



The Histories: The Landmark Herodotus

Herodotus, *Andrea L. Purvis* (Translator), *Rosalind Thomas* (Introduction), *Robert B. Strassler*

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From the editor of the widely praised *The Landmark Thucydides*, a new Landmark Edition of *The Histories* by *Herodotus*, the greatest classical work of history ever written.

Herodotus was a Greek historian living in Ionia during the fifth century BCE. He traveled extensively through the lands of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea and collected stories, and then recounted his experiences with the varied people and cultures he encountered. Cicero called him “the father of history,” and his only work, *The Histories*, is considered the first true piece of historical writing in Western literature. With lucid prose that harks back to the time of oral tradition, Herodotus set a standard for narrative nonfiction that continues to this day.

In *The Histories*, Herodotus chronicles the rise of the Persian Empire and its dramatic war with the Greek city-states. Within that story he includes rich veins of anthropology, ethnography, geology, and geography, pioneering these fields of study, and explores such universal themes as the nature of freedom, the role of religion, the human costs of war, and the dangers of absolute power.

Ten years in the making, *The Landmark Herodotus* gives us a new, dazzling translation by Andrea L. Purvis that makes this remarkable work of literature more accessible than ever before. Illustrated, annotated, and filled with maps, this edition also includes an introduction by Rosalind Thomas and twenty-one appendices written by scholars at the top of their fields, covering such topics as Athenian government, Egypt, Scythia, Persian arms and tactics, the Spartan state, oracles, religion, tyranny, and women.

Like *The Landmark Thucydides* before it, *The Landmark Herodotus* is destined to be the most readable and comprehensively useful edition of *The Histories* available.

The Histories: The Landmark Herodotus Details

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From Reader Review The Histories: The Landmark Herodotus for online ebook

umberto says

I think I would like to invite my Goodreads friends to browse any Book you like, then take heart to start with Book I as the inception of the whole inquiry unthinkable to those Greek scholars at that time, but Herodotus could make it and you cannot help admiring him when you read his famous preamble:

Herodotus of Halicarnassus here displays his inquiry, so that human achievements may not become forgotten in time, and great and marvellous deeds -- some displayed by Greeks, some by barbarians -- may not be without their glory; and especially to show why the two people fought each other. (p. 4)

This preamble, I think, in the 1970 edition may entice you as well:

HERODOTUS of Halicarnassus, his Researches are here set down to preserve the memory of the past by putting on record the astonishing achievements both of our own and of other peoples; and more particularly, to show how they came into conflict. (p. 41)

Moreover, the one in this 1988 edition published by the University of Chicago Press is also interesting:

I, Herodotus of Harlicarnassus, 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 all this, the reason why they fought one another. (p. 33)

First of all, don't be intimidated by its length, that is, 543 pages in the 1996 Penguin edition, please find any translation you're familiar with its style or wording then keep reading a few pages once in a while, don't hope to finish it in a few days/weeks since it's one of the masterpieces in ancient history, you need time to think, take notes and ask yourself why.

Secondly, this is definitely his magnum opus for posterity of all nations to read, reflect and interpret in terms of reciprocal toleration as fellow human beings so that we learn not to make unthinkable mistakes again. In many engagements there, you can witness various unimaginably ruthless deeds instigated by the powers that be, fate and godlike valour of those true Greek and Persian soldiers. Those fallen heroes including all innumerable soldiers killed in various battles deserve our respect with awe, admiration and gratitude as our exemplary models of humankind.

And finally, scholars should honour and keep him in mind since Cicero called him 'the father of history' and we can enjoy reading his second to none narrative. However, some chapters might not be interesting when he sometime told us about the flora/fauna seemingly unrelated to the looming hostilities. I take them as relaxing moments and we can learn from what he told us frankly and good-humoredly. Those ruthless war scenes, for instance from Chapter 20 onwards in Book IX, are amazingly described to the extent that we can visualize such ruthless gory scenes with increasingly stupefying horror in which it is hopelessly put into words.

That's it and I think I would reread the University of Chicago version for solace and advice in there

whenever I'm free from work. It'd teach us of course to mind our own business, be kind, have mercy towards our fellow colleagues, friends, cousins, etc. since we all have limited time to live on earth.

Note: In fact, I have another Penguin copy with its front cover showing a painted vase depicting two soldiers in action (Persian vs. Greek), not this one so the page numbers as mentioned above may vary. Therefore, I've reposted my review since I don't know how to return to its previous book cover.

Brian says

It wasn't just Vollmann's fourth reference to Herodotus in a span of 20 pages in *Rising Up and Rising Down*, it was the reality and shame that I'm in my 40s and the most I know about the war between Persia and the Hellenic city states is what I learned from the movie *300*. Thus, *The Histories*.

First: I can't imagine what it would have been like reading these nine books by Herodotus in any format other than this simply amazingly researched and presented volume. *The Landmark* has to be the final word on Herodotus: the maps, the footnotes, the appendices, indices, forwards and notes - it is an astounding collection created for the layperson like me to approach a subject that is seemingly dry and yawn-worthy. But *The Histories* is anything but boring. At times, even page-turning, jaw-dropping awesome. When you say to your partner, "Honey, listen to this -" and then quote Herodotus, you know something amazing has happened.

Herodotus does more than just recount tales of war, he goes to great lengths to describe the culture and the history of dozens of the denizens in his world. An astounding undertaking in any age - made even more incredible given that this was written 600+ BCE. His even-handed histories and details of Persia, a nation looking to conquer and subjugate his own, is an astounding feat of scholarship and academia - even before those words had meaning.

I was so impressed with *The Landmark* that I purchased their publications on Thucydides and Xenophon. By the time I've finished both of those, I'll be able to play horseshit bingo the next time I watch *300*.

Beth says

"These are the researches of Herodotus of Halicarnassus, which he publishes, in the hope of preserving from decay the remembrance of what men have done, and of preventing the great and wonderful actions of the Greeks and the barbarians from losing their due meed of glory; and withal to put on record what were the grounds of feud."

