

INTRODUCTION

1 LIFE OF HERODOTUS

1 THE NATURE OF THE EVIDENCE

There are two sets of data about H.'s life, both of them problematic. The first consists in H.'s own references in his work. As an inquirer-narrator he is conspicuous in the *Histories*, often intervening to organize the narrative, to involve us in his research, to inform us of where he has learned something, to share his uncertainties, or to evaluate his characters' behavior (Form and Thought §§ 3–3.4.1, henceforth F.&T.). This insistent authorial voice, however, has very little to say that is properly autobiographical, with the exception of references to some foreign travels in the context of the display of his ἱστορίη (Life §§ 3–4; F.&T. § 3.4.2). For further information we must turn to occasional notices of later ancient authors, which are often unreliable, fragmentary, or obscure.

1.1 *The Evidence of the First Sentence*

H. was a native of Halicarnassus, on the Aegean coast of Asia Minor, and he became a citizen of Thurii in southern Italy later in his life. According to the extant manuscripts, the first sentence of the *Histories* announces that the work is 'the exposition of the research of Herodotus of Halicarnassus'. In a very early variant of the same passage, quoted by Aristotle, the author calls himself instead 'Herodotus of Thurii'. Most ancient sources confirm his connection with both places.¹

¹ Duris of Samos is unique in apparently claiming both H. and his relative Panyassis for his own native city (*Suda* s.v. Πανύσσις = *FGrHist* 76 F64, but the text is corrupt). Julian the Apostate calls him simply Θούριος λογοποιός (*Ep.* 52 Bidez). In Plut. *De malig.* 35 = *Mor.* 868A, although H. was considered Thurian by other people, he was really a Halicarnassian (cf. *De exil.* 13). Legrand 1932a: 13–14 thinks it more likely that the ancient reidentification occurred in the other direction, with Hellenistic Halicarnassus reclaiming the now-famous author. Two Hellenistic inscriptions celebrate H. and Panyassis as distinguished natives of Halicarnassus (*SGO* 01/12/01, 01/12/02). On H.'s adoption of Thurii, see the *Suda* s.v. Ἡρόδοτος, quoted in § 2 below; Strabo 14.2.16 mentions among other writers from Halicarnassus H. 'whom they later called Thurian on account of his having taken part in the colonization of Thurii' (ὄν ὕστερον Θούριον ἐκάλεσαν διὰ τὸ κοινωνῆσαι τῆς εἰς Θουρίου ἀποικίας); cf. Plin. *HN* 12.18, although the text is uncertain. The epithet 'Thurian' is also attributed to H. by the *Lindian Chronicle* 29 (*FGrHist* 532); Avienus *Or. Mar.* 49.

1.2 *H.'s Birth Date*

The foundation of Thurii in 444/3 provides one of the rare chronological linchpins of H.'s life. His arrival with the first or second wave of colonists is almost the last recorded event about him. Some ancient authors conjectured that he was then in his ἀκμή, i.e. about forty years old, thereby assigning his birth to c. 484.² H. would have been at most a child when Xerxes waged the campaign described in Books 7–9 of the *Histories*. Halicarnassus, like the other Greek cities on the coast of Asia Minor, was at the time subject to the Great King and fought on the Persian side against the mainland Greeks. The city contributed to the expedition five ships commanded by its queen, Artemisia, one of the most extraordinary characters in H.'s work.³

