes a series of unsought challenges that explored these potentialities; for instance, the Scythians developed a peculiar but effective way of protecting themselves as a result of their climate and their empty, new country and because of the course of their rivers (4.46–47). More often, however, one course of action supersedes or is preferred over another by the decision of one man or by the voluntary choice of a people referred to as “they.” Cyrus, as a result of Croesus' advice, once Croesus was his captive, changed the entire way of life of the Lydians; they became pliable victims of their conquerors (1.155–57). At 5.3 we learn that “the nation of the Thracians is the biggest of all mankind, except for the Indians. If they were under a single ruler or could be of a single mind, none could fight them down, and they would, in my judgment, be far the mightiest of all the people on earth. But such agreement is quite impossible for them; no means can bring it about, and this is the respect in which their weakness lies.”

His is a kind of universal history; that is, it is the record of all the logical possibilities, political and human, that coexist in the human world. The *kleos* is the tale that makes one understand and admire this; that obtrudes itself between one's bewilderment at the diversity of experience and one's innate single moral certainty of man's nature; that harmonizes what one knows is true of man, because he oneself writ large, and the excitement of the vision of men and events greater than anyone, without Herodotus' aid, could easily conceive of. The moral stories are another form of this aid; for example the king who wept for sorrows suitable for tears but was silent before those that were too great for weeping (3.14); the enormity of the army of Xerxes, drinking rivers dry on its march to Greece (7.43); Xerxes who wept at the review of his huge army when he reflected that in a hundred years not a one of them would be alive (7.45); and the story of the crafty Artemisia at Salamis (8.87).

The great innovative rulers also come before us in the *kleos*. There are Cyrus and Darius, founders of dynasties, with whom, on the whole, all goes well, who are decisive and will also listen to advice at the right moments, and whom, all the same, destruction finally overtakes when they disregard good advice, Cyrus in facing the Massagetae, Darius the Scythians. And Cambyses and Xerxes, who are their sons and their exact opposites. And, to set the whole in perspective, we have the king of Ethiopia who rejected and banished the spies of Cambyses with a denunciation of the clothes, money, and imperialism of his contemporary world as decisively as did the king of Brobdingnag in dealing with Gulliver; he stands for an entirely different and elementary way of life. And in ways of life, the bottom of the scale is held by the cannibals: "The Man-Eaters have the most savage manner of life of all men; they believe in no justice nor use any law" (4.106).

We have here, within the scope of Herodotus' history, the entire gamut of human possibilities, in social, political, and, in a way, moral terms. When I say this, I do not want to do away with the difference between Herodotus and Homer, between the historian and the poet. Herodotus did not invent the peoples; they and the personalities were actually there or nearly always there, in his historical scene, to bear the weight he assigns them. But he did assign them this weight. And the range and the significance are matters of obvious selection, so that the *History* becomes a pattern, itself a kind of myth. Inside, of course, there are massive passages of detail that are the result of eyewitness work and of the careful balancing of one aspect of probability against another. Yet these are built into a framework that is poetic. Man lives on a continuum of intellectual and moral possibilities. The king of Ethiopia may be right, may indeed be righter than Cambyses' spies or the contemporary powerful Persian and Greek politicians. It is always within the power of any ruler, or perhaps within that of any community, to opt out of modernity and choose a different road. It is possible, and may be desirable, to choose a different moral scheme for oneself and one's country. This is as different a view of history as possible from that expressed by the Corinthians, at the Lacedaemonian Congress before the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, in the pages of Thucydides (1.71.3). They lecture the Spartans on the grounds that their institutions are "old-fashioned" (*archaiotropa*). They say that advances in technology have their corollary in general human political institutions; the more advanced phases overcome the older. But in Herodotus the king of Ethiopia is the political equivalent of Solon who the latter lectures Croesus on the superiority of the life of the private man to that of the Eastern despot. One may choose a national (and international) position that willingly disregards power and politics, increase in money, technical development. Indeed, one of the main emphases borne by the Persians in Herodotus' narrative is the disastrous disappearance of the private sphere within the distorted unity of their community.

So the *kleos*, the tale of glory, to be true to its *natural* function in man's report of past events, and to be true to Herodotus' artistic handling of it, must show all the facts and aspirations of human life that are present on this great continuum, stretching from King Cambyses to the cannibals, and this involves also individuals such as Cyrus and Darius along with Prexaspes.

Of course, Herodotus has his preferences in forms of life and political organization. Bias of Prier was *right* to advise as he did when he urged the Ionians to move away and form in Sardinia an empire of their own (1.170). Herodotus himself does not want to live like the Scythians. But he has an overwhelming sense of the diversity of man, of his fertile gift for innovations, at times his reseeking of elementary patterns in resistance to the trend of a time, or the supersession of one form of political theory by another that is temporarily superior.

Thucydides, in the passages of his *History* where he is clearly criticizing his predecessor, speaks, as I noted near the start of this introduction, of the contrast between his own work, which he intended to be “a possession for ever,” and the other (by implication, Herodotus’) as aimed at the delight of the immediate hearer. In the main, I think Thucydides is right about the immediate delight of the ear. Herodotus can be felt as a living voice fairly often. Listen to the end of the story of Adrastus, the man who killed his brother; whom Croesus then purified of bloodguilt; and who was assigned as bodyguard to Croesus’ son, whom he then accidentally killed:

So Croesus buried his son as was right. But Adrastus, the son of Gordias, the son of Midas, he who was the slayer of his own brother and had become the slayer of his purifier, who was, moreover, aware within himself that he was of all men he had ever known the heaviest-stricken by calamity, when there was a silence about the tomb and none was there, cut his throat over the grave. [1.45]

This is indeed as though we saw the figure before us on the stage, and we would do well to remember the bitterness of Thucydides’ phrase—“I have not composed my work as a competition piece for the delight of the moment”—where “competition piece” (*agōnisma*) is certainly a reference to the theater or to the rhapsodes’ or actors’ competitions. But we would do well also to remember the line in the *Odyssey* where Odysseus is praising the minstrel at the court of Alcinous and speaks of the supreme power of the singer in rendering a subject “as though you were there yourself” (*Odyssey* 8.491). It is *as though*—not as a real onlooker. The *artifice* of Herodotus’ *kleos* is very important. Its purpose is to give artistic substance to a moment or an event; thus there is an object that draws men’s natural pleasure in the great moment or great deed to a single concentration of delight and meaning. The *kleos* will then, in the process of time and recollection, become part of the future of that moment or event. As the *kleos* deals with the natural possibilities of man’s memory in their most significant form, the natural enemy is time and forgetfulness. And the most potent opponent of time and forgetfulness is the creation of the things that, in Helen’s phrase, are “subjects of song for men of future days” (*Iliad* 6.348–57).

The listening audience is certainly the target of much of Herodotus’ shaping of the narrative. In the later books, one thinks of the presentation of Xerxes’ dream and the intervention of Artabanus and the obviously readable and actable conversation between the evil spirit of the dream and Artabanus. Another is the ringing eloquence of the Athenian answer to the timid address of the Spartans when King Alexander of Macedon, in the name of the Great King, tried to tempt the Athenians to desert the Greek alliance: “There is our common Greekness: we are one in blood and one in language; those shrines of the gods belong to us all in common, and the sacrifices in common, and there are our habits, bred of common upbringing” (8.144). The element of the theatrical, Thucydides’ *agōnisma*, is plain in many places throughout the history. Often the parts are intricately fitted together but designed for a series of dramatic climaxes. There is the naturally supreme moment when Xerxes in his agony weeps at the thought that of all his magnificent army none would be alive in a hundred years (7.46), but the listing of the peoples and the description of their colorful uniforms are meticulously shaped to draw the historical detail into the moment of Xerxes’ agony.

There are two worlds of meaning that are constantly in Herodotus’ head. The one is that of human calculation, reason, cleverness, passion, happiness. There one knows what is happening and, more

less, who is the agent of cause. The other is the will of Gods, or fate, or the intervention of daimon. Herodotus did not, I think, have very clear notions of theology, at least as Christianity came to understand it. He does not feel sure of the identity of particular Gods, as intervening at particular moments, except on the rarest occasions. He gives us a glimpse of an Apollo who wished to save Croesus and couldn't (1.91), of a difference between the will of *one* God and Fate. Indeed, the oracles (or the priests) at Delphi document this by saying that even a God cannot cheat the Fates, who are personalized for this occasion. This is indeed the same dilemma we see in the *Iliad* when Zeus fails to save Sarpedon and, later, Hector, "long since condemned by fate" (*Iliad* 16.435 and 22.209–13). But for Herodotus, generally, any special God, or the Gods, or Fate, or (very commonly) The Divine (*to theion* or to *daimonion*) are all one. They all mean the power that controls the world of man. And this power in relation to man is bound up with a maddening relation between man's reason and understanding and such "signs" as the Divine has allowed us to have of its future or past intervention. Herodotus is quite definite on two points: that the Divinity is altogether "jealous" and prone to trouble us and that "there is, somehow, some warning given in advance [*prosemainein*] when great evils are about to fall on either city-state or nation [*ethnos*]" (6.27). He also affirms his belief in oracles in general, although, like a sensible man, he can detect many occasions when one has a right to distrust a particular oracle (8.77).