Herodotus's reference to his "researches" (sometimes translated "inquiries") uses the Greek word *historie*, from which we get "history." This is the first recorded use of the word.

The main subject of *The Histories* is the twenty years (499-479 B.C.E) of war between Greece and Persia. Herodotus begins by presenting the alleged origins of enmity between Greece and Persia in mythic times. He adds Persian and Phoenician accounts that he has heard to Greek ones. These stories have to do with the abduction of women. According to the Persians, the Phoenicians began the quarrel by carrying off the Greek woman Io and taking her to Egypt. The Greeks retaliated by abducting the woman Europa from the Phoenicians, and later they carried off Medea of Colchis, which motivated Paris to abduct Helen. Herodotus says that the Persians trace their enmity toward the Greeks back to the Trojan War. The Phoenicians, on the

other hand, insist that Io left willingly.

After summarizing these stories, Herodotus says that he will not discuss further which account is correct, and changes the subject to historical causes more recent than the legendary past: “I prefer to rely on my own knowledge, and to point out who it was in actual fact that first injured the Greeks...” Herodotus traces the beginning of the conflict to when Croesus of Lydia conquered the Greek towns of Asia, but Books I - IV focus on other issues. Most of this part of the book is concerned with geographical accounts, stories of notable people, and ethnographies of the peoples ruled by the Persians. Some scientific issues also come up, such as the cause of the flooding of the Nile. Starting with Book V, in which the Persians suppress the rebellion of the local Greek population in Persian territory (the Ionian Revolt) the narrative becomes more tightly focused.

Herodotus is a moralist; he presents the story of the Persian Wars as a story of how the hubris of the Persian rulers leads to their defeat, and demonstrates how “the god with his lightning smites always the bigger animals, and will not suffer them to wax insolent... likewise his bolts fall ever on the highest houses and the tallest trees” (Bk VII).

The website Livius.org has commentaries that I found really helpful when I was reading this.
<http://www.livius.org/articles/person...>

The website also has an interesting essay, “The Significance of Marathon” on the historiography of the battle of Marathon, which occurs in Book VI.

“It is often said that the battle of Marathon was one of the few really decisive battles in history. The truth, however, is that we cannot establish this with certainty. Still, the fight had important consequences: it gave rise to the idea that East and West were opposites, an idea that has survived until the present day, in spite of the fact that 'Marathon' has become the standard example to prove that historians can better refrain from such bold statements.”

Some great reviews by other readers on GR:

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...> (this one's pretty funny)

some highlights:

Bk I: The story of Croesus & Solon & Cyrus - The wealthy king of Lydia, Croesus, urges Solon, the Athenian lawgiver [magistrate] to admit that he is the happiest of men. (Croesus at this point has captured nearly all the Greek towns along the west coast of Asia.)

Solon warns him that no one can be called happy until he ends his life well. *“Call him, however, until he die, not happy but fortunate. Scarcely, indeed, can any man unite all these advantages: as there is no country which contains within it all that it needs, but each, while it possesses some things, lacks others, and the best country is that which contains the most; so no single human being is complete in every respect — something is always lacking. He who unites the greatest number of advantages, and retaining them to the day of his death, then dies peaceably, that man alone, sire, in my judgment, is entitled to bear the name of 'happy.' But in every matter it behooves us to mark well the end: for oftentimes God gives men a gleam of happiness, and then plunges them into ruin.”*

Croesus dismisses Solon's answer, *“since he thought that a man must be an arrant fool who made no account of the present good, but bade men always wait and mark the end.”*

Croesus suffers for his arrogance when his son Atys is accidentally killed in a boar hunt. Croesus later attacks Cappadocia, part of the empire of Cyrus the Great (and part of modern Turkey). In the conflict that follows, Cyrus captures the city of Sardis. Croesus's other son is killed in the fighting, trying to protect his father, and Croesus is captured. Croesus tells Cyrus the story of Solon's warning to him years before, and how everything had turned out exactly as Solon had said, although it was nothing that especially concerned him, but applied to all mankind alike, and most to those who seemed to themselves happy... Then Cyrus, hearing what Croesus had said, relented, bethinking himself that he too was a man, and that he was a fellow man, and one who had once been as blessed by fortune as himself, that he was burning alive; afraid, moreover, of retribution, and full of the thought that whatever is human is insecure. So he bade them quench the blazing fire as quickly as they could, and take down Croesus and the other Lydians, which they tried to do, but the flames were not to be mastered."

Croesus prays to Apollo and a rainstorm extinguishes the flames. Cyrus, "convinced by this that Croesus was a good man and a favourite of heaven" asked him after he was taken off the pile, "Who it was that had persuaded him to lead an army into his country, and so become his foe rather than continue his friend?" "What I did, oh! king, was to thy advantage and to my own loss. If there be blame, it rests with the god of the Greeks, who encouraged me to begin the war. No one is so foolish as to prefer war to peace, in which, instead of sons burying their fathers, fathers bury their sons. But the gods willed it so."

Bk II: Herodotus's story about Indian burial customs:

"... if one were to offer men to choose out of all the customs in the world as seemed to them the best, they would examine the whole number, and end by preferring their own; so convinced are they that their own usages surpass those of all others. Unless, therefore, a man was mad, it is not likely that he would make sport of such matters. That people have this feeling about their own laws may be seen by many proofs; among others, the following. Darius, after he had got the kingdom, called into his presence certain Greeks who were at hand, and asked -- 'What he should pay them to eat the bodies of their fathers when they died?' To which they answered, that there was no sum that would tempt them to do such a thing. He then sent for certain Indians, of the race called Callatians, men who eat their fathers, and asked them, while the Greeks stood by, and knew by the help of an interpreter all that was said -- 'What he should give them to burn the bodies of their fathers at their decease?' The Indians exclaimed aloud, and bade him forbear such language."