1.3 *Halicarnassus and Thurii*

The eastern and western cities that represent the beginning and end of H.'s life identify him as a Greek of the periphery, accustomed to contacts with different ethnic groups. **Thurii**, although its foundation was sponsored by Athens, was a Panhellenic colony of settlers that included Ionians, Dorians, and Achaeans from different parts of the Greek world (Diod. Sic. 12.11.3). It was built on the territory of Sybaris, a city founded in the eighth century by Troezenians and Achaeans. Before its destruction by Croton in 510, Sybaris had been famous for its connection to the East Greeks and for its inclusive interactions with non-Greek Italian natives.⁴ **Halicarnassus**, H.'s birthplace, was a Greek city in Caria, the home of Dorians, Ionians, and Carians, as well as other local non-Greek populations. The dynasts whose family for three generations held the city under Persian rule had Carian names (Pisindelis) as well as Greek ones (Artemisia; Matthews 1974: 6). Persians and Lydians also lived in Caria, which was part of the Persian satrapy of Sardis; the Lydians had been close to the Carians at least since the time of Croesus, whose mother was Carian (1.92.3). The citizens of Halicarnassus, founded c. 900 by colonists from Troezen, considered themselves Dorian in H.'s time (7.99.3), but the Ionian element was strong as well; both Ionic and Doric dialects

² Aulus Gellius 15.23 quotes Pamphyla, a scholar of Neronian times, as saying that H. was 53 years old at the time of the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War (431). Dionysius of Halicarnassus places H.'s birth a little before τὰ Περσικά (meaning Xerxes' campaign); cf. Diod. Sic. 2.2, who says he was born in the reign of Xerxes (who became king in 486).

³ H. calls her a 'wonder', 7.99.1; cf. also 8.68–9, 87–9, 93, 101–3.

⁴ ML: no. 10; Ehrenberg 1948.

appear in the city's fifth-century inscriptions.⁵ By then Halicarnassus had long ceased to be part of the federation of the Dorian cities in Anatolia centered around the sanctuary of Apollo at Triopium, in the territory of Cnidus. According to H., a religious violation led to its banishment by the other five members of the league (1.144); an underlying cause might well have been the perception that Halicarnassus was not Dorian enough or even, given the prominence of the Carian element, not sufficiently Greek.

As narrator of the *Histories*, H. appears comfortable with this mixed heritage. He is complimentary toward the Carians (1.171.3–4nn; 5.111–12), although not so much toward Halicarnassus itself (1.144.3n), and he is scornful of the East Greeks' claims to purity of blood. The intermingling of different ethnicities, he insists, was part of their history from the time of their first settlement in Asia (1.1.146.1–2).

2 THE BIOGRAPHICAL TRADITION

The fullest account of H.'s family background and the reasons why he left Halicarnassus are given in the Byzantine lexicon, the *Suda* (s.v. Ἡρόδοτος):

Herodotus: Son of Lyxus and Dryo; of Halicarnassus, from a distinguished family; he had a brother Theodorus. He moved to Samos because of Lygdamis, who was the third tyrant of Halicarnassus after Artemisia: Pisindelis was the son of Artemisia, and Lygdamis the son of Pisindelis. In Samos he used the Ionian dialect and wrote a history in nine books, beginning with Cyrus the Persian and Candaules king of the Lydians. He went back to Halicarnassus and drove out the tyrant; but 'because in time he saw that he was the object of envy by the citizens', he went voluntarily to Thurii, which was colonized by the Athenians, and, after he died there, was buried in the market-place. But some say that he died in Pella. His books are named after the Muses.

2.1 H.'s Family

The non-Greek name of H.'s father suggests a tradition of Carian–Greek intermarriage in Halicarnassus.⁶ Another possible family member with a

⁵ ML: no. 32 = Fornara 1983: 70 = Tod 45; cf. also Tod 46. On the archaeological and epigraphic evidence for the early history of Halicarnassus, see Hornblower 1982: 14–18.

⁶ The *Suda* (s.v. Πανύσσις) cites an alternate tradition that gives not Dryo but Rhoio ('pomegranate') as the name of H.'s mother. Both are Greek names.

non-Greek name is Panyassis, an epic poet identified in the *Suda* as H.'s cousin or uncle, and the author of two works no longer extant: a *Heracleia* in 14 books and 9,000 epic hexameters and an *Ionica* of 7,000 verses, probably in elegiac couplets, about the mythical foundations of the Ionian cities. H. touches on some of this material in 1.146–7.

