

Herodotus as an Ancient Journalist:  
Reimagining Antiquity's Historians as Journalists

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The word *journalist* dates back to 1693 and has been defined as “one who earns his living by editing or writing for a public journal or journals.”<sup>1</sup> In modern times, the journalist has grown to mean much more than someone simply involved in the production of printed journals. It has become a synonym for reporting in any news media. For this historical look at the journalist in popular culture, a journalist is defined as anyone in any century who performs the function of the journalist — to gather and disseminate news and information, to report, to observe, to investigate, to criticize, to inform.

Calling an ancient historian a journalist might be thought of simply as a question of labeling. For years, scholars have ignored journalists even when it was obvious that they were talking about journalists. Therefore, it is important to seriously consider labels. Calling Herodotus and other Greek and Roman chroniclers of their time *historian* has created a discipline of history, a way of looking at the world and reporting what that world looked like at a precise moment in time. Labeling Herodotus as a journalist may not change what he wrote, but it does change our perception of where journalism originated, how it was received, and how the journalist himself was tolerated or ridiculed or criticized. By returning to antiquity and showing how people who were doing the same jobs as journalists today were perceived and accepted or not accepted, we can see how the images we now have of journalists in modern times had their roots in ancient times — suffering the same misconceptions, the same charges of sensationalism

and lying, of making up quotes, of distorting the truth, of always emphasizing bad news instead of good news.

Modern historians acknowledge that ancient historians<sup>2</sup> hardly live up to the definition of what a historian should be. The ancient historian is accused of not worrying much about what was true or false, wasn't too concerned about when things happened, was adept at making up quotes and speeches, frequently relied on legend rather than fact, loved the sensational and the unusual, and often accepted idle rumor, malicious gossip, and hearsay as fact. That depiction sounds more like a definition of a tabloid journalist than a modern historian. In this article, Herodotus is reimagined as the "father of journalism" rather than the Roman intellectual Cicero's equally hyperbolic appellation, "the father of history." This examination assesses the way Herodotus reported, researched, and wrote *The Histories*.

It turns out that the best ancient historians were essentially good reporters, eyewitnesses who recreated what happened in public affairs, in the military, and in high society. Greek historian W. Kendrick Pritchett says that unlike many future historians, Herodotus of Halicarnassus "was an observer of customs untrammelled by the desire to fit all that he had seen into a theory."<sup>3</sup> He was essentially "a reporter of what he had seen even if he did not understand it, and of what he had heard, if it seemed for any reason worth reporting, without his necessarily believing it."<sup>4</sup>

The word *historiai* originally meant an investigation or inquiry into the actions of human beings in the past, not history as it is known in modern times. Herodotus makes it clear from the beginning exactly what he intends to do. In the opening lines of his *historiai*, he says: "Here are presented the results of the enquiry carried out by Herodotus of Halicarnassus. The purpose is to prevent the traces of human events from being erased by time, and to preserve the fame of the

important and remarkable achievements produced by both Greeks and non-Greeks; among the matters covered is, in particular, the cause of the hostilities between Greeks and non-Greeks.”<sup>5</sup>

As translators Janet Lembke and C. J. Herington say, these histories should be called “Enquiries.”<sup>6</sup>

Herodotus was not born in Athens, but in Halicarnassus (in modern times, the Turkish city of Bodrum) about the time of the Persian Wars (492-449 BCE), and he traveled around the world of the east Mediterranean.<sup>7</sup> He was much like a typical war correspondent with all of the flaws and virtues of a working foreign and domestic correspondent. His colorful *Histories* is a fascinating piece of work filled with anecdotes, folklore, inscriptions, digressions on geography, and customs. He humanizes history, making the great historical events with which his public is familiar come alive with character and the exploits of the individual.<sup>8</sup>

Herodotus probably created his written *Histories* out of oral readings he gave over a period of time in Athens and other Greek cities, recalling things he had seen and heard in his travels.<sup>9</sup> At one of Herodotus’s public readings of his history, it is said that one young Athenian aristocrat in attendance left the performance in tears — he was over stimulated by the performance and the vivid information placed before him. That man was Thucydides, who would become, by modern reckoning, one of the greatest of the Greek historians.<sup>10</sup> Like Herodotus, Thucydides told the “story of the great events of the recent past ... The works of Herodotus and Thucydides together created an intellectual field that we still call by the name Herodotus gave his own investigations: *historie*, or history,” says translator Robin Waterfield.<sup>11</sup>

Herodotus writes the way most journalists, not historians, write about events: short, self-contained narratives following each other like “beads on a string.” They are not integrated into a larger conceptual whole. “A strong opening sentence states its initial force and almost

always a concluding sentence wraps it up, often restating a variant of the introductory sentence,” Waterfield says.<sup>12</sup> Some narratives make up many pages, some one paragraph, some interrupt a longer narrative, and some are digressions. The story is told in a rough chronological order with “sudden detours.” It’s almost as if Herodotus were really writing a first draft of history — and that’s what journalists have been doing for centuries.

Herodotus admits as much. For him, the word *historiai* means investigation, enquiry, research, and provisional information, the best that he could do under the circumstances. According to Waterfield, Herodotus tries to give his audience “the best version or versions of past events” that he has been able to piece together, taken from “the most qualified informants he could find.”<sup>13</sup> Yet it is Herodotus who is the one in control — he decides what to tell and what not to tell, he is the one who is constantly evaluating what he has heard. He is not a stenographer, he is a journalist.

Herodotus was arguably the first writer to try to figure out what was reliable and what was unreliable information by the use of what he called “autopsy” — knowing through first-hand experience and personal observation, “being at an event rather than reporting what happened by interviewing other people.”<sup>14</sup> Like any good reporter, Herodotus trusts what he sees for himself. This becomes impossible when dealing with events that happened before he was born or when he was living and traveling elsewhere, Pritchett notes.

Some historians, such as James Romm, think of Herodotus “as a man of many vocations — a moralist, storyteller, dramatist, student of human nature, perhaps even a journalist himself,” admitting “there is no good English term to describe Herodotus’s literary role in *The Histories*.<sup>15</sup> Classicist Stephanie West describes Herodotus’s approach to his subject matter as “being generally nearer to a modern journalist’s than we judge appropriate for a serious historian.”<sup>16</sup>

But journalist-historians such as Justin Marozzi look at Herodotus not only as the world's first historian, but also as "its first foreign correspondent, investigative journalist, anthropologist and travel writer. He is an aspiring geographer, a budding moralist, a skillful dramatist, a high-spirited explorer and an inveterate storyteller. He is part learned scholar, part tabloid hack, but always broad-minded, humorous and generous-hearted, which is why he's so much fun. He examines the world around him ... with an unerring eye for thrilling material to inform and amuse, to horrify and entertain."<sup>17</sup>

Herodotus plays to his fifth century Greek audience, an audience not much different from our audiences today, which is why he spends time talking about ants "which are bigger than foxes, although they never reach the size of dogs"<sup>18</sup> or flying snakes: "I went to the part of Arabia fairly near the city of Buto to find out about winged snakes. When I got there, I saw countless snake bones and spines; there were heaps and heaps of spines there — large, medium-sized and smaller ones."<sup>19</sup> Herodotus knows his audiences, and he knows they love stories about individual heroes and their achievements, the bizarre and the sensational. So who can blame this storyteller for wanting to please his audience by emphasizing those kinds of stories?