Bk III: Sosicles of Corinth's response to the Spartans, who at this point in the narrative plan to reinstate a tyrant in Athens. Sparta's allies are skeptical of the plan, but only Sosicles the Corinthian argues against it:

"Surely the heaven will soon be below, and the earth above, and men will henceforth live in the sea, and fish take their place upon the dry land, since you, Lacedaemonians [another name for the Spartans] propose to put down free governments in the cities of Greece, and set up tyrannies in their room. There is nothing in the whole world so unjust, so bloody, as a tyranny. If, however, it seems to you a desirable thing to have the cities under despotic rule, begin by putting a tyrant over yourselves, and then establish despots in other states... If you knew what tyranny was as well as ourselves, you would be better advised than you now are in regard to it."

Sosicles then tells of how Corinth was once ruled by an oligarchy, before it became democratic.

Bk VII: The battle of Thermopylae

"And now there arose a fierce struggle between the Persians and the Lacedaemonians over the body of Leonidas, in which the Greeks four times drove back the enemy, and at last by their great bravery succeeded in bearing off the body. This combat was scarcely ended when the Persians with Ephialtes approached; and the Greeks, informed that they drew nigh, made a change in the manner of their fighting. Drawing back into the narrowest part of the pass, and retreating even behind the cross wall, they posted themselves upon a

hillock, where they stood all drawn up together in one close body, except only the Thebans. The hillock whereof I speak is at the entrance of the straits, where the stone lion stands which was set up in honour of Leonidas. Here they defended themselves to the last, such as still had swords using them, and the others resisting with their hands and teeth; till the barbarians, who in part had pulled down the wall and attacked them in front, in part had gone round and now encircled them upon every side, overwhelmed and buried the remnant which was left beneath showers of missile weapons.

Thus nobly did the whole body of Lacedaemonians and Thespians behave; but nevertheless one man is said to have distinguished himself above all the rest, to wit, Dieneces the Spartan. A speech which he made before the Greeks engaged the Medes, remains on record. One of the Trachinians told him, 'Such was the number of the barbarians, that when they shot forth their arrows the sun would be darkened by their multitude.' Dieneces, not at all frightened at these words, but making light of the Median numbers, answered 'Our Trachinian friend brings us excellent tidings. If the Medes darken the sun, we shall have our fight in the shade.' "

Bk VIII: Xerxes reflects on the passage of time:

"And now, as he looked and saw the whole Hellespont covered with the vessels of his fleet, and all the shore and every plain about Abydos as full as possible of men, Xerxes congratulated himself on his good fortune; but after a little while he wept.

Then Artabanus, the king's uncle (the same who at the first spake so freely against the king, and advised him not to lead his army against Greece) when he heard that Xerxes was in tears, went to him, and said: 'How different, sire, is what thou art now doing, from what thou didst a little while ago! Then thou didst congratulate thyself; and now, behold! thou weapest.'

'There came upon me,' replied he, 'a sudden pity, when I thought of the shortness of man's life, and considered that of all this host, numerous as it is, not one will be alive when a hundred years are gone by.'

'And yet there are sadder things in life than that,' returned the other. 'Short as our time is, there is no man, whether it be here among this multitude or elsewhere, who is so happy, as not to have felt the wish — I will not say once, but full many a time — that he were dead rather than alive. Calamities fall upon us; sicknesses vex and harass us, and make life, short though it be, to appear long. So death, through the wretchedness of our life, is a most sweet refuge to our race; and God, who gives the tastes that we enjoy of pleasant times, is seen, in his very gift, to be envious.' "

Lazarus P Badpenny Esq says

"When the moment finally came to declare their purpose, the Babylonians, in order to reduce the consumption of food, herded together and strangled all the women in the city - each man exempting only his mother, and one other woman whom he chose out of his household to bake his bread for him."

As the British Government bludgeons the nation with its ideologically-driven 'Austerity Budget', note that the ancients had a strategy or two for surviving straitened times themselves. And they managed to protect 'front-line' services. Who doesn't like to wake up to the smell of freshly-baked rolls? Now, how does one get one's hands on Theresa May?

"...As for Samos, the Persians took the entire population like fish in a drag-net, and presented Syloson with an empty island. Some years later, however, Otanes contracted some sort of disease of the genital organs and that, in conjunction with a dream he had, induced him to repopulate the place."

Seriously. Wtf?! I mean, who hasn't dreamed of personally repopulating an island [I know I have:], but just how fertile does a guy have to be that an std leaves him debilitated to the degree that he can **only** re-seed an entire race like some Zeus on the loose? I thought all these dudes preferred boys so what's with *that*? If I didn't know Herodotus had such a downer on hearsay I'd swear someone was pulling his leg.

"...for I have never heard of a man who after an unbroken run of luck was not finally brought to complete ruin. Now I suggest that you deal with the danger of your continual successes in the following way: think of whatever it is you value most - whatever you would most regret the loss of - and throw it away: throw it right away, so that nobody can ever see it again. If, after that, you do not find that success alternates with failure then go on using the remedy I have advised."

Harsh.

"...He was blind for ten years, after which he received an oracle from the city of Buto to the effect that the time of his punishment being now ended, he would recover his sight, if he washed his eyes with the urine of a woman who had never lain with any man except her husband.

He tried his wife first, but without success - he remained as blind as ever."

Jeez, there has to be an easier way to discover you're a cuckold.

Jan-Maat says

What do Herodotus and Tristram Shandy have in common? Progress through digression.

I suppose my first acquaintance with the work of Herodotus was through that technicolor cold war drama The 300 Spartans in which a rampantly heterosexual force of Spartans defends freedom, liberty, and all that good stuff from allegedly ferocious yet ineffective, hordes of freedom hating Persians. The appalling, appealing, simplicity of that film is a grave disservice to the genius of Herodotus – already mauled by Thucydides barely after completing – if complete it is – his surviving work.

Later I was shocked into actually reading the first half of an old Everyman edition of Herodotus by a National Geographic article but it was only now at an advanced age - older quite possibly than many of the protagonists described in the Histories - that I have finally read through the complete Herodotus.

The conflicts between the Persians and the Greeks, culminating in the battles of Marathon, Salamis and Plataea, form a framework in which Herodotus digresses his way round the Greek world: physically (view spoiler), intellectually, culturally, but the eventual war is less the story of the clash of civilisations than the clash of relative inequality of development.