The connection with Panyassis, if true, suggests that H. came from a prominent family, as the *Suda* suggests, but that does not necessarily mean that he was a καλὸς κάγαθός in the strict sense. In a unique autobiographical passage in the *Histories*, H. recounts that in Egypt the logographer Hecataeus once questioned the priests about ancient history, presenting them with his personal genealogy, going back to a god in the sixteenth generation. H. adds that later he himself interviewed the priests in the same temple, but he did not 'genealogize' himself (2.143). The irony of H.'s comment as narrator is obvious, but the personal relevance of the passage remains ambiguous; at any rate he did not expect to impress the Egyptians with such claims.⁷

2.2 Political Activity

The only available ancient report states that H.'s family was politically active against the last tyrant of Halicarnassus. In 480 Artemisia was queen-regent, ruling on behalf of her young son (νεηνίεω, 7.99.1), named Pisindelis in the *Suda*. Pisindelis must have become tyrant a few years later and could have had a son, Lygdamis, old enough to inherit the power c. 460. Halicarnassus was then probably already a member of the Delian League; the city is inscribed in the first Athenian Tribute List in 454/3. This means that Athens at first tolerated the native regime, perhaps after Lygdamis provided guarantees to govern constitutionally;⁸ local political conflicts may well have accompanied an increasing Athenian influence in Halicarnassus.

In the entry Πανύασις the *Suda* says that Lygdamis killed Panyassis, while the entry Ἡρόδοτος reports that he caused H. to migrate to Samos. The Ἡρόδοτος entry also attributes to H. a primary role in the expulsion of Lygdamis (τὸν τύραννον ἐξελάσας); after the change of regime H. left Halicarnassus again 'because in time he saw that he was the object of

⁷ Perhaps H. is implying that, unlike Hecataeus, he had no heroic Greek genealogy to give (Legrand 1932a: 8). Perhaps, though, H. is simply skeptical about gods as ancestors of ordinary human beings or thinks it was vulgar of Hecataeus to make such a boast.

⁸ ML: no. 32 gives a *nomos* regulating property disputes passed by citizens of Halicarnassus, Salmacis (a Carian settlement), and Lygdamis.

envy (φθονούμενον) by the citizens'. In H.'s text the verb (φθόνει, φθονέουσι, 7.236–7) can signify the suspicion with which political advisers to those in power regard one another; as an adjective, H. as narrator also applies it to an opinion of his own that his reading audience might think obnoxious (ἐπίφθονον, 7.139.1).⁹

2.3 *Reliability of the Biographical Tradition*

In the absence of real information, ancient scholars could have constructed H.'s biography on the basis of inferences from his writings. H.'s family kinship with Panyassis may have been invented in order to connect him to another prominent Halicarnassian, to epic poetry, and to the literary-historical tradition. H.'s opposition to Lygdamis in his home town might be a fiction inspired by the anti-despotic ideology that pervades the *Histories*. Even H.'s participation in the Panhellenic colony of Thurii has been ranked by some among the items that seem 'too good to be true'.¹⁰

On the other hand, ancient biographers of H. had more evidence at their disposal than we do. Some of the information reported by the *Suda* is not credible, including the implication that H. used Ionic Greek only in Samos; both traditions about his death and burial are questionable.¹¹ Were H.'s fellow citizens among those who resented his opinions? At 7.139 he predicts that he will annoy many audiences for declaring that in the Persian Wars Athens was the savior of Greece. His work as a whole is not an apology for Athens; it contains a mixture of praise and blame for a variety of Greek and non-Greek cities and individuals (F.&T. § 3.4.1). But in early Halicarnassus or even later in Thurii, where Athenian power was becoming unpopular, it is quite possible that H. was by some considered a pro-Athenian propagandist.¹²

⁹ In the treatise usually called *On the Malice of Herodotus* (*De malignitate Herodoti*), Plutarch claims that H. enviously and deliberately tarnished the reputation of many Greeks and Greek states (nn23, 24 below; Marincola 1987, 1994; Pelling 2007; Marincola 2015; Dewald 2022).