As Waterfield summarizes: "It would not be difficult to imagine him engaging Pericles or Protagoras in an all-day debate about how to assign blame when a javelin accidentally hits someone."<sup>20</sup> Herodotus goes for a good story no matter who is involved, and people who have no status in the society, so-called "nobodies,"<sup>21</sup> often take center stage — becoming minor celebrities in the process. "He shares the newsman's passion for the great story, the event that captures the mind and expands the limits of experience," says Romm.<sup>22</sup> Marozzi likens Herodotus to "any tabloid newspaper editor who knows sex sells. Herodotus understands his

audiences' desire for titillation ... Herodotus knows he's got to hold the attention of the people sitting cross-legged in front of him with aching backs and pins and needles in their legs. He's got to keep them interested for hours at a time."<sup>23</sup>

Herodotus was a great storyteller, seeing the many different personal narratives of the past as one story of the Persian Wars. The nine books in Herodotus's *The Histories* are, in Waterfield's paraphrase of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a Greek literary critic in the Roman Empire, "a polycentric narrative that moves easily among the different voices, stories and points of view of many individuals from many different lands."<sup>24</sup> Translator Waterfield adds, "He is always willing to pause to note interesting and astonishing phenomena that occur almost as afterthoughts, or parenthetical remarks only tangentially related to the topic at hand."<sup>25</sup>

Herodotus made little distinction, however, between myth and fact.<sup>26</sup> Accuracy wasn't his major concern. His principal criterion: Were the stories he heard, often from informants who had little or no part in battle, worth telling? If the answer was yes, he included them in his histories.<sup>27</sup> Wrote Herodotus, "Anyone who finds such things credible can make of these Egyptian stories what he wishes. My job, throughout this account, is simply to record whatever I am told by each of my sources."<sup>28</sup> He says there are Greek writers, "some from a long time ago, some more recently -- who presented" this doctrine from the Egyptians, "as if it were their own. I know their names, But will not write them down."<sup>29</sup>

Herodotus apparently felt no overriding obligation to ensure his stories were true. He left the decision to believe or not to believe the story with his listener or reader, although he occasionally gave his opinion about the story's veracity.<sup>30</sup> Classicist Francis Godolphin concludes this about Herodotus: "He states flatly that he does not believe everything he has reported, but that it is his duty to recount everything that is said."<sup>31</sup> In Herodotus's words: "I am

obliged to record the things I am told, but I am certainly not required to believe them — this remark may be taken to apply to the whole of my account.”<sup>32</sup> Herodotus seldom asks, “Is it true? How do we know that it is true?”<sup>33</sup> He simply presents the information and lets his audience decide.

In discussing the role of the Argives, the Greek inhabitants of Argos, in the Persian invasion of Greece, for example, Herodotus goes to great pains to explain that “I am not in a position to say with absolute certainty” whether the king of Persia sent a herald with a message to Argos and that an Argive delegation did go to Persia to verify mutual friendship. “The only version of events I am prepared to affirm is the one told by the Argives themselves. I do, however, know this much: if everyone in the world were to bring his own problems along to market with the intention of trading with his neighbors, a glimpse of his neighbors’ problems would make him glad to take back home the ones he came with. In other words, there are worse things in the world than what the Argives did. . . . After all, one can also hear it said that it was actually the Argives who invited the Persians to invade Greece, since they had come off badly in their conflict with the Lacedaemonians [the Greek Spartans] and felt that any situation was preferable to their present distress.”<sup>34</sup>

Herodotus did believe in attribution. He may have been facile and chatty in his oral presentation, but he points out what is research, what is judgment, what is observation, and what information was gained by hearsay:<sup>35</sup> “So far my account of Egypt has been dictated by my own observation, judgment, and investigation, but from now on I will be relating Egyptian accounts, supplemented by what I personally saw.”<sup>36</sup>

Like a conscientious reporter, he went to “great pains to collect the most trustworthy information.”<sup>37</sup> Herodotus wrote, “I wanted to understand these matters as clearly as I could so I

also sailed to Tyre in Phoenicia, since I had heard that there was a sanctuary sacred to Heracles there, and I found that the sanctuary there was very lavishly appointed with a large number of dedicatory offerings ... I talked to the priests of the god there and asked them how long ago the sanctuary was founded, and I discovered they disagreed with the Greek account, because according to them the sanctuary of the god was founded at the same time as Tyre, which was 2,300 years ago ... These enquiries of mine, then, clearly show that Heracles is an ancient god.”<sup>38</sup>

Herodotus also shows the reporter’s skepticism about believing everything one hears. In his reporting on Heracles, he tries to figure out what really happened: “The Greek account of Heracles’s birth is far from being the only thoughtless thing they say. Here is another silly story of theirs about Heracles. They say that when he came to Egypt, the Egyptians crowned him with garlands and led him in a procession with the intention of sacrificing him to Zeus. He did nothing for a while and began to resist only when they were consecrating him at the altar, at which point he massacred them all. Now in my opinion, this Greek tale displays complete ignorance of the Egyptian character and customs. For it is against their religion for Egyptians to sacrifice animals (except for sheep, ritually pure bulls and male calves, and geese), so how could they sacrifice human beings? And how could Heracles kill thousands and thousands of people when he was just one person, and (by their own admission) not yet a god either? Anyway that is all I have to say about this matter; I trust the gods and heroes will look kindly on my words.”<sup>39</sup>

Journalists do their reporting much as Herodotus does in his individual narratives throughout his *Histories*, and they also let the reader or listener interpret what they write and say. Herodotus’s narratives differ in structure, focus, subject matter, and pacing depending on what he is reporting. Some of his narratives “are dramatic, some annalistic, some might have been



written up as tragedies, complete with dialogue, some are straightforward catalogues, or descriptions of battles, political and diplomatic negotiations, or ethnographic surveys,” writes translator and commentator Waterfield. “Whatever interpretive connections may be drawn linking one unit to others, occurring at other points in the *Histories*, Herodotus generally lets us draw on our own. It is up to us to notice structural analogies, thematic echoes or similarities in language or tone that suggest possible comparisons or contrasts to be drawn. . . . Every reader must in the end assess for him or herself how earnest or trustworthy Herodotus is as a reporter of genuine information.”<sup>40</sup>

Herodotus tests “attractive stories by common sense,” writes scholar Gilbert Norwood. But too often “he accepts miraculous accounts, which investigation would have disproved.”<sup>41</sup> He may be a skeptic, but he is not above accepting incredible, improbable exaggerations, adds Usher.<sup>42</sup> What is often forgotten, however, is the time and place in which Herodotus and the other Greek historians lived.

Narrative practices that are suspect today were perfectly acceptable to Herodotus’s audiences and peers who loved a good story nicely told, says Waterfield: “Conversations from foreign lands in the distant past are recounted that neither Herodotus nor his informants probably knew about, motives are described, stories are told from the imagined points of view of their actors, vivid details are supplied that are almost certainly the product of someone’s invention rather than of actual memory.”<sup>43</sup> Herodotus believed that if it was good enough for the legendary epic poet Homer’s narrative of past events and personalities, it was good enough for him.