Because one of the things that has struck me reading the whole thing in a linear fashion is not so much the framing narrative structure but the repetition of themes and narrative parallels: the wise advisor to the ruler, that a hard land makes for a hard people, that change follows on from transgression.

One of the early starting points in Herodotus' narrative is the rise of Persia under Cyrus. Then, in the beginning, the Persians are poor. They inhabit a harsh land. By the end of the story the Persians possess a mighty empire, they are rich and rule over wealthy peoples but they make war against the Greeks. They have forgotten Cyrus' warning, which Herodotus kindly reminds us of: "*Soft countries...breed soft men. It is not the property of any one soil to produce fine fruits and good soldiers too*" (p543). For narrative purposes the Greeks in the time of story - already several generations before Herodotus was composing his work - were

poor. In their Olympic Games they compete for Olive Branches and honour, rather than gold, silver or bronze like sensible people (view spoiler), simply because they have nothing better, the contrast between a rich Persian meal and a Spartan one (view spoiler) is an occasion for laughter.

There's a criticism of Imperialism in this - what is the point of waging war against people who sleep in tents, wear leather, live in a country so unfruitful that they can eat all they can find but can never eat their fill? The repeated lesson, never learnt, taught through repeated harsh blows (view spoiler) is that transgression through aggression that is not sanctioned by God, gods, Fate, or Mandate of Heaven, as expressed variously through the opaque words of Oracles, and (view spoiler) really this is about expansion beyond your ecological base, ends in grim failure perhaps in the form of having your decapitated head dipped into a bag of blood - such was Cyrus' fate at the hands of Queen Tomyris - ah, another theme here - call no man happy until his death!

By the time Herodotus's work was completed it is the Greeks who in turn are wealthy and powerful, on the verge of fighting the Peloponnesian war (during which, so much for the eternal clash of civilisations, the Spartans will turn to the Persians for aid in defeating the Athenians, but in Herodotian style, I digress, with purpose). We can read this, whether Herodotus intended this is another question, with irony. Success will lead to wealth, an inevitable softening, and pride leads on to a fall (view spoiler).

Since History didn't exist before Herodotus (or Thucydides depending on your point of view) we can hardly say that history in Herodotus is cyclical rather than linear, instead the philosophy that unfolds is that the nature of existence itself is cyclical. Wisdom is the result of hardship, learnt by riding Fate's wheel in a complete cycle. Alienated in self imposed exile Solon is the wise advisor to Croesus. After defeat in the war which he brought about, Croesus can be a wise advisor to Cyrus. In exile the Spartan King Demaratus is a wise advisor to Xerxes.

To judge Herodotus as a writer of history is a little unfair, this is a transitional work. Part of his approach comes from the epic - he is explicitly looking back to Homer and the Iliad, another part we would think of as folktale and fable which is about moral teachings, traditional wisdom, and tropes (view spoiler), another the travelogue - Rebecca West's Black Lamb and Grey Falcon is a direct descendent (view spoiler). History, though, as a narrative of events with an analysis of causes is one of his gifts just as Egypt was the gift of the Nile, even if in part on account of Thucydides sharp response to Herodotus.

It also manages to capture the transition that occurs when the past and historical memory slips over into fable. This is not only something we can see in the presentation of Cyrus and Cypselus but more pointedly in the examples of Delphi and Thebes. Already by Herodotus' time Delphi was painting over its prior Persian sympathies and we get some fantastical stories instead of how weapons left in the sanctuary divinely appeared around the temple or how a great loud voice was heard shouting from within all of which conflicts completely with the oracular statements that Herodotus records which instead are defeatist if not actually pro-Persian, the effect is a little like a book about occupied France showing that everybody - even Petain, was actually in the Resistance. The Thebians, despite their contingent dying to a man at Thermopylae, are recorded as pro-Persian - this is attributed to Herodotus making use of Athenian informants. I feel that there is fable and folklore also in the victory at Salamis - the Greeks win by playing a trick upon the Persians, Themistocles is the Odysseus of the piece, wielding the one not entirely defeatist oracle, maintaining the allies in a threatened position, trying to exploit the potential for division amongst the Persian coalition, and finally mauling the enemy fleet, although the cycle must be completed for him too and eventually he ends up as a wise advisor at the Persian court.

Still, I like how archaeology now confirms Herodotus' stories of steppe women wielding weapons, just as zoology confirms that the genitals of both sexes of camel face backwards (view spoiler). Some historians even take things one stage further and prefer Herodotus' account of Athenian strategy developing in reaction to the Persian advance to the discovered inscription at Troezen which gives the retreat down the coast and

the evacuation of Attica as previously agreed strategies.

Unlike in the old film, Herodotus' Persians are gallant and honourable foes (if occasionally given to whipping the sea for it's misdeeds), but then we are in the epic tradition. The enemy has to be worthy of the hero. Herodotus is far more effective here than say Livy in his treatment of the war with Hannibal - there we have to read Punic virtues and attractiveness between the lines to understand the fact that Livy doesn't attempt to explain of Hannibal surviving and thriving in Italy for years on end.

I wondered reading if Herodotus would make for a complete elementary education, Aesop meets Aeschylus with the wonders of Egypt thrown in. Admittedly you would have to deal with questions like "Mummy, Daddy, what does 'refused normal intercourse and lay with her in an unnatural way (view spoiler)' mean?" so this would be no course of action for the fainted hearted - but one only for those prepared to bend the bow of the long-lived Ethiopians and to bring up their offspring to respect the Oracle at Delphi, admire wisdom, and be curious about the customs of other countries.

If I may deviate from my current deviation and recover the thread of my narrative the other point that struck me reading the complete work rather than just the first half was how Murray's Early Greece was in good part a commentary and analysis of Herodotus, drawing its anecdotes about the Oracle at Delphi or Greek Colonies from this work.

On the subject of the latter, pausing to mention the colonists who departing their homeland threw a lump of iron in the harbour swearing never to return until it floated or those told by the Oracle at Delphi to set up a colony in Libya even though they had no idea where Libya was or how to get there, I arrive at the Greek settlers at Miletus who married Carian women after having murdered all their menfolk. The colonists pass a law "*forbidding them to sit at table with their husbands or to address them by name*" (p60). Later there is a similar story about captured Athenian women whose children born of rape band together to the point that they are all considered dangerous by their captors who put them all to death, this inevitably leads to divine punishment and the need to ask advice of the Oracle at Delphi, but I digress, though before returning to my theme again the pattern of violence as self-destructive behaviour that brings down an entire community - the whole of the Persian wars in Herodotus' account is figured as the culmination of a series of violent abductions that can only ever end in disaster because the human passions can not be stilled until divine retribution forces the community polluted through its violence to offer up propitiation. This reminded me of Michael Wood's point about western Europe having adopted ancient Greece as a forebear - "*the glory that was Greece*" was not all fine statues and beautiful ruins, heritage isn't a clear cut matter, the baby comes with the bathwater.

The great contrast here in my mind is with the Romans. They have the Sabine women, who despite the violent beginning represent reconciliation and the unity of different peoples. The Romans base an ideology of empire and themselves as an Imperial people on the basis of a myth of reconciliation, the Greeks an ideology of civic distinctiveness on a history of sectarianism enforced beyond the point of self-harm. Something clear from Herodotus' account is how divided the Greeks are, with many supporting the Persians and some opposed, not out of great principals but on account of local rivalries.

Lets finish with the Spartans. Not as laconic, proto-all-American superheroes of the battlefield tanned and oiled fit to star in technicolor, but as examples of Herodotus' style. It is the Spartans and Athenians who breach the norms of international diplomacy by murdering the Persian Ambassadors - Herodotus is no whitewasher (though perhaps his early audiences admired their ancestors precisely for that violation). Best of all is his fascinated treatment of the Spartan King Cleomenes, at once decisive and brilliant, but transgressing acceptable behaviour - for instance having holed up some enemies in a sacred wood he tricks some of them out claiming they have been ransomed and has them slaughtered (pp349-50). The Spartans put him on trial for failing to capture Argos, in his defence he argues that having offered sacrifice at the temple of Hera he saw flame flash from the breast but not the head of the statue *he knew from this with absolute certainty that*

he was not to capture Argos...The Spartans accepted this as a credible and reasonable defence, and Cleomenes was fully acquitted (p350). The outcome of all this is that Cleomenes goes mad, and with a knife, cuts himself into strips while in the stocks. Again: transgression, pollution, and call no man happy until he is dead.

"My business is to record what people say, but I am by no means bound to believe it - and that may be taken to apply to this book as a whole" (p421)

peiman-mir5 rezakhani says

Herodotus's Histories are a masterpiece of ancient Greek literature. The work is a blend of history, geography, and ethnography. Herodotus is known as the "Father of History" for his systematic approach to recording events. The Histories are divided into nine books, covering the Persian Wars and other significant events of the time. The work is a testament to Herodotus's skill as a writer and a historian.

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Riku Sayuj says

Hubris in History: A Recurring Terror

"The conversion of legend-writing into the science of history was not native to the Greek mind, it was a fifth-century invention, and Herodotus was the man who invented it."

~ R.G. Collingwood

The prime subject of The Histories is the twenty years (499-479 B.C.E) of war between Greece and Persia for domination of the Greek world, but he intersperses this main narrative with plenty of personal interest

stories, “wonders” about firsts and bests, historical parallels and occasionally his own biased judgements, but always making it clear that he is interested *only* in presenting a viewpoint — he leaves the act of judgement to the reader. It would be true to assure that it was Herodotus who helped create the concept of the discipline of “history,” in part by stressing and criticizing his sources and accepted traditions. My job is to record what I have been told, make of it what you will that is the dominant warning note wherever H’s authorial voice intervenes in the narrative. That should be the disclaimer all history books should come with.

All the main themes of the book are evident in its beginning and ending, in keeping with the circular narratives that H prefers to adopt. All the intervening incidents act like reinforcements of the overall thrust inherent in the beginning and ending.

The Beginning: The Parallel Rise of Freedom & Empire

We begin with an insecure Hellenic world, just shaking off the shackles of tyranny and tasting real ambition for the first time. Meanwhile in the other end of the world, an existing empire is being shaped into a fearsome tyrannical force by the new Persian rulers. Soon the Persian empire starts to extend ominously outwards and gobbles up most of the known world. This infringes on a core idea of H — the concept of natural limits and over-extension. Persia is meant to fall. “The Small shall become the Big; and the Big shall become the Small.”

As long as empires are driven by ambition, history is doomed to repeat itself.

The gods set limits and do not allow human beings to go beyond them; Herodotus makes it clear that the Persians have to fail in their plan to conquer Greece, because they have overreached their natural boundaries. Xerxes announces his campaign by telling his advisers that he intends to conquer Greece so that ‘we will make Persian territory end only at the sky’ (7.8).

The Middle: The Clash of Civilizations

Then we are taken through the many over-extensions of the Persian empire under a succession of rulers (in Ionia, Scythia, etc), until they are poised to encroach upon the newly non-tyrannical Greek world. Here we enter the climactic middle of the narrative and is drenched in the details of the gory encounter. Many heroes, legends and dramatic material is born here and we emerge on the other side with a clear sense that it was Athens, without the yoke of tyranny, that was able to bring down the fearsome war machine of the Persian empire. David has won out against Goliath. This is achieved due to much luck and much pluck, but in the final analysis H seems to imply that the fault was with the hubris of the Persians.

It needs to be pointed out that: H is quite clear that as human beings Persians are on the whole no better and no worse than Greeks. Structurally, however, Xerxes’ great expedition to Greece stands as a monument to the dangerous blindness of massive empires and grandiose thinking—but it is also the backdrop against which H has been able to present to us the Greeks’ love of their homeland, their valor against incredible odds, and their deep desire to preserve their freedom.

So, even as this main narrative concludes, we are shown what is the inevitable result of Hubris that over-extends its own reaches. And of how tyranny in any form is not going to triumph over people who have tasted what freedom means.

The Ending: A Reenactment of The Beginning

Herodotus could have ended there. But he doesn’t. Instead he takes us to the Ending to rub in the message and to instill that message with its true significance — what is its bearing on the future? For, an investigation

of History is meaningless unless it can educate us about the future. And it is the future that H ironically points to as he takes us through the concluding sections of his Histories.

For now it is the turn of the Greeks to over-extend. In the thrill of victory and in the thrall of a thirst for revenge, in the spirit of competition with its own neighbors, Athens and Sparta launch out on its own imperialistic enterprise to mainland Asia. This is to culminate in H's own day with the Ionians looking upon Athens as the equivalent of a Tyrant.

The beginning of this period saw the triumph of the Greek mainland states over the might of the Persian Empire, first in the initial invasion of 490 and the battle of Marathon, and then in the second invasion of 480/79, with the battles of Thermopylae, Salamis, Plataea, and finally Mycaleb in Asia Mnor.

This unexpected victory against what seemed like the mightiest empire on Earth resonated in Greek consciousness through the fifth century and indeed beyond. The Greeks in general, and the Athenians in particular, because they had played the major part in the triumph of "Freedom", saw these victories as a triumph of right over might, courage over fear, freedom over servitude, moderation over arrogance. It helped crystallize and reinforce Greeks' attitudes to their own newfound way of life and values, intensified their supreme distrust of monarchy and tyranny, and shaped their attitude to the Persians. And after what they visualized as the great struggle for freedom, the people of Athens entered upon a spectacular era of energy and prosperity, one of the great flowering periods of Western civilization.

In more practical terms, Athens' naval success in the Persian Wars and its enterprise immediately after led to the creation of the Athenian Empire, which started as an anti-Persian league and lasted for almost three-quarters of a century (479-404).

H seems to imply that Athens should learn from these investigations of the past, see what Tyranny can do, see the dangers of over-extension, understand the need for balance, respect certain international boundaries, and stay its own overreaching hand.

And indeed within fifty years of the Persian defeat the dream had faded, and before the end of the century Athens, over-extended abroad and overconfident at home, lay defeated at the mercy of her enemies, a Spartan garrison posted on the Acropolis and democracy in ruins. Much in the intervening years had been magnificent, it is true, but so it might have remained if the Athenians had heeded Herodotus. He had portrayed the Greek victory as a triumph over the barbarian latent in themselves, the hubris that united the invader and the native tyrant as targets of the gods. The Persian downfall, or at least the defeat of their imperialistic ambition, called not only for exultation but for compassion and lasting self-control.

As should be quite obvious, there is much to learn in this for modern times too, but with an added twist. For Hubris did not end its romp through history there. It took on new wings once history started being recorded. Now every new emperor was also competing with history. Alexander had to outdo Xerxes. Caesar had to outdo Alexander. Britain had to outdo Rome. Germany had to outdo Britain. USA had to outdo Britain, etc. A never-ending arms-race with imperial history and the accompanying Hubris that powers it.

So Herodotus, even as he recorded History so as to blunt its devastating force on the lives of men, also unwittingly added new impetus to its influence, by adding the new flavor of recorded glory to the existing receptacle of legendary glory. Hubris drank it up.

Jonathan says

If you are an English speaker there is no reason for you to consider buying any other edition of this text. Brilliantly translated, filled with just the right amount of footnotes, maps and pictures, and there is an appendix for pretty much everything you could think of.

Grace Tjan says

What I learned from this book (in no particular order):

1. Ancient Greeks are quarrelsome and love to waste each other's city-states for the pettiest reasons.
2. From all forms of government known to man, democracy is the best. Tyrants and oligarchs suck.
3. The Persian Empire is a mighty barbarian nation, but being cowardly, effeminate and slavish, it is eventually defeated by the quarrelsome but brave and civilized Greeks.
4. Among the Greeks, the Spartans are the bravest. ~~Gerard Butler with a six-pack~~ King Leonidas and his 300 Spartans heroically perished in the battle of Thermopylae. They also have the particularly icky custom of marrying their own nieces.
5. The Delphic oracles are 100% accurate, except when someone manages to corrupt the Pythoness. The Gods are, however, a jealous sort and would strike any mortal who has the presumption of calling himself happiest on earth. Therefore, one should call no man happy until he is dead.
6. Egypt is a country of wonders, but its citizens' customs and manners are exactly the reverse of the common practice of mankind elsewhere. For example, the women there urinate standing up, while the men sitting down. The country also abounds in strange fauna, among them the hippopotamus --- a quadruped, cloven-footed animal, with the mane and tail of a horse, huge tusks and a voice like a horse's neigh.
7. The Scythians are a warlike nation that practices human sacrifice. The Scythian soldier drinks the blood of the first man that he kills in battle and cuts off all of his enemies' heads, which he must show to the king to get his share of the war booty. They also like to saw off their enemies' skulls, which they make into fancy gold-plated drinking cups.
8. The manners of the Androphagi, being cannibals, are more savage than those of any other race. Darius the Persian smote them.
9. The Atarantians, alone of all known nations, are destitute of names. The title of Atarantians is borne by the whole race in common, but the men have no particular names of their own. They also like to curse the sun because he burns and wastes both their country and themselves.
10. In the Indian desert live ants that are larger than a fox. They like to throw up sand-heaps as they burrow, which are full of gold. This is why India is so rich in gold. In Arabia, there are sheep that have long tails, so long that the shepherds have to make little trucks for their tails. *Really.*

BUT SERIOUSLY,

Herodotus is a consummate storyteller who had a fine eye for the fantastical, although to his credit, he always qualified his more improbable assertions by stating that they are based on hearsay or other sources

that he could not wholly verify. Much of the pleasure of reading his book is found in the lush descriptions of long lost nations and their exotic customs. His 'Histories' does not concern itself solely with history in the modern sense, but it is also a book of travelogue, ethnography, zoology, geography and botany. He is an excellent raconteur, almost always entertaining, except when he drones about speculative geography. We can easily imagine him, a man of seemingly inexhaustible curiosity, interviewing Marathon veterans for firsthand battle accounts, or interrogating Egyptian temple priests about their country's history and religion. History for him is not a dry recitation of facts and dates, but an intensely human story acted by a vast cast of monarchs, queens, warriors, tyrants, gods and ordinary citizens. Regicides and rebellions are caused by personal passions, such as in the stories of Caudales and Gyges, and Xerxes and Masistes. Dreams compel Xerxes to invade Greece. Divine intervention decides the course of epic battles.