¹⁰ Fehling 1985: 80–1, 1989: 244 with n1; cf. Marincola 2001: 20–1.

¹¹ Stephanus of Byzantium quotes an epigram supposedly from H.'s tomb in Thurii; see Meinecke 1958: 315. The idiosyncratic tradition that H. died at Pella can be explained as a deduction from H.'s conspicuously apologetic account of the Macedonian king's medizing behavior at 5.17–21 (Badian 1994), or as part of a late fifth- and fourth-century representation of the Macedonian kings as patrons of the arts (Legrand 1932a: 18 and n3).

¹² Evans 1982: 4. Cf. § 4 and n20 below.

3 HERODOTUS ABROAD

Nothing more is known of the sojourn in Samos mentioned by the *Suda*, although H. is demonstrably well informed about the history, sites, and artifacts of the island.¹³ The biographical tradition remains silent about the foreign travels that H. mentions (Asheri 2007: 6). He gives vivid descriptions of Sardis (1.93; 5.101) but probably never went to Persia, although he had access to Persians living in Asia Minor (Persians §§ 9–9.1). He did not see Median Ecbatana, which he describes in rather fanciful terms (1.98), but he visited the Black Sea region and Scythia (4.81.2), and he implies that he saw Babylon and traveled in Babylonia (1.183.3, 193.4). In the book on Egypt, where eyewitness reporting is most insistently on display, he says he traveled up the Nile to Elephantine (2.29), inspected sites and interviewed local guides or temple priests (e.g. 2.3.1, 112–13, 125; cf. 2.143). He also reports visits to Tyre in Phoenicia (2.44) and to Palestine (2.106.1).¹⁴

The evidence for H.'s life drawn from the *Histories* has been disputed almost as much as the biographical tradition. Drawing attention to the errors in H.'s descriptions, some scholars argue that he never went to the various sites that he states he has seen¹⁵ and that his alleged collection of reports from local sources is nothing but fiction, either serving the purpose of advertising the narrator's expertise or simply conforming to a literary convention that his public would have understood and accepted.¹⁶

4 HERODOTUS IN GREECE

Within the Greek world, H. explicitly says that he went to Thasos (2.44), Dodona (2.55), Sparta (3.55.2), Zacynthus (4.195), Thebes (5.59), and

¹³ 1.70; 2.182; 3.60, 123; 4.88, 152.4; 6.14.3; Mitchell 1975. For Irwin 2009, H.'s motives for devoting considerable attention to Samos are political, not biographical.

¹⁴ Scholars have analyzed the text of the history in an attempt to reconstruct the relative chronology of these foreign travels (Jacoby 1956: 27–38 = 1913: 247–67). They are now generally assigned as a group to the period of H.'s life that preceded his move to Thurii. Legrand 1932a: 24–9 proposes Scythia, Syria and Babylon, Egypt, in this order, and argues that the last voyage must have begun after 449 on the basis of 3.12. On H.'s travels in Egypt, see Lloyd 1975: 61–76. For the special quality of his interventions as narrator in Book 2 on Egypt, see Marincola 1987.

¹⁵ Armayor 1978, 1980; West 1985. The tradition of questioning H.'s credibility goes back to antiquity and continues in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance, when the 'father of history' was dubbed the 'father of lies'. For this aspect of H.'s reception, see Momigliano 2013 [1966]; Evans 1968; Pritchett 1993; for his general reputation in antiquity, see Hornblower 2006.

¹⁶ Fehling 1989. Cf. F.&T. nn5, 35, 36.