In some ways, Herodotus and Homer dealt with the myths of the day much like today’s journalist deals with the news. In modern times, writes journalist and academic Jack Lule, news, like myth, “offers the steady repetition of stories, the rhythmic recurrence of themes and

events ... [News and myth] offer and repeat stories. They draw stories from real life. They tell stories that confront issues of social, public life. And they use their stories to instruct and inform. They are moral tales. They warn of disaster and disease, of degeneracy and decay. They tell tales of healing and comfort, of righteousness and reform. They offer dramas of order and disorder, of justice affirmed and justice denied. They present portrayals of heroes and villains, of models to emulate and outcasts to denigrate. News and myth speak to a public and offer stories that shape and maintain and exclude and deny important societal ideas and beliefs... The news still serves as messenger, the news still brings information from near and far. But the news does far more. News offers eternal stories that give meaning and value to life. News dreams the myth onward and gives myth modern dress.”<sup>44</sup>

Like correspondents throughout the centuries, Herodotus too often deals with information in languages he does not understand<sup>45</sup> While traveling outside Greece, any historian was at the mercy of interpreters and guides. Most of the sources of information were oral sources and a good historian played reporter by traveling to the sources, asking questions and writing down the answers he received, according to Marozzi.<sup>46</sup>

It is said that Herodotus’s linguistic abilities were average. Most commentators believe that Herodotus talked to the actual participants in the war. Many of his sources were “men of influence” who would be able to give him the “official view of military events” or “the view of a particular faction,” says classical historian Truesdell S. Brown.<sup>47</sup> Herodotus gives us the specific names of three of his informants, and Pritchett surmises: “It is an easy guess that he got much of his information from the custodians of various cults in the places he visited. He must have developed some technique of interrogation.”<sup>48</sup> Herodotus makes no secret that he is telling stories others have told him — he consistently tells his audience: “it is said” or “they say.” He

quotes anonymous priests at temple sites<sup>49</sup> and identifies hundreds of unnamed speakers he met on his extensive travels by their cities, and he makes sure his audience knows that his information is only as good as his sources. There isn't a reporter in the world who doesn't understand Herodotus's problem. The concept of "unnamed sources" or "anonymous sources" is a significant issue in journalism today, not just in the history books.<sup>50</sup>

Herodotus was dealing with people who had limited knowledge of the past and had their own reasons for telling a story a certain way.<sup>51</sup> Many had defective memories or prejudice that distorted their testimony. Thucydides, the well-known Greek historian who followed Herodotus, criticized his predecessor for relying on "chance passers-by."<sup>52</sup> Anyone who has covered an accident and interviewed eyewitnesses knows that oral testimony is almost always suspect. The more time between the event and the testimony, the less authentic the oral account becomes. Even in antiquity, eyewitness accounts were suspect and not considered on the whole reliable, "especially when witnesses are recalling traumatic incidents."<sup>53</sup> As Thucydides, more the modern reporter than Herodotus, put it: "Combatants can't see everything and only know with difficulty what happens right nearby."<sup>54</sup> Ancients discovered that those who take part in an action may know more than anyone else, but even these eyewitnesses don't know much more than what is happening within their purview.

Religion is used to explain much of what Herodotus reports. Often his sources are oracles ("the earthly pronouncements of the gods"). In this, Herodotus follows Homer's example of describing great wars in which gods help hero-warriors on both sides perform deeds of great courage and valor.<sup>55</sup> It was acceptable propaganda that the gods, if angered, would "visit huge penalties on human arrogance."<sup>56</sup> Myths and legends were a strategic part of the religion and social beliefs that Greeks accepted with the certainty that only faith-based conviction can have.

Herodotus had no reason to question any narrative based on fifth century BCE religious beliefs. Divine powers usually provide the “why” things happened, and Herodotus quotes the gods through an oracle or as seen in a dream or predicted by an omen or a divine sign.<sup>57</sup>

When confronted with complex economic and political reasons for historical events, Herodotus relies on simplistic, usually religious, explanations.<sup>58</sup> Writing about a Persian disaster at sea, Herodotus says: “This all happened by divine will, to reduce the Persians’ numerical advantage and bring their forces down to the level of the Greeks.”<sup>59</sup> Thucydides, writing about a similar incident involving the role of weather in naval warfare, points out that the reason for the Greeks’ naval success is that the commander took into account local weather conditions: “He expected that the Peloponnesians would not be able to remain in formation ... but that the ships would drift into one another and the small craft would cause confusion; and if, as tended to happen at dawn, the wind were to rise and blow out of the gulf ... the Peloponnesian formation would collapse in no time. He thought that the timing of the attack was up to him. He would make it whenever he wanted to because he had the better-manned, better-built ships, and the best time would be when the wind blew up.”<sup>60</sup>

Most of the early historians were torn between their historical mission (to preserve records and accurately chronicle their past) and their literary and artistic mission (glorifying men and gods) necessary to preserve their popularity and fame. Historian Stephen Usher insists that the single quality that makes Herodotus “one of the most readable of ancient writers is constant alternation between material of factual and scientific interest (which he often analyzes and criticizes) and that of phenomena” that excite the imagination and undergo no test of fact or accuracy, or “wonders of the physical world and of human achievement” that take many forms.<sup>61</sup> Herodotus is responsible for amazing stories — a king throws his emerald gold ring into a sea

and retrieves it later from the stomach of a fish prepared for his dinner.

Like modern television journalists, Herodotus never forgot that his purpose was not only to inform, but also to entertain. He not only told the old, tried-and-true stories to his audience, but he also was forced to come up with new material to keep his audiences interested and entertained.<sup>62</sup> If the live audience turned against him, he was in trouble. So he diversified his narrative with speeches and conversations — some real, some made up — and enriched his historical narrative with incredible stories that created heroes and villains often influenced by the gods. It gave the crowd a quick primer on what was good and what was bad, what was inevitable and what was changeable about the human condition.<sup>63</sup> The result was instant success.<sup>64</sup>

Herodotus kept his audience interested with his “insatiable appetite for travel and inquiry” for the purpose “of finding out as much as he could about the Greek and the barbarian worlds.” The only full-length, near-contemporary account of the war between Persia and the Greeks is Herodotus’s nine books, composed between 460 BCE and 430 BCE and based on his travels and oral interviews. The problem is that Herodotus, like many correspondents throughout history, had little personal experience of war or combat.<sup>65</sup> His descriptions of the geography are vastly superior to his descriptions of battle. Herodotus is weak on the political and military history of the Persians because he is reporting events two decades or more after they happened; the people who are giving him information are often unreliable; and few if any had direct access to the “inner counsels of the Persian court and high command. The result is a narrative that will respond, to put it mildly, better to the historical standards of a Tolstoy” or a novelist rather than a historian. Because of this, Herodotus will represent a military or political conflict as a series of personal anecdotes. His personality profiles give the best and sometimes the only source of the Persian invasion, but he never offers a sense of the complete battle, just vignettes and episodes

linked to interesting individuals.<sup>66</sup>

His account of the Battle of Salamis<sup>67</sup> offers an example of the way Herodotus describes a military conflict. In discussing the way the battle starts, he cites three conflicting sources: the Athenian version (one ship became “inextricably entangled with an enemy ship — and so the rest of the Greek fleet joined in by coming to help ....”), the Aeginetans version (“... but the Aeginetans say that it was the ship which had been sent to Aegina ... that started it.”), and “yet another account” that “claims that a ghostly woman appeared and, in a voice that reached every man of the fleet, gave the Greeks their orders, first reprimanding them with the words, ‘Fools, when are you going to stop retreating?’”<sup>68</sup> Herodotus then continues his story of the battle by focusing on two Samians and how they fared in the battle (“I could list the names of a lot of Ionian captains who captured Greek ships, but I will restrict myself to mentioning two Samians ...”).<sup>69</sup> He tries to be honest with the reader-listener: “I am not in a position to say for certain how particular Persians or Greeks fought,” and then offers an exciting vignette on how Artemisia’s ship did in battle.<sup>70</sup> Herodotus continues to show the battle progressing: “Another thing that happened in the thick of the battle was ... .”<sup>71</sup> “According to the Athenians ... .”<sup>72</sup> “Acclaimed with the highest honors in this battle were the Aeginetans, followed by the Athenians, particular individuals who earned names for themselves were ... .”<sup>73</sup> “And so every prediction about the battle came true” including “the statement made in an oracle many years previously about the wrecks which came ashore ... no one in Greece had been able to interpret the prediction... .”<sup>74</sup>

Herodotus qualifies much of what he says: “According to learned Persians, it was the Phoenicians who caused the conflict.”<sup>75</sup> “So this is what the Persians and Phoenicians say, I am not going to come down in favor of this or that account of events, but I will talk about the man

who, to my certain knowledge, first undertook criminal acts of aggression against the Greeks. I will show who it was who did this, and then proceed with the rest of the account. I will cover minor and major human settlements equally, because most of those which were important in the past have diminished in significance by now, and those which were great in my own time were small in times past. I will mention both equally because I know that human happiness never remains long in the same place.”<sup>76</sup> “I know that this is what happened, because I heard it from the Delphians; but the Milesians add certain details.”<sup>77</sup>