A skein of tragedy runs through the historical drama that he narrates. The gods are so capricious and jealous that "one should not call a man happy until he is dead." Xerxes, on beholding his massive force on the Hellespont, laments that "not one will be alive when a hundred years are gone by." Yet while man lives his short existence he is capable of epic deeds, and Herodotus chronicled them all.

Trevor says

The kids bought me this for Christmas and it is a thing of infinite beauty. I've been meaning to read these histories for years and never quite got around to it. I had never realised quite how remarkable this book would be.

This version of the book is the third that I now own – I've also got a copy of the Penguin Classics and I've just finished listening to this as a talking book. But I am going to make my way through this book eventually, as it is hard to focus on many of the details of the wars and so on without a decent map in front of you to refer to – and this book has lots of maps and drawings and other illustrations, although, annoyingly, no illustration of the Egyptian labyrinth which Herodotus said was even more remarkable than the pyramids.

Along the way Herodotus tells some incredible stories. Some of them sound like they are straight out of the 1001 nights. Others make your jaw drop open.

There are also discussions of things like what is the source of the Nile, that really have whetted my curiosity to read more about the 19th century types who finally discovered the source. Now, why was this such a big question in the ancient world? Well, the problem was that the Nile seemed to come out of the desert and that isn't exactly the sort of place where you would expect to find lots and lots of water. The winds that came for where the Nile seemed to flow out from were also always hot – and so the idea that perhaps the water in the Nile swelled once a year due to the melting of snow (although partly reasonable, obviously) didn't seem to make a lot of sense when you thought that the river was coming out of a desert (deserts being the natural enemy of snow). It really is fascinating listening to Herodotus discussing these speculations about the source of the Nile and the paradoxes such speculations provided.

In the immortal words of Bob Dylan, "There ain't no limit to the amount of trouble women bring". There are interesting asides about the Trojan war and how Herodotus speculates that Helen was probably dead by the time of the war started and so when the Greeks asked for the Trojans to hand her over they literally couldn't. He can't see why else they would have allowed their civilisation to be crushed for the sake of one woman, beautiful or not.

There is a woman who commanded a ship on the side of the Persians, there are women who come back as

ghosts and complain about being cold (which their husband should know as the last time he tried to bake his bread the oven was cold – this would have taken me a while to understand if Herodotus did not explain that the husband had lain with her after she had died.) But this is not really a history that involves many women – this is a story about blokes doing what blokes like most – killing other blokes.

All the same, my favourite bit of this came quite early in the piece. The story of the theft of Rhampsinitos' treasure. I'm going to give you the short McCandless version of this as it really is a wonderful story and I can't leave this review without talking about it.

When Rhampsinitos (an Egyptian king) decided to have a place built for his treasure he didn't know that the builder would put a stone into the works that could be easily removed. The builder told his sons about this stone as he lay dying and once the builder had died his sons nipped around to the king's treasury and helped themselves to the riches inside. The king noticed this sudden loss of wealth and set a trap to capture those who were all too frequently popping in and stealing his goodies. The trap was quite successful and one of the brothers ended up getting caught. He told his other brother to cut off his head so that they wouldn't both be discovered. This his all too obliging brother did. The king then had a body without a head in his treasury, but still had no idea how anyone could get into the treasury room without breaking any of the seals on the locks.

So, he had the body of the thief hung up and guarded so that whoever cried in front of it would be brought before him. The thief who had cut off his brother's head was then told by his mother that he had better do something to rescue his brother's body or else all hell would break loose. He came up with a plan to get the guards drunk and to steal the body, which he did and also shaved half of their beards off to make sure they quite understood how stupid they had been made to look. The king was, needless to say, bloody furious. (I did mention this reminded me of the 1001 nights, yeah?) Anyway, the king then decides to get his daughter to work in a brothel, but before she sleeps with anyone she is to ask them what is the worst thing they have ever done and if any of them say anything like they cut off their brother's head and stole his body from the king's guards, she is to grab hold of him and call for the police (or whatever the Egyptian equivalent was at the time). The thief decides to play along, and goes to the brothel with the severed arm of a freshly dead corpse under his jumper. When he tells the king's daughter about his exploits she makes a grab for him and he holds out the dead man's arm, which she holds onto while the thief cleverly makes his escape. The king is so impressed with this man's exploits that he begs him to come forward and receive a reward, which he does and ends up getting to marry the king's daughter – I assume the daughter he gets to marry is the prostitute mentioned earlier, but I guess no one actually ever called her that to her face.

The best bit of this is that it shows something Herodotus does the whole way through these histories. He will be telling one of these stories and suddenly they will start to become completely unbelievable and he will say, "of course, I don't believe this stuff for a minute, but this is the story I was told in Egypt and what would you have me do? I have to tell you what I was told."

The other story that held me enthralled was of the self-mutilation of Zopyros – honestly, this is utterly remarkable. It is worth reading the book just for this story alone.

There are lots of occasions where fathers are forced to do horrible things to their sons – my favourite is the story of a king who punishes one of his advisors by feeding him his son as the meat portion of a feast. The king then leaves this advisor in a position where he can revenge himself on the king. You know, if I was to feed someone their own child I would probably kill him straight away afterwards – call me overly cautious, but I've a sneaking suspicion that the person who has feed you the flesh of one of your kids is never going to be one of you best friends ever again, no matter what else they do for you.

This book is fantastic and the Landmark edition is like its name implies, really something special.

Cphe says

This was way outside of my comfort zone and I doubt if I'd have undertaken it if it hadn't been read as a group read. I went into it without any prior conceptions. I just thought it would be interesting, and it was.

A long read and in parts a difficult read as I initially found it challenging to grasp the differing but similar sounding names. (it took some getting used to)

However it was interesting, fascinating in parts learning of the cultures, mores, people who challenged and changed the world around them.

Thought the attention given to detail quite staggering at times describing events, wars, armour, weaponry, customs and traditions.

Difficult to comprehend that this was written over 2000 years ago.

Mikos says

Wow.... where to start, where to start.

Reading the Histories by Herodotus (the Father of History) feels like taking a trip back in time to a world full with wonder and mystery. Central in the story is the great clash between the Greek city states and the mighty Persian Empire, but calling it that is kind of an insult when you consider the massive amount of information, gossip and hearsay that is in the book, there is so much more in this story. Herodotus gives an epic account of the entire (known) ancient world and paints a beautiful picture. A massive undertaking considering when it was written.

Herodotus gives insight in what has taken place before the monumental clash, the cause of the clash and all that happened before to all nations involved, and he takes this very literally. Starting with the ascension of the king of Lydia and the rise of the Persian Empire (from Cyrus the Great till Xerxes), Herodotus tells all. When describing the rise of the Persian Empire, Herodotus dives into so much more than just the military developments. Especially the first 4 'books' are full with anecdotes and background information on nations, families, empires, customs, geography, anthropology, animals, eating habits, housing, sacrifices. In which Herodotus takes a very environmentally deterministic view. You really get the idea that he just wrote everything down that was known. The number of stories in this book is just baffling, there are probably more than a hundred stories within the main story. For me as a total freak regarding antiquity this is all pure gold. It reminded me off some of my teachers during my time in college, when you would ask a question and the teacher would always tell so much more then you'd asked, being passionate about his course and everything. This book is a lot like that, Herodotus has the tendency to digress to an astounding degree (and in opposite to my time at college, I AM interested). All the known people and nations get his attention, from the Egyptians, Persians, Libyans, Scythians, and Indians and all their tribes to the people closer to home like the Athenians, Spartans, Thebans, Boeotian's and Ionians. The scope of his research is huge. Me being a huge geek for this stuff it's great! looking up maps, looking for background information and more sources etc. :D.

Because of this scope and writing style (which is very dense) the book can be a bit overwhelming with all the names of families, tribes, nations etc., I learned so much, yet I have the feeling I forgot even more. A

'problem' with this book is that the further you go (geographically) from Greece the more unreliable the information becomes. This sounds bad for a history book, but it was fantastic. As Herodotus states, he writes this stuff only so it can be recorded for later generations and doesn't claim it's the solemn truth. Because the information isn't all that reliable it paints a beautiful worldview in which the most outrageous customs and beliefs blend with myths and facts. Some of these gems include:

- The existence of big gold digging ants in India (dog/fox sized)
- One-eyed people in the north with a griffon defending gold
- A people named Neurians who left their country because of a snake invasion and who become wolves once every year

In some instances though Herodotus tends to give motivations for actions and individuals or causality between events which he just can't rectify. Together with the earlier mentioned gems it's one of the reasons Herodotus's other nickname is the Father of Lies. But he does tend to mention where information comes from and how reliable it is. Only when he talks about military campaigns a lot of his statements seem to be overdone and he comes across as a bit gullible (5 million Persians in the invasion?). Still a lot of his information has turned out to be correct, unfortunately though none of the gems :(A big plus is that in a lot of instances he gives multiple accounts/theories of the same events, and he tends to give credit to the more 'normal' accounts. Even if these accounts are ridiculous with the knowledge we now have, I find it fascinating how he comes to his conclusions within the belief system of his time. Sometimes he even comes with his own theories like the hydrological cycle of the Danube (in which he's essentially correct) or the origin of the Nile (in which he is not).

Surprisingly, the last 5 books which focus more on the actual clash aren't as engaging as the first 4. There is still some digressing in book 5 and 6, with a focus on events in the several Greek city states (damn, what a quarrelsome lot), but the focus is more on the military developments and the eventual clashes between Greece and Persia. Starting with the Ionian revolt leading to the first military clash with Persia at Marathon until the final expedition of Xerxes. While still very interesting it pales compared to the first books. Having said that, it's still about Marathon, Thermopylae, Salamis and Platea! Battles that have taken place 2500 years ago, but still speak to the imagination today. How a small group of city states defied the greatest empire of that age is still quite baffling to me. While Herodotus takes a more neutral tone in the first 4 books (so far that that is possible), his Greek heritage does shine a bit through when it concerns Persia (in military terms and to a lesser extent in lifestyle, apparently they were very feminine). But I can't really blame him for that, it makes sense. Let's be honest the accomplishment is quite huge and when you personally grow up during the actual clash it's even more human than normal to glorify your own nation and ridicule your enemy.

My advice to future readers would be, don't consider this solely as a history book. Consider it as a Greek view of antiquity with all it's prejudices and values thrown in the mix culminating in one great epic story. I absolutely loved it!

John Conquest says

What I read: Histories by Herodotus

What I expected: Thucydides + Persians

What I got: Mountable battle dolphins
The complete discography of Kid Rock

Eyewitness testimony that Ethiopians produce pitch black semen (no homo)

"Our flying snakes will block out the sun!"

On all levels except physical I am a Mede *Whips the sea*

"Herodotus can I borrow 100,000 Persians?" "1,000,000 Persians? What do you need 5,000,000 Persians for?"

The Virgin Greek pederasty, the Chad Persian piss fetish

Ahmad Sharabiani says

Ἱστορίαι = The Histories, Herodotus

The Histories (Greek: Ἱστορίαι; also known as The History) of Herodotus is now considered the founding work of history in Western literature. Written in 440 BC in the Ionic dialect of classical Greek, The Histories serves as a record of the ancient traditions, politics, geography, and clashes of various cultures that were known in Western Asia, Northern Africa and Greece at that time. Although not a fully impartial record, it remains one of the West's most important sources regarding these affairs. Moreover, it established the genre and study of history in the Western world.

The Histories also stands as one of the first accounts of the rise of the Persian Empire, as well as the events and causes of the Greco-Persian Wars between the Achaemenid Empire and the Greek city-states in the 5th century BC.

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Huda Aweys says

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