A very great deal of the *History* is necessarily concerned with men's attempts to read these signs. The Egyptians, we are told, have the most complete set of records on wonders and their outcomes (2.82), and, except for oracles, this is the only system that can lead to results (8.77). But, from first to last, man is dogged by the mysterious nature of the Divine purpose (if purpose it should be called) and its relation to his human understanding. For the outcome of a "sign" may accord in name and in some peculiar symmetry of form or meaning but, in the value and significance of the event, be quite altered. The Magi at the court of King Astyages had predicted that from his daughter he would have a grandchild who would take the crown from him. After the usual ineffectual effort to destroy the child by exposing it (an episode I have discussed above, in another context), the boy—Cyrus—reappeared. He tells a story of how in the village, where his shepherd foster father lived, some children had in place chosen him king. Astyages now wanted to know from the Magi whether this fulfilled the oracle or whether further harm was to be feared for himself and his crown. The answer was as follows: "If indeed the boy survives and has become king with no connivance, be of good cheer and good heart: he will not come to rule a second time. Some, even of our prophecies, issue in very small matters, and in all that pertains to dreams the fulfillment is often in something trifling" (1.120). This story is all the more significant because, after all, the event proved that the Magi had been right the *first* time. The "real" meaning can be established only by hindsight. But this "real" meaning is what counts for human beings, and men have no indication whether the Divine recognizes any distinction between one and other outcomes that in some fashion bear the same name or the same shape.

At times the jealousy of the Gods, to which Herodotus refers, makes it look as though the *intention* of the God or Gods had been to deceive and maliciously to mock. It is hard to acquit of malice the utterance of Apollo given to Croesus ("if he made war on the Persians he would destroy a mighty empire," 1.53). Yet it does look as though the Delphic priests, in Herodotus' report at any rate, thought they had saved the God's reputation; for Croesus should, he was told, have asked "*what* empire" (as he now agrees), and the priests cite Apollo's undoubted aid to him when he was on the burning pyre (the deliverance through the rainstorm) and the benefit they claimed the God rendered in extending his period of success (1.91). On the whole, I think that Herodotus believes that the Divine is altogether jealous and prone to trouble us because it controls a world in terms that we cannot understand and that distort the outcome we would want; but it is not necessary that we believe that the Gods have personal vindictiveness against those who are destroyed. What is decisive is the impersonal hinge of fate.

Particular Gods may at times be represented as the unwilling assistants as the hinge of fate turns. But fate in its compulsive patterns depends on the potency of single events or blocks of events. Croesus, we are told, was expiating the fault of his ancestor, Gyges (1.91). Also involved, though not always, is some personal act or attitude on the part of the person who suffers punishment. Croesus, we learn, suffered, "one may guess...because he thought he was of all mankind the most blessed" (1.34). And in the case of Apries, "since it was fated that he should end ill, something now caused it to happen, which I will [later] tell at greater length" (2.161). Yet such apparent causes or even superficial occasions are mainly *signs* to the human world; they do not correspond to the effective power of causation. The coincidence seems entirely due to a matching of acts from past to future. In such matching acts, however, moral wrongs seem to have a place. For instance, Herodotus speaks out as to his own conviction on the question of the cause of the Trojan War: "The reason of this, if I may declare my opinion, was that the Divine was laying his plans that, as the Trojans perished in utter destruction, they might make this thing manifest to all the world: that for great wrongdoings, great also are the punishments from the gods" (2.120). Again, about the Queen Pheretima: "But neither did Pheretima end her life well. For straightway after her vengeance on the Barcans she went back home to Egypt and there died violently and foully. For when yet living she bred of herself a mass of worms, so that mankind may see that violent vengeance earns the gods' grudges" (4.205). Yet it sometimes seems that it is the act that calls for the appropriate response, and only incidentally and occasionally the actor. Mycerinus, for example, was severely punished by the shortening of his life and reign because he did not understand that he was the third in a necessary sequence of three *bad* kings (2.132); his regrettable lapse into virtue necessitated his removal. And Xerxes, who clearly would have preferred to follow Artabanus' advice *not* to invade Greece, was forced on his evil course by a dream (7.18). Of course, we do not know what the antecedent events were, in the case of either Mycerinus or Xerxes, that constituted the impersonal pattern of Divine planning. Some such, we may conjecture, there must have been, given the evidence of the Divine urging. In such a system the choice of the individual man himself, his preference for virtue or vice, is valid only as it harmonizes with fate. Indeed, the individual man, saint or sinner, is hardly more important than the individual animal. For example, "There is a divine providence, with a kind of wisdom to it, as one might guess, according to which whatever is cowardly of spirit and edible should be prolific in progeny so that, with all the eating of them, they should not fail to exist; while things that are savage and inflict pain are infertile" (3.108). This certainly pictures a world of design as far as Divine providence is concerned, since the fertility and infertility of the animals turn on the balance between eaters and eaten. But if one puts this together with the exclusive emphasis elsewhere on the sin and not the sinner, one comes out, I believe, with the conviction that great sins are punished because some order of the universe is maintained by divine punishment. But this simply does not reach down to the moral choice of the individual man any more than the general laws about fertility and infertility in the animal kingdom concern the fate of the individual rabbit or elephant.