Thessaly (7.129.4), but his narrative also shows familiarity with Delphi and Athens; it is reasonable to assume that he visited many of the places he mentions in Greece. Metanarrative remarks stating that certain objects or monuments were still there *ἔς ἐμὲ*, ‘to my time’, suggest autopsy.¹⁷ Other passages seem to be addressed to specific audiences and may be evidence of H.’s location at the time of narration (S. West 2007: 27).¹⁸

Sophocles addressed an epigram to someone named Herodotus, perhaps the historian (Plut. *An seni* = *Mor.* 785B); a friendship between the two authors would be consistent with some striking correspondences between their works.¹⁹ Some ancient scholars report that H. gave public readings at Athens from his history; in c. 445, according to Eusebius, the council awarded him a prize for this service. The third-century historian Diyllus apparently reported that on the decree of a certain Anytus the Athenians paid H. ten talents.²⁰ This sum is too high to be accurate, but it was common for savants and sophists of the age to be paid for public lectures. This practice may well explain certain oral features in the style of the *Histories*, the narrator’s frequent acknowledgment that he is speaking to an audience, and the occasional implication that he has treated a certain topic before (3.80.1; 6.43.3).²¹

Thebes and Olympia are also cited as actual or potential settings for H.’s lectures, although there is no need to believe the legend that at Olympia Thucydides as a child was moved to tears upon hearing H. reciting the *Histories*.²² Early in his work, Thucydides berates authors who tell mythical stories to entertain their audience in public competitions with little regard for truth (1.22.4), and identifies two details found in H. (at 6.57.5, 9.53.2) that he calls inaccurate (1.20.3), but he does not identify H. by name in either passage. Plutarch reports that the Thebans refused

¹⁷ E.g. 1.50.3, 52, 66.4, 92.1, 93.3; 5.77.2; cf. F.&T. § 3.4.2.

¹⁸ See e.g. 1.145n Αἰγὰι (southern Italy); 4.99.4 (southern Italy and Athens). Cf. 1.98.5, 192.3; 2.7.

¹⁹ Cf. especially 3.119 and *Soph. Ant.* 904–12; Murnaghan 1986; Dewald and Kitzinger 2006.

²⁰ Euseb. *Chron.* Ol. 83.3. Diyllus is cited by Plutarch (*De malig.* 26 = *Mor.* 862A–B). Cf. the monetary award of less than two talents received by Pindar for a dithyramb (*Isoc. Antid.* 166); Cleidemus was also compensated for his *Atthis* (*Tert. De anim.* 52).

²¹ F.&T §§ 3–3.4.2. There is no information of other activity by which H. would have supported himself, although Evans 1982: 6–7 suggests that he might have engaged in trade on the basis of passages that reveal interest in and sympathy for this activity (e.g. 1.163.2, 194; 3.6; 4.152, 196), and where he calculates distances by the number of days of sailing (4.86).

²² Marcellin. 54; Phot. cod. 60, 19b, 36–42; for Olympia, see also Lucian *Her.* 1–2.

to hire H. as a speaker and even prevented him from talking to the city's young men. This notice is again suspect because Plutarch, a Boeotian himself, is here criticizing H. for painting an unflattering portrayal of the Thebans.²³ It may, however, preserve the memory of real tensions accompanying the diffusion of H.'s work. The Persian Wars were still an emotionally charged topic in the mid-fifth century, when Greek cities accused each other of insufficient commitment to the earlier cause of freedom, or of betraying that cause later on.²⁴ H.'s narrative of the past, like his description of foreign peoples, contains numerous allusions to the here and now of narration, some of them implicitly questioning the customs, character, and behavior of the Greeks of his own time (F.&T. § 4.2.4, with n53).

5 DATING H.'S WORK

H.'s *Histories* very likely are a composite record of many past performances, composed, combined, and revised over a long period of time and probably shared piecemeal with different Greek audiences. The finished product may not have appeared all at once; from the evidence of the text we cannot determine a date of publication but only estimate points in time when H. was still at work.

The *Histories* end in the year 479, after the Persian defeat and withdrawal. The last event mentioned is the removal by the Greeks of the cