



Ancient Fanfiction: Herodotus

By Zac Copeland-Greene

“History,” Herodotus the Greek thought to himself —or at least he would have if he had thought in English. Herodotus was going to write a History, or rather an inquiry, for that was what the Greek word *historia* meant. Naturally Herodotus was thinking of the Greek word for the simple fact that he was Greek. Well, technically he was an Ionian Greek, hailing from Halicarnassus on the west coast of Asia Minor (what we might call modern Turkey), but that was Greek enough to Herodotus.

“Inquiry,” Herodotus the Ionian Greek thought to himself in Greek, as he stood outside the gates of Halicarnassus staring out across the plains. He was going to write his “inquiries” — a work to immortalise the great and marvellous deeds of humankind, just like the epic songs of old. He would include feats of battle, feats of construction and even some remarkable features of nature. But he wasn’t going to stop with just the feats of Greeks, no.

He thought back to the Halicarnassus of his youth: a city of Greek language and culture but also a city of visitors from the East, who spoke in different accents and practiced new customs. Thinking back to this, Herodotus wanted to do something new and different. He wanted to celebrate both Greeks and foreigners alike. He had heard stories from merchants of strange beasts and great pyramids in a fascinating land called Egypt, of the shocking treacheries of the Lydian kings, and even of the remarkable invention in Babylon of a boat that could be taken apart and put on a donkey’s back. There was so much Herodotus wanted to see for himself, so many people he wanted to hear from, and so much he wanted to write about.



So Herodotus decided he would tell the story of how the Greeks and non-Greeks came to meet and later to fight, with perhaps a few other stops along the way. Yes, Herodotus was going to write a magnificent work that would rival the grandeur of the poets. He might even coin a few poetic phrases himself — “call no man happy until he is dead” sounded particularly profound!

“Profundity” Herodotus the Historian thought to himself, smiling smugly for a moment. Then he took a deep breath as he looked out across the plains outside Halicarnassus. He had a lot of research that he needed to do and a lot of travelling to see and hear the evidence of great pyramids and foldable boats for himself. Writing his *Inquiries* was beginning to sound like a lot of work. But maybe he could just go back home and make some of it up...

Context:

Herodotus was a Greek writer who lived in the 5th Century BCE. He produced a single work in nine books known as the Histories. The work’s aim was to be an account of the Persian Wars which had occurred just before Herodotus’ birth but also ended up involving many local stories and descriptions of places he encountered on his travels. Herodotus was nicknamed the “Father of History” as he was the first writer in the Western world to produce a work that we today would recognise today as a History, although he was also given the nickname, the “Father of Lies” as many believed a lot of what he wrote was rubbish!

Resources:

About Herodotus: <https://www.ancient.eu/herodotus/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2009/jan/03/herodotus-charlotte-higgins>

Read Herodotus’ Histories here: <http://classics.mit.edu/Herodotus/history.html>