Piety there is in Herodotus, but, interestingly enough, it concerns mostly not what you feel about the Gods but what you feel about your fellow men's feelings about the Gods or what the Gods feel about you. King Cambyses was crazy, said Herodotus, or he would never have outraged the feeling of the Egyptians by injuring their sacred cow (3.29). Illustrating this is the story of the wise Darius, the story of *nomos*. Darius asked his Greek and his Indian subjects about their burial customs and jokingly inquired of each what they would take to break with their ancestral customs, the one by eating, the other by burning, their ancestors. He is greeted with horror by both (3.38). From Herodotus' point of view, Darius is not only the wise but the pious ruler. Herodotus on the same model has tried to write as a pious and sensible historian, offending no one's religious susceptibilities and recording a variety of religious accounts. There are, it is true, certain attitudes or acts that seem to directly provoke the Gods' wrath on human beings. God does not suffer anyone to "think high" but himself, says Herodotus.

(7.10). But such high thoughts nearly always appear only as the *apparent* cause (*prophasis*); the offense of Apries is an example. The weight of causation seems to lie solidly on an antecedent series of events. In a famous passage of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, the chorus says that theirs is a special and unusual belief, that they think that punishment does not come from the gods simply on the high and mighty in itself but on sin (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 757). It is quite possible that Herodotus would agree with the poet. But for him it would not be the sin of the individual, or at least not necessarily so, but a sin that, for some special reason (unknown), constitutes for the Divine the beginning of a significant sequence.

Piety also figures in Herodotus' book—in terms of a direct relation to the Gods—in his cautious avoidance of denying the existence of any daimon or God who can conceivably have done the thing that people say he has done. Thus Herodotus severely questions the divinity of the Thracian daimon Salmoxis, but, when he passes to another subject, he has hardly denied the divinity explicitly (4.96). And when he tells us that the Egyptians do not believe in heroes at all (2.50) and is concerned to disprove the Greek stories about Heracles in Egypt, he concludes with this hope (2.45): “May both gods and heroes view me kindly!”

In speaking of animals in Egypt and their relation to religious practices, he says the following: “But if I were to say why it is that the animals are dedicated as sacred, my argument would drive me into talking of matters divine, and the declaration of these is what I would particularly shun. To the degree that I have spoken of them, it was with but a touch, and under the stress of necessity, that I have spoken” (2.65). Yet of course, since the gods or fate or the divine or the daimonic control the world, one is forced, even in history, to mention them, even with “but a touch.”

