

The Histories (Barnes & Noble Classics)

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The Histories, by Herodotus, is part of the Barnes & Noble Classics series, which offers quality editions at affordable prices to the student and the general reader, including new scholarship, thoughtful design, and pages of carefully crafted extras. Here are some of the remarkable features of Barnes & Noble Classics: New introductions commissioned from today's top writers and scholars Biographies of the authors Chronologies of contemporary historical, biographical, and cultural events Footnotes and endnotes Selective discussions of imitations, parodies, poems, books, plays, paintings, operas, statuary, and films inspired by the work Comments by other famous authors Study questions to challenge the reader's viewpoints and expectations Bibliographies for further reading Indices & Glossaries, when appropriate All editions are beautifully designed and are printed to superior specifications; some include illustrations of historical interest. Barnes & Noble Classics pulls together a constellation of influences—biographical, historical, and literary—to enrich each reader's understanding of these enduring works.

The world's first great narrative history, Herodotus's The Histories vividly describes how the Greeks—few in number, poor, and disunited—managed to repulse a massive invasion by the powerful Persian army in the 5th century b.c. This amazing upset victory changed the course of western civilization, as the cities that led the resistance—Athens and Sparta—became the two major powers on the Greek mainland. The remarkable period that followed introduced revolutionary ideas about democracy, education, philosophy, drama, and—thanks to Herodotus—the writing of history.

A wonderful storyteller, Herodotus filled the Histories with amusing anecdotes and dialogue, human details about the lives of important political figures, and a kaleidoscope of viewpoints from people of many lands. Magnificent in compass and enormously entertaining, the Histories is not only the leading source of original information for Greek history during the all-important period between 550 and 479 b.c., but also an artistic masterpiece that created a new genre of literature.

Features maps of several noted battles, index of proper names, and a general index.

Donald Lateiner teaches Greek, Latin, Ancient History and Comparative Folklore in the Humanities-Classics department at Ohio Wesleyan University. His scholarship focuses on Homer and Herodotus. He has published a book on each. He also researches nonverbal behaviors in ancient literature.

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"Herodotus sometimes writes for children and sometimes for philosophers," said the greatest of modern historians, Edward Gibbon (The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, 1776-1788, chapter 24, note 54). Casual and serious readers alike have loved the first historian, the inventor of history, for his narrative genius and tragic-comic view of human events, great and small. He has been equally criticized and damned by professional historians, ethnographers, and geographers for errors of fact and method.

and even for his Greek. Cicero was not the first to call him "the father of lies." The German scholar Detlev Fehling (see "For Further Reading") actually avers that he never left Greece or perhaps even his Anatolian study, copying others' lies and travelers' tales, inventing claims of visits to exotic places and familiar monuments, and fabricating hundreds of alleged sources.

Whereas other ancient historians who followed his large footsteps narrowed their scope in terms of topic (Thucydides, Polybius, Sallust), time (Theopompus, Livy, Tacitus), or territory (the local historians, such as those of Athens, the Atthidographers, or the chroniclers of other poleis), Herodotus Homerically encompasses vast realms in topic, time, and territory. After leaving his birthplace, Halicarnassos on the western edge of Asia Minor (Anatolia, now roughly Turkey), he sailed on various voyages, perhaps as a merchant, south to Egypt, east to Sidon, north to the Hellespont and Black Sea, and west to Italy and Sicily. He then traveled inland in all these directions, although one cannot always separate his reports based on personal visits from what he heard or thought he heard, through interpreters who were sometimes comparatively informed and sometimes no better than local loungers eager to help a tourist. He saw the earth beneath his feet and existing structures at Delphi, Marathon, and Delos. He traveled to the edges of the known and unknown inhabited world in Egypt and Italy, and around the Black Sea. He heard about Spain, Babylon (in modern Iraq), Afghanistan, cold Britain, and the hot Sahara. This last region, described with wonder and some disparagement in the latter half of book IV, is crucial to the story of Ondaatje's protagonist in *The English Patient*, a Central European explorer of North Africa. Herodotus was his guide in those vast spaces, and he was never separated from this talisman, a kind of Bible for his restless search in life.

Herodotus—the inquirer, evaluator, and judge (a combination of the three is what "historian" means in Greek)—tells us what he observed. He saw pyramids, inscriptions, and other natural and artificial alterations of the environment. He heard facts and fictions from combatants, travelers, and survivors. He gathered legends and anecdotes from oral traditional tales. And he surmised certain things to be possible or probable from his own penetrating critiques of humans, their normal and odd behaviors, and their environment. Some of his alleged errors turn out to be misunderstandings of what he wrote. Some real errors (such as his disbelief [4.42] in the possibility of Phoenician circumnavigation of Africa) derive from his honest mistakes in a young and illiterate world without prose books—his was one of the first and certainly the most ambitious work of research to his day.

Notwithstanding the somewhat exceptional case of the Athenians and the unavailability of scribal records of the Eastern autocracies, his world possessed few public records, no libraries or databases, only many personal and parochial biases and foreign tongues. His sources and source materials include Egyptian, African, Persian, Phoenician, Scythian, Celtic, and Ethiopian as well as Greek information. For one exotic example, his account of gold-digging, furry giant ants in the northeastern corner of the Persian Empire (Pactyike; 3.102-105) may have misreported, through many intermediary sources, the habits of a larger animal. The large burrowing marmots of the Dansar plateau, which overlooks the Indus in Kashmir, may have given rise to Herodotus' bizarre account of mining insects; see Michel Peissel's *The Ants' Gold: The Discovery of the Greek El Dorado in the Himalayas* (1984) and an article by Marlise Simons ("Gold-Digging Ants' Mystery Seems Solved, After Bugging Scholars for Centuries"; *New York Times*, November 25, 1996). In "The Place of

Herodotus in the History of Historiography." the eminent student of ancient historiography Arnaldo Momigliano wrote: "If we had to give an a priori estimate of . . . success in writing history by Herodotus' method, we should probably shake our heads in sheer despondency."

Other Books

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