Sometimes Herodotus will be transparent about how he got his information (“I was unable to get any information from anyone else. However, I myself traveled ... and saw things with my very own eyes and subsequently made enquiries of others; as a result of these two methods, the very most I could find out was as follows.”<sup>78</sup> “I myself have seen ...”);<sup>79</sup> how he has worked to make sure a story was as accurate as possible (“I would suggest that this is what happened ....”);<sup>80</sup> why he has accepted a certain account (“I cannot vouch for the truth of this story; I am simply recording what is said. Still it might all be true, since I have personally seen ....”);<sup>81</sup> or how he has done the best he could within the limitations of his knowledge and probability (“I cannot say anything about how their negotiations got started, because there is no record of that... .”<sup>82</sup> “No one knows for certain ... I have no idea why the earth — which is, after all, single — has three separate names .... nor can I find out the names ... Anyway, that is enough about all of this”).<sup>83</sup>

Herodotus is an investigative reporter critically evaluating what he sees and hears, and he often assures his audience that what they are hearing is what he believes to be true.<sup>84</sup> He offers different versions of events and may prefer one over the other, but he usually lets the reader decide which one to believe.<sup>85</sup> Herodotus probably had as much difficulty as Thucydides

in writing down speeches verbatim. Like most reporters before recording devices, both historians tried to recreate the speeches capturing as much of the original as possible. Critics believe Thucydides was more accurate and conscientious about doing that than Herodotus.<sup>86</sup>

Herodotus works more as a journalist than anything else. He maintains a respectful distance from his reportage; he often gives two or more accounts of the same incident; and he advises the listener when he has reservations about the story, often just quoting an informant without comment or pointing out that the speaker has reasons for not being believed: “I cannot say for sure what happened next — which of the Ionians proved brave or cowardly in this battle — because everyone blames everyone else.”<sup>87</sup> He sometimes assumes the role of a guide, an informed friend, a sympathetic editor evaluating events from a distance. And like most journalists in modern times, he is given little if any credit for that and is constantly criticized for his lack of trustworthiness, objectivity, and carelessness with the facts.<sup>88</sup> Some even accuse him of making up the bulk of his history and lying about his source citations.<sup>89</sup>

Reporters have been accused throughout history of exploiting tragedy for profit. Ancient historians did the same thing, and Herodotus loved stories of individuals facing great moral dilemmas and divine fury. Many of his stories are written in the form of Greek tragedies.<sup>90</sup> Herodotus has been accused in modern times of being a docudramatist, a novelist, a liar who makes up his sources, a sensationalist, a show-off, and, now, a journalist. But no one will deny that he loves a good story, especially one with astounding facts, and that he would much rather spend time reporting what is going on in the agora, the streets and fields, and the battlefields — all the while looking for a fascinating tidbit, an amazing folk tale, or a shocking anecdote than worry about whether an incident or a personality is important in the scheme of things.<sup>91</sup>

Even in antiquity, Herodotus was a popular target of passionate and strong criticism. He



was attacked for sensationalism and bias, his love of the bizarre, the unusual, the fabulous, the awe-inspiring, and the marvelous. When Thucydides came along with his emphasis on solid reporting of the way things were, the criticisms against Herodotus became louder and noisier.<sup>92</sup>

Years later, the Roman biographer Plutarch's special tract *On the Malice of Herodotus* became, as one critic declared, "the first time in literature of the slashing review that the book under review really had been read." The pamphlet is a "systematic survey of Herodotus, book by book, with the offending passages quoted in full and the critic's outraged and often sarcastic comments following."<sup>93</sup> Plutarch accused Herodotus of prejudice and misrepresentation and likened Herodotus to the drunken Hippoclidides, saying just "like Hippoclidides who stood on his head upon a table and gesticulated with his legs" Herodotus "would dance away the truth and exclaim, 'Herodotus cares not for that.'"<sup>94</sup>

Plutarch pulls no punches as he accuses Herodotus of maligning by insinuation; of exaggeration; of faking impartiality (by citing a person's faults and throwing in a virtue to show he harbors no prejudice); of damning with faint praise and citing irrelevant faults; of being harsher than necessary; of always looking for the worst and choosing the most dishonorable version of an anecdote to damage a reputation; and of being duplicitous by "saying that he does not believe what, of course, he wants a reader to believe."<sup>95</sup> While he praises Herodotus's style for its simplicity and grace, and recognizes his art, he won't forgive him for his prejudices.<sup>96</sup> Plutarch writes that the style of Herodotus "as being simple, free and easily suiting itself to its subject, has deceived many ... for it is not only (as Plato says) an extreme injustice to make a show of being just when one is not so; but it is also the highest malignity to pretend to simplicity and mildness and be in the meantime really most malicious." Plutarch says he feels "obliged to defend our ancestors and the truth against this part of his writings, since those who would detect

all his other lies and fictions would have need of many books.” He calls Herodotus’s malice “more polite and delicate” than other writers, “yet it pinches closer, and makes a more severe impression — not unlike to those winds which, blowing secretly through narrow chinks, are sharper than those that are more diffused.”<sup>97</sup>

Going after Herodotus as modern critics usually go after journalists who show bias in their reporting, Plutarch accuses him of being “an enjoyer of his own fancy in putting the worst construction on things,” and using “odious terms when gentler expressions might do as well.” He points out that Herodotus accused someone as being a fanatic when he is superstitious, or calling someone mad rather than showing “inconsiderateness in speech.”<sup>98</sup> “He delights in speaking evil,”<sup>99</sup> omits some “good and laudable action” maliciously because the omission “happens in a place that is pertinent to the history,”<sup>100</sup> embraces the worst,<sup>101</sup> is “favorable to the barbarians ... deriding the Greeks still further,” and invents information to “detract from the glory of others.”<sup>102</sup>

Plutarch is critical of Herodotus’s habit of telling a story and then saying he doesn’t really believe the story, but that it is up to his audience to decide whether it is true: “They who send forth calumnies obliquely, as if they were shooting arrows out of corners, and then stepping back think to conceal themselves by saying they do not believe what they most earnestly desire to have believed, whilst they disclaim all malice, condemn themselves also of farther disingenuity.”<sup>103</sup> Plutarch analyzes each of *The Histories*’s books in detail to prove his points to his satisfaction. He acknowledges that Herodotus is “an acute writer, his style is pleasant, there is a certain grace, force and elegancy in his narrations ... these things delight, please and affect all men. But as in roses we must beware of the venomous flies called cantharides; so we must take heed of the calumnies and envy lying hid under smooth and well-couched phrases and

expressions, lest we imprudently entertain absurd and false opinions of the most excellent and greatest cities and men of Greece.”<sup>104</sup> Just like investigative journalists today who are vilified for attacking popular public figures, Herodotus is treated to this savage retort by Plutarch because he attacked powerful Greek figures of the past, popular citizens Plutarch respected.