Since all men know equally about the divine (2.3), it is only the names of gods, the customs of the worship, and the accounts and rituals that differentiate our notions of religion. It may be, and sometimes is, the historian's work to concern himself with these but only very rarely with the basic religious concepts underlying them all. It is the differences between peoples on which, to adapt Yeats's phrase in another context, history keeps house. That the Divinity is always jealous and prone to trouble us, as Solon tells Croesus (1.32), is perhaps a universal religious perception; that God allows no one but himself to think high is another (7.10). What these sentences mean is that two important aspects of the divine are caught by statements that are, strictly speaking, analogical. God can be understood *as if* he were a jealous and troublesome despot; he permits no one to be haughty before himself. This is one way of *speaking* about the inner knowledge that all men have of the Divine. It is the way of speaking when what is drawn on is the aspect of God that appears to man personal. God alone is free of danger or vulnerability. He therefore alone can “think high.” Man never can and should never dare to. On the other side are the many references to an impersonal balance of fate which is often shown as being independent of God's control and *a fortiori* of man's control or even his reasoned comprehension. The balance of fate can sometimes be traced to past events. Otherwise one can only hazard guesses, sometimes assisted by the Gods, sometimes by the semiscientific examination of similar cases and their outcomes. The basic religious “truths” thus analogically expressed underlie all the historical narrative, perhaps even give it its characteristic flavor and very form. But they are really not in need of comment; they are too basic and too general. But that the Persians approach their God not in human form but as the natural elements and therefore worship on the tops of mountains (1.131); that the Egyptians see Apis as a calf (3.28); that Homer and Hesiod have furnished the Greeks with an appropriate gallery of deities, with forms and honors assigned them (2.53); that the Indians' sense of the sacred commits them to eating their dead parents (3.38)—these are all of concern to the historian because, in their multiplicity, they extend the range of our understanding of man's condition in the world, the world that is ultimately entirely controlled by power not his own. The human notion of fate as an evening-out of the balance—upset by some

monstrous sin, such as Pheretima's punishment of the people of Barca—is a human metaphor for a ~~observed religious truth that cannot be otherwise communicated.~~ But granted the evening-out, the human observer is often at a loss to find the first and the last of the series of responsive events. Unlike the varying customs and rituals, the truth implied in the metaphor of balance is commonplace and universal, but its application to particulars is difficult and unsatisfactory. It is therefore sometimes communicated by Herodotus or commented on, but comparatively rarely.

This is a mystery, this relation between the two worlds, that of divine control and that of the human beings on the receiving end. And, I think, Herodotus would avoid, as far as he can, the world of divine control, not only because of the risk to himself as observer and recorder. There is in him a deep admiration and delight in the human, and this, in his terms, implies a certain neglect of the divine and a wish to leave it, if possible, out of consideration. “That time may not draw the color from what man has brought into being” (1.1): time is the destroying agent against which you erect the *kleos*. Again, in the world of the Gods there is nothing to be done. The world of humanity, controlled by finally incomprehensible powers, is a tragic world. At best, the Divine meaning mocks the other. If one is to be great and glorious as man or nation or city, one is the more likely to fall into the traps of the supernatural. The most sensible course is to choose the private life; but the purpose of Herodotus' *History* is to chronicle the great men, great cities, and great deeds. So as a writer he is almost committed to a world of tragedy, where good or great intentions have but little to do with what happens. Still, the *kleos* remains, not, I think, as a moral warning nor yet as a national eulogy. Perhaps Herodotus saw himself as securing for the great deeds of the Persian War the only permanence in this world of relative values, the permanence of memory.

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The English in which Herodotus comes before us should be direct, powerful, and clear but also, I think, a little odd. His Ionic is a literary dialect; it links him with Homer, the main share of whose language is Ionic. This bond with Homer was intended to be very suggestive. Herodotus' *History* is to be the story of another great war, that of the Persians against the Greeks, as Homer's was that of the Greeks against the Trojans. But it was to be something new—prose history, not poetry, and history that would concern itself not only with the glories of the great deeds in battle but with reasons why the war and its great deeds had come about. It is this combination of tradition and innovation that is at the heart of Herodotus' work. The English in which he now speaks to us must have a flavor, at least, that is as traditional and literary and a little archaic as Homer sounded for the fifth-century Greek.

Of course, it is quite possible, and some would consider it desirable, to disregard any special quality of the original Greek style. Rather concentrate, these critics might say, on a forceful English version without bothering to render the peculiar character of the Greek by some sought-out quirk in the English. But though this seems a bold and telling attitude, it misrepresents the Greek that faces the translator. It is indeed what makes de Selincourt's version in the Penguin edition much less satisfactory than it otherwise might be. His English is racy, it reads well, and it is sharp and to the point, but it entirely fails to convey any part of the conscious mask of Herodotus: his use of an inherited way of talking (from Homer) while treating of something new. The Penguin Herodotus sounds exactly as though new-minted by a twentieth-century journalist. There are keen strokes and very little nuance, which is quite false to the Greek style and to the strange man who is himself so preeminently the style. Herodotus must sound somewhat literary and whimsical. Still, he must, even more importantly, be powerful and direct, because the history is largely designed for public reading. Very many of his greatest stories are folklore that must have come straight from the mouths of local inhabitants and were to find their artistic form of publication in the mouth of the public reader and find an audience. If there is one feature an English Herodotus must pass on to us, it is an air



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