

Re: Herodotos

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- *From:* "Andrew Dalby" <akdalby@xxxxxxxxxxx>
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Commenting on

>Herman Rubin

and on

>>leuwarden@xxxxxxxxxx

>

>>This was the reason why I cringed at the idea of starting with
>>Herodotos. But, as is often the case, I did not see that (personal
>>reason) clearly and therefore drummed up a (more objective) substitute
>>argument, which I suspected would not hold water.

>

> I never said that history should START at the time of
> Herodotus; one cannot understand that time without the
> earlier material. But Herodotus started the idea that one
> should tell history accurately and try to tell it without
> bias. ...

> As far as I know, one does not study Herodotus; rather one
> quotes him for much of the Greek history of that time, and
> for earlier Greek and Egyptian history.

>>> There are works which give historical information before
>>> Herodotus, but he was the first to attempt to make the
>>> history an accurate presentation. This is why he should
>>> be studied.

>

He's called the father of history because he was the first writer of history who tried to understand and explain the reasons for events and for people's actions, rather than just listing events year by year; also because, directly or indirectly, all later historians in the European/Western tradition look back to his example. In the Chinese tradition you might say similar things of Sima Qian (Ssu-ma Ch'ien), who wrote about 300 years later than Herodotos if I remember rightly.

He's also worth reading because he really knew how to tell a story, and because the subject he was dealing with — the reasons for the disputes and warfare between Greece/Europe and Persia/Middle East — is a subject that catches people's interest even now!

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As for accuracy and lack of bias, well, he tried. What's interesting is how he did it, whether or not he always succeeded. On events before his own time he had practically no evidence except oral tradition to rely on -- so he tells us the traditions. What else could he do?

PS to leuwarden -- preferably in French, please! and thank you!

Andrew

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• *Follow-U*