Leading Herodotus’s more modern critics is German classicist Detlev Fehling who doesn’t believe that Herodotus’s source citations are real. He calls Herodotus a liar and a fraud, someone who invented stories and put words into his informants’ mouths.<sup>105</sup> “Bluntly speaking, Herodotus’ statements as to his sources are just too reasonable to be true...the events recounted are not real events, but unhistorical or fabulous stories,” Fehling claims.<sup>106</sup> “Herodotus’s careful avoidance of personally vouching for the truth of something miraculous...should leave us in no doubt that he is far from believing in such things himself,” and this excuses him from “recounting things that no reasonable person would believe.”<sup>107</sup> Fehling says Herodotus citing multiple sources for one story produces “a powerful illusion” that these “different and variously interrelated reports are being collected by the author’s tireless and wide-ranging investigations and pieced together into a single picture....” “The more unlikely the story, the stronger the confirmation has to be.”<sup>108</sup>

Fehling says Herodotus’s admission that there are things he does not know gives him a credibility that isn’t warranted.<sup>109</sup> He even questions if Herodotus went on many of the travels he claims and thinks of him as a “wandering intellectual whose means of subsistence were his own mental powers.”<sup>110</sup> Fehling concludes that Herodotus is a pseudo-historian.<sup>111</sup> Others have called him “a rhapsodist in prose.”<sup>112</sup> So why not call him a journalist, who while not living up to the high standards of being a historian, certainly deserves credit as a workmanship journalist who did a credible job of reporting on the war between Greek city states and the gigantic invading

army of the Persian empire, and how, against all odds, the Greeks claimed victory.

For Fehling, nothing in Herodotus's *Histories* is accurate. Everything, from his informants to his numbers to his narratives is all lies, pure invention. His attack is concentrated on the folk tales and legends. Those refuting Fehling — and there are many — believe his indictment would apply to all of classical literature since early Greek history was based on sacred and profane myths and legends. Explorers for centuries have followed Herodotus's text, confirming much of what he wrote. Excavations and explorations have verified his reporting. Specialists in history, archaeology, monuments, ethnography, and anthropology also have written of Herodotus's veracity.

It also seems churlish to criticize Herodotus for conforming to the culture, customs, and history of his time.<sup>113</sup> Pritchett says, "His interest was in traditions, whether oral or written, which relate the fortunes of people in the past, or describe events, not necessarily human, that are said to have occurred at real places. Such legends contain a mixture of truth and falsehood; for were they wholly true, they would not be legends, but histories." Pritchett adds that an element of the miraculous also is involved. "Folk tales, on the other hand, are generally understood as narratives handed down at first by word of mouth from generation to generation, narratives which, though they describe actual occurrences, are in fact purely imaginary." Herodotus passes these stories down by finding people "who could recite and repeat verbatim an unbelievable assortment without any written source."<sup>114</sup>

Herodotus did not invent the legends. He verified what he could by visiting the places where it was said the legends took place and he "embellished them in a simple style" which "charmed his audience."<sup>115</sup> That audience believed in folk tales and superstitions. It was part of their faith-based interpretation of the world.<sup>116</sup> The defenders of Herodotus claim those who

attack him “in a rationalist frenzy treat Herodotus with the same kind of patronizing and dismissive contempt that Victorian missionaries reserved for Haitian voodoo.”<sup>117</sup>

Ancient Greeks not only believed Homer’s epic was a record of actual events in the heroic past, but they also believed in the validity of Herodotus’s narratives of the recent past. It is essential to place Herodotus in his cultural milieu in which the legends existed and he recorded them. “Societies in generations much later than that of Herodotus and nearer in time to our own have believed in stories, which seem to us incredibly fantastic,” writes Pritchett.<sup>118</sup> The audience listening to Herodotus knew much of what he was saying and “if he had made errors of such magnitude as claimed, it is astonishing that such alleged blunders have left no trace in the subsequent record of such a critical and unforgiving people . . . If we adopt the position of the liar school, Herodotus was contradicting history about matters in which he knew he would be found out,” stories and information that any Athenian would have known to be incorrect.<sup>119</sup> Common sense and logic show that couldn’t be the case. If Herodotus were making it all up, certainly contemporary audiences who heard his narratives during his lifetime would have exposed him as a charlatan rather than a valuable reporter.<sup>120</sup> Why would he lie to people who would know he was lying? To say citing various sources as his authority would add to the deception is also gratuitous. “It would be a sham if, after telling a pack of needless lies, obvious to all, he pretended that he was speaking the truth,” says Pritchett.<sup>121</sup>

The question of whether Herodotus was a historian or a storyteller of fiction bothers modern scholars. Ancient historiography, they say, should aim to tell the truth, to chronicle things that actually happened, and to establish their causes. If that historian does not tell the truth, “there can only be three explanations: error, dishonesty or misconception of history’s true function.”<sup>122</sup> Literary critics are more lenient in their judgment — there are many sorts of truth,

and what's wrong with some of it being fiction? Historians believe that there must be solid fact underneath the literary text to qualify as history. Both camps want to distinguish between truth and falsehood.

Historian Charles Williams Fornara says Herodotus tried to be more than simply “the reporter of tradition.” But he realized that much of what he heard was “tainted by favoritism,” and that, like Thucydides who came after him, it was difficult for him to ascertain the truth. Both “assumed the right to picture a scene consistently with the reports of witnesses or common knowledge.”<sup>123</sup> His research “reflected a sharply reduced image of the reality, with many of its features obliterated, so his account more closely approached the actuality (as pictured) by the refraction of that image and the restoration of the features.” Herodotus was forced to use imaginative recreation and to create elaborations based on the evidence he collected. “Everything from needful circumstantial detail to the virtual reproduction of the thoughts of leading figures was injected into the historical narrative, often on mere grounds of probability,” adds Fornara.<sup>124</sup>

The problem with Herodotus and other ancient historians is that they try to do both — perpetuate epic narrative and interpretation while looking for factual truth. Characterizing who they are and what they do in modern terms is not easy. Herodotus promises to record “wonderful” achievements that will appeal to his audience’s sense of wonder and much of his material is mind-boggling. He refuses to pass judgment on what is true and what is false. By doing that, he can tell all sorts of stories “without exposing himself to the charge of untruth.” Herodotus is very conscious of the problem of truth and seems to worry about it in print more than any other Greek historian. But he seems to want it both ways — he loves the sensational because it entertains his listeners, but he also wants to distance himself from it, “and make a distinction between myth and solid, verifiable history.”<sup>125</sup>

Yet Homer remains his model. This becomes a problem for Herodotus and many ancient historians. “The imitation reveals itself in such things as the choice of theme: war; the characterization of the theme; the mask or *persona* of the historian (a complex amalgam of epic poet, epic hero in general and Odysseus in particular, hence both ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ the narrative); the size of the work; the expansiveness and digressiveness of treatment; language, vocabulary, rhythms; introduction into the narrative of dramatized conferences and conversations; epic representation of battle scenes; formal ‘catalogues’ of opposing forces; direct divine input into human affairs; general moral and theological stance.”<sup>126</sup> If a historian imitates a non-historian, it doesn’t matter if it is because of homage, rivalry, style, or familiar, if comforting, stereotypes. Factual distortion is certain. Herodotus balanced that by sometimes rejecting Homeric material<sup>127</sup> and emphasizing autopsy (seeing for one’s self) and other reportorial skills. Herodotus thus combines history with literature, “embracing true things, false things, things of indeterminate status, great things and small things, things both of the remote past and of historical times, things both Greek and barbarian; vast in scope yet with an ever narrowing focus, concerned with both the documentation of a great mass of specifics...its tone Homerically objective, intensely personal, dispassionate, involved, uncritical, rigorous, serious, entertaining. Who said Herodotus was simple?”<sup>128</sup>

Ancient historians who followed Herodotus were convinced that the aim of history was to give pleasure with “exciting events, great dramas, bizarre exotica.”<sup>129</sup> Their audiences didn’t really worry much about truth, accuracy, or fairness. They wanted a show, not the mere recording of facts and figures. So it is obvious that ancient historians say things they know are false. Herodotus was sarcastically referred to as the father of lies, quoting eyewitnesses about things they could have never seen, inventing and manipulating factual material. Herodotus did it

primarily to “spin a good yarn,” but also to “make moral points or bring out broader patterns or causes behind complicated sequences of events.” Was the concept of truth different in antiquity than it is in modern times?<sup>130</sup> We still have a less strict standard for accuracy and logic when it comes to an oral presentation (or in today’s fastest way to communicate — the Internet). But certain things are constant: the veracity of eyewitnesses and evidence, conflict of sources, chronological inaccuracy, dramatic exaggeration and truth and falsehood as well as the obvious question: did the event take place or not, and was it described as it happened or as the writer wished it had happened?<sup>131</sup> When Herodotus insists that he is telling the truth, do we believe him? And was he being honest with himself? “No serious ancient historian was so tied to specific factual truth that he would not sometimes help general truths along by manipulating, even inventing ‘facts’... the relationship of ancient historiography to external reality is shifting, ambiguous, multifaceted, messy; in those respects at least, like life itself.”<sup>132</sup>

The problem is more relevant for historians than for journalists. Everything Herodotus is accused of cuts to the core of what a historian is. Being a journalist doesn’t have the grand pretensions of being a historian. The working reporter and correspondent simply do the best they can to present a picture of the ways things are and the way things were. They can always change what they say has happened as new information comes in. They care most about their audience because that is their bread and butter, and their major concern is having their story heard or read because without an audience, they have no purpose. They are not writing for posterity. They are writing for the moment. To educate, to inform, to entertain, to try to be as accurate and fair as possible — that is the goal of modern journalism, but sometimes, journalists throughout history have failed at meeting that test, sacrificing accuracy and fairness for sensationalism, for fabulous stories that captured the imagination of the public. But they were still called journalists, perhaps



reviled and mistreated, hated and scorned, but journalists nevertheless. It seems that the ancient historians fare better when labeled as journalists.

Herodotus set the stage for Thucydides who created a new standard for history — and journalism. Herodotus created, up to that time, one of the great compilations of “human and documentary evidence” about war<sup>133</sup> in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Thucydides decided to write contemporary, not ancient, history because he believed that “contemporary history is the only history worthy of the name because it is the only form in which the historian has a reasonable chance of discovering the truth.”<sup>134</sup> Like a foreign correspondent, he was “a contemporary of the events he describes.” As Godolphin says, “If he has, on occasion, failed to get the facts, he nevertheless makes it clear any failure is not caused by lack of effort on his part.”<sup>135</sup> Thucydides is said to have never played fast and loose with the facts.<sup>136</sup>

Thucydides’s work is also closer to journalism than history. Until Thucydides, Usher writes, “The past, not the present had been regarded as the historian’s proper province.” But Thucydides wanted to get his information first-hand. He wanted to be both participant and observer. His accounts of battles have a ring of authenticity, “free from malice and self-righteousness that the memoirs of generals so frequently contain.”<sup>137</sup> Like any good reporter, Thucydides did not apologize or prettify the evil that his countrymen did. “To his impartial eye, it matters little whether they are his countrymen or not,” writes Norwood. The horrors of war and what it does to any human being is described with great candor in one passage after another.<sup>138</sup> Here is the reporter in the midst of a military campaign, not the historian looking back at a historic battle years after the event took place, relying on dubious sources.

Thucydides relied on his own observations and informed sources, but he doesn’t “tell us when he was an eyewitness and when he was not...no informants are named, no reasons given

for choosing one version of a story rather than another”<sup>139</sup> Thucydides seems to offer such an honest and unbiased account, however, that few doubt its authenticity. He uses all of the tools modern war correspondents use — informed sources, eyewitness accounts, personal observations — and like today’s foreign correspondent, his dispatches are accepted as valid because he is a trusted reporter. We rely on his integrity even though there is little in the text itself to support that premise.

Like Herodotus, Thucydides was more the “artful reporter” than the historian, and like Herodotus, he created a way of working that journalists have emulated throughout the centuries, a way of reporting that is consistent with the way journalism has been practiced since ancient times, creating an image of the journalist in popular culture that is as valid today as it was then.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*. *Humours Town* in 1693 (Epistle-Writer or Journalists-Mercurists). After the French *journaliste*. In 1712, Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, No. 323, p. 2, “One who journalizes, or keeps a journal.” From the French *journalisme*, 1781. *Journal* is from the 1355 “book of church services,” from the Anglo-French *jurnal* “a day,” from O. Fr. *journal*, originally “daily” from L.L. *diurnalis* “daily” or *diurnal*. Sense of “daily record of transactions” first recorded in 1565; that of “personal diary” in 1610. Used in 1833 in English. Some information from *Online Etymology Dictionary*.

<sup>2</sup> Fornara, Charles Williams, *The Nature of History in Ancient Greece and Rome*, pp. 1-2. Ancient journalists were involved in five types of historical writing that came into existence by the end of the fifth century BCE:

\*genealogy or mythography – the heroic tradition, legend, and myth.

\*ethnography – description of foreign lands and peoples, presenting a general picture of a people’s mode of life within the setting of their natural and historical environment.

\*history as the ancients defined it, a description of men’s needs.

\*local history or horography setting down the year-by-year record of a city-state from the time of its creation. “The local historians suited their style to their subject and adopted the persona of the antiquarian,” (p. 22-23).

\*chronography – the calibration of events taking place in different parts of the civilized world.

<sup>3</sup> Pritchett, W. Kendrick, *The Liar School of Herodotus*, p. 353.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 353.

<sup>5</sup> Herodotus’s *The Histories*, Book 1 Introduction. Robin Waterfield translation, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Aeschylus’s *Persians*. Lembke and Herington translation, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Waterfield, Introduction, p. x.

<sup>8</sup> Norwood, Gilbert, *The Writers of Greece*, pp. 14, 116. Brown, p. 33.

<sup>9</sup> Waterfield, introduction, p. x.

<sup>10</sup> Usher, p. 23; Brown, p. 47; Waterfield, p. xi.

<sup>11</sup> Waterfield, p. xi.

<sup>12</sup> Waterfield, Robin,, *Herodotus The Histories, a New Translation*, introduction, pp. xix-xxii.

<sup>13</sup> Waterfield, introduction, p. xxviii.

<sup>14</sup> Pritchett, pp. 7-8.

<sup>15</sup> Romm, James, *Herodotus*, p. 8: “In keeping with the spirit of mythic history, I have tried to avoid calling Herodotus a historian, even though the term usually provokes no objection when applied to him by scholars. History may be his subject matter, but his approach to the subject differs from that of historians as we know them. Barbara Tuchman responded to the label “historian” by “insisting that she was a journalist who happened to write about history.”

<sup>16</sup> West, Stephanie, “Herodotus and Olbia,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 142, The British Academy, 2007, pp. 80-81. “An assurance and a confident use of detail suggesting an eye-witness are part of his stock-in-trade, his approach to his subject matter being generally nearer to a modern journalist’s than we judge appropriate to a serious historian.”

<sup>17</sup> Marozzi, Justin, *The Way of Herodotus: Travels With the Man Who Invented History*, p. 7. Another journalist who used Herodotus as a modern guide is Ryszard Kapuscinski. In his book, *Travels With Herodotus*, translated from the Polish by Klara Glowczewska, he writes: “We do not know in what guise Herodotus traveled...he is a reporter, an anthropologist, an ethnographer, a historian. ... this wandering of his is no picaresque, carefree passage from one place to another. Herodotus’s journeys are purposeful – they are the means by which he hopes to learn about the world and its inhabitants to gather the knowledge he will feel compelled, later, to describe,” pp. 79-80.

<sup>18</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 3:102. Waterfield translation, p. 212.

<sup>19</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 2: 75. Waterfield translation, p. 124.

<sup>20</sup> Waterfield, introduction, p. xxxviii.

<sup>21</sup> Waterfield, introduction, p. xl.

<sup>22</sup> Romm, p. 115. “Any writer of history must also be, to some degree, the teller of a story; indeed the word ‘story’ originated as an abbreviated form of ‘history,’ and the two words remained fused in Italian *storia* and French *histoire*. For Herodotus, the history of the Greek conflict with Persia was, among other things, a great story: it had colorful, exotic scenery, larger-than-life characters, thrilling action, and an ending that, at the time it actually occurred at least, had come as an enormous surprise. What is more, this vast and sweeping story gave room for the inclusion of dozens of smaller tales, some no more than a sentence or two in length, others occupying many pages of Greek text, some intimately connected to the main ‘plot line,’ others so distant from it as to be no more than footnotes or parentheses. These shorter tales reveal a side of Herodotus’s work that has captivated its readers from the first – or perhaps ‘listeners’ would be more accurate...The word ‘story’ also carries a somewhat different connotation in the field of journalism, and in this sense, too, it applies to the tales of *The Histories*. When newspaper reporters say, for example, that a certain event makes a great story, they mean not only that they can generate articles about it, but that its oddity, its emotional impact, or the larger truths that it captures makes it an object of fascination to an entire society. Above all, it is novelty that attracts us to such ‘news’ stories: we are irresistibly drawn to the spectacle of things never seen before or things done on a bigger or more extreme scale than ever. Although Herodotus’s concerns in *The Histories* go far beyond those of a journalist, he shares the newsman’s passion for the great story, the event that captures the mind and expands the limits of experience. Time and again he refers to individuals as ‘the first we know of’ to have done something and to events as “the greatest we know of,” ‘the only time we know of’ and so on. These expressions have led one recent writer to compare Herodotus’s text, in one aspect, to the *Guinness Book of World Records*, in that both preserve the most extraordinary and extreme human achievements of their day. It’s a suggestive analogy but needs to be qualified in this way: for Herodotus, as for the best journalists, firsts and mosts are not significant simply because they are record-breakers, but because of the insights they offer into human life or even the natural and divine worlds surrounding it.” pp. 114-115.

<sup>23</sup> Marozzi, p. 7. “*The Histories* were written to be read aloud, probably in symposia around the Greek world, the fifth-century BCE equivalent of a high-toned series of Reith Lectures or a talk and book-signing at a literary festival.”

<sup>24</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a Greek literary critic in the Roman Empire, comments are paraphrased by Waterfield, introduction, p. xii.

<sup>25</sup> Waterfield, introduction, pp. xvi-xvii.

<sup>26</sup> Godolphin, Francis R.B., *The Greek Historians*, p. xxi.

<sup>27</sup> Usher, Stephen, *The Historians of Greece and Rome*, pp. 4-5. Usher writes that Herodotus had “little concern for truth.”

<sup>28</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 2.123.1 Robin Waterfield translation, p. 144.

<sup>29</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 2.123.1 Robin Waterfield translation, p. 144.

<sup>30</sup> Usher, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> Godolphin, p. xxi.

<sup>32</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 7. 152. Robin Waterfield translation, p. 457.

<sup>33</sup> Waterfield, p. xxvii.

<sup>34</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 7.152.1. Robin Waterfield translation, p. 457.

<sup>35</sup> Norwood, p. 120.

<sup>36</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 2.99. Robin Waterfield translation, p. 132.

<sup>37</sup> Norwood, p. 120.

<sup>38</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 2:44. Robin Waterfield translation, p. 113.

<sup>39</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 2:45. Robin Waterfield translation, pp. 113-114.

<sup>40</sup> Waterfield, pp. xx, xxxv.

<sup>41</sup> Norwood, p. 121.

<sup>42</sup> Usher, pp. 6-7.

<sup>43</sup> Waterfield, introduction, p. xxvii.

<sup>44</sup> Lule, Jack, *Daily News, Eternal Stories: The Mythological Role of Journalism*, pp. 19-21, p. 201.

<sup>45</sup> Norwood, p. 121.

<sup>46</sup> Marozzi often refers to Herodotus as the journalist who adds “a wonderfully vivid piece of reportage,” p. 209. Marozzi relates the “breathless story of how Delphi managed to withstand Xerxes’ invasion of 480 BCE, starting with the miraculous appearance of ‘sacred weapons’ in front of the shrine.” Either Herodotus “has been taken in by the priestly propaganda or he’s happy to recycle the myth to entertain his audience...the Persian troops panicked and were cut down by the Delphians as they fled. The great shrine and its untold wealth were saved. Then the travel writer-journalist’s final flourish. The I’ve-been-there-myself-moment: ‘The rocks which fell from Parnassus were still there in my time; they lay in the enclosure around the shrine of Pronaea, where they embedded themselves after crashing through the Persian troops.’” p. 231.

<sup>47</sup> Brown, Truesdell, S., *The Greek Historians*, p. 40.

<sup>48</sup> The three are Archias the Spartan (Herodotus, *The Histories*, 3.55.2), Tymnes at Olbia (4.76.6) and Thersander of Orchomenos (9.16.1). He also seems to have spoken to the three priestesses at Dodona (2.55.3), Pritchett, p. 345.

<sup>49</sup> Marozzi writes, “Herodotus is going on what he’s told and he’s doing his best to track down the most reliable sources available....As a rule he’s careful to attribute the information to the priests. ‘There were other things, too, which I learnt at Memphis in conversation with the priests of Hephaestus, and I actually went to Thebes and Heliopolis for the express purpose of finding out if the priests in those cities would agree in what they told me with the priests at Memphis,’ he writes. Not unlike a journalist corroborating his sources.” p. 143.

<sup>50</sup> Waterfield, introduction, p. xxix. “Several hundred times he cites unnamed speakers by their cities: Spartans, Corinthians, Athenians, and many other mainland Greeks; Greeks and non-Greeks from the north and Asia Minor like Macedonians, Thracians, Scythians, Taurians, Samians, Carians, Phoenicians and Syrians; and non-Greek interlocutors from farther off as well: Egyptians, of course, but also Chaldeans, Arabians, Ethiopians and many others.”

<sup>51</sup> Waterfield, introduction, pp. xxxi-xxxii.

<sup>52</sup> Moles, J.L., “Truth and Untruth in Herodotus and Thucydides” Chapter Three in Christopher Gill and T.P. Wiseman, *Lies and Fiction in the Ancient World*, p. 106.

<sup>53</sup> Marincola, John, *Greek Historians*, p. 64.

<sup>54</sup> Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, Book 7.44.1. Translated by Walter Blanco, pp. 290-291.

<sup>55</sup> Usher, pp. 17-21.

<sup>56</sup> Godolphin, p. xxii.

<sup>57</sup> Waterfield, introduction, p. xxxvi.

<sup>58</sup> Norwood, p. 121.

<sup>59</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 8:13. Robin Waterfield translation, p. 493.

<sup>60</sup> Norwood, p. 121. Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, translated by Walter Blanco, Book 2:84, p. 91.

<sup>61</sup> Usher, p. 7.

<sup>62</sup> Waterfield, p. xxii: Points out that the initial deliveries of the *Histories* were probably oral – no footnotes. Herodotus “read material aloud to a variety of audiences scattered widely throughout the Greek world. One of his most important tasks as a traveling savant would have been to make connections, to add material, to show linkages between things his audiences had not known were connected....Thus, when he came to something relevant that his immediate audience might not know, he simply stopped, added it and went on. ...much information has been preserved simply because Herodotus thought it would interest one or another of his audiences. But the effect on the narrative is odd...the main narrative thread looks at times as though it is merely a formal device that Herodotus exploits so as to pursue his real goal, the addition of new, extraneous material –rather as a clothesline’s principal function is to provide support for the various articles suspended from it.”

<sup>63</sup> Usher, p. 22.

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- <sup>64</sup> Brown, p. 25.
- <sup>65</sup> Brown, p. 41.
- <sup>66</sup> Aeschylus, *Persians*. Lembke and Herington translation p. 7.
- <sup>67</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 8:76-96. Waterfield translation, pp. 513-520.
- <sup>68</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 8:84. Waterfield translation, p. 515.
- <sup>69</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 8:85. Waterfield translation, pp. 515-516.
- <sup>70</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 8:87. Waterfield translation, p. 516.
- <sup>71</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 8:90. Waterfield translation, p. 517.
- <sup>72</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 8:94. Waterfield translation, p. 519.
- <sup>73</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 8:93. Waterfield translation, pp. 518-519.
- <sup>74</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 8:96. Waterfield translation, p. 520.
- <sup>75</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 1:1. Waterfield translation, p. 3.
- <sup>76</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 1:5. Waterfield translation, pp. 4-5.
- <sup>77</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 1:20. Waterfield translation, p. 10.
- <sup>78</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 2:29. Waterfield translation, p. 105.
- <sup>79</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 6:47. Waterfield translation, p. 368.
- <sup>80</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 2: 56. Waterfield translation, p. 118.
- <sup>81</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 4:195. Waterfield translation, p. 300.
- <sup>82</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 8:128. Waterfield translation, p. 532.
- <sup>83</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 4:45. Waterfield translation, pp. 249-250. Also, Herodotus expert Godolphin adds the following phrases used by Herodotus to show where he got his information: “These words the Lydians wrote down...” “What the language of the Pelasgi was, I cannot say with any certainty...” “The following is the way in which Sardis was taken.” “Among many proofs which I shall bring forward...” “Of their customs, whereof I shall now proceed to give an account...” “But the greatest wonder of all that I saw in the land after the city itself, I will now proceed to mention...” “That these were the real facts I learnt at Memphis from the priests...” “Now with regard to mere human matters, the accounts which they gave, and in which all agreed, were the following...” “What they said of their country seemed to me very reasonable...” “Thus, I give credit to those from whom I received this account of Egypt...” “Here I take my leave of the opinions of the Ioanians and proceed to deliver my own sentiments on these subjects.” “The second opinion is even more unscientific than the one just mentioned and also, if I may so say, more marvelous...the third explanation, which is very much more plausible than either of the others, is positively the furthest from the truth...” “The following tale is commonly told in Egypt...” “This was what I hear from the priests...” Godolphin, pp. 20, 23, 37, 82-83, 93-94, 96, 98, 100, 114.
- <sup>84</sup> Waterfield, introduction, pp. xxix-xxx.
- <sup>85</sup> Marincola, p. 74.
- <sup>86</sup> Marincola, pp. 77-78.
- <sup>87</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 6:14. Waterfield translation, p. 357.
- <sup>88</sup> Waterfield, introduction, pp. xxx-xxxii.
- <sup>89</sup> Harris, William, *Ancient Literacy*, p. 80. “Herodotus freely invents texts” in the 420s. “Fourth-century orators and politicians frequently invented historical facts in a most abandoned fashion, and historians avoided documentary research.” p. 81.
- <sup>90</sup> Moles, p. 112.
- <sup>91</sup> Waterfield, introduction, p. xviii.
- <sup>92</sup> Marincola, pp. 37-38. “Throughout antiquity, Herodotus was a common target of criticism and polemic... Thucydides, by contrast, was held up as the greatest historian and was only rarely criticized. Critics pointed to two faults of Herodotus above all: partiality and sensationalism” and “The other feature for which Herodotus was consistently faulted was his love of the unusual and the marvelous.” Marincola points out that much of Herodotus’s narrative includes large portions of the mythic or fabulous, “which is neither probable nor true.”

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- <sup>93</sup> Barrow, R.H., *Plutarch and His Times*, p. 157.
- <sup>94</sup> Plutarch, *On the Malice of Herodotus*, 33, in *Plutarch's Moralia – Plutarch's Miscellanies and Essays*. Translated from the Greek, corrected and revised by William W. Goodwin, p. 356. Chapter 43, the final chapter, summarizes the indictment of Herodotus by claiming that Herodotus fails to give the Greeks credit for valiant deeds. Plutarch offers as examples of Herodotus's bias, four major engagements between Greeks and barbarians: Naval Battle of Artemisium, Land Battle of Thermopylae, Naval Battle of Salamis, and the Land Battle of Plataea.
- <sup>95</sup> Barrow, p. 157.
- <sup>96</sup> Atkins, J.W. H., *Literary Criticism in Antiquity: A Sketch of Its Development: Volume II, Greco-Roman*, p. 319.
- <sup>97</sup> Plutarch, *On the Malice of Herodotus*, 1. Goodwin edition, p. 331.
- <sup>98</sup> Plutarch, *On the Malice of Herodotus*, 2. Goodwin edition, p. 332.
- <sup>99</sup> Plutarch, *On the Malice of Herodotus*, 3, Goodwin edition, p. 332.
- <sup>100</sup> Plutarch, *On the Malice of Herodotus*, 4. Goodwin edition, p. 332.
- <sup>101</sup> Plutarch, *On the Malice of Herodotus*, 5. Goodwin edition, p. 333.
- <sup>102</sup> Plutarch, *On the Malice of Herodotus*, 12, 38-39. Goodwin edition, pp. 335, 362.
- <sup>103</sup> Plutarch, *On the Malice of Herodotus*, 8. Goodwin edition, p. 334.
- <sup>104</sup> Plutarch, *On the Malice of Herodotus*, 43. Goodwin edition, pp. 370-371.
- <sup>105</sup> Fehling, Detlev, *Herodotus and his 'Sources': Citation, Invention and Narrative Art*. Translated from the German by J.G. Howie., pp. 1-11.
- <sup>106</sup> Fehling, p. 13.
- <sup>107</sup> Fehling, p. 104.
- <sup>108</sup> Fehling, pp. 113-115.
- <sup>109</sup> Fehling, p. 125.
- <sup>110</sup> Fehling, p. 259.
- <sup>111</sup> Fehling, pp. 155, 181, 255.
- <sup>112</sup> Pritchett, p. 191, Quotes F. Hartog in *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History* as saying on p. 364: "The father of history is not a historian," but a rhapsodist in prose.
- <sup>113</sup> Pritchett, pp. 35-36, 80-81, 127, 130-131, 226-230, 265-266.
- <sup>114</sup> Pritchett, pp. 268-269.
- <sup>115</sup> This was not unlike the early journalism of the Western United States. Most subscribed to the line in a piece of fiction, "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend," as immortalized in the 1962 film, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*.
- <sup>116</sup> Pritchett, p. 336.
- <sup>117</sup> Pritchett, pp. 352.
- <sup>118</sup> Pritchett, pp. 286-287.
- <sup>119</sup> Pritchett, pp. 327-328.
- <sup>120</sup> Waterfield, introduction, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv.
- <sup>121</sup> Pritchett, p. 330.
- <sup>122</sup> Moles, p. 90.
- <sup>123</sup> Fornara, p. 134.
- <sup>124</sup> Fornara, pp. 134-135.
- <sup>125</sup> Moles, pp. 90-96.
- <sup>126</sup> Moles, p. 97.
- <sup>127</sup> Moles, pp. 97-98.
- <sup>128</sup> Moles, p. 98.
- <sup>129</sup> Moles, p. 102.
- <sup>130</sup> Moles, p. 115.
- <sup>131</sup> Moles, pp. 118-119.
- <sup>132</sup> Moles, p. 121.

<sup>133</sup> Norwood, p. 123.

<sup>134</sup> Usher pp. 28-29.

<sup>135</sup> Godolphin, p. xxiii

<sup>136</sup> Godolphin, p. xxvi.

<sup>137</sup> Usher, pp. 23-24.

<sup>138</sup> Norwood, p. 128. Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, translated by Walter Blanco, Book 3: 70-83, is a good example of Thucydides's war reporting, pp. 127-131.

<sup>139</sup> Usher, p. 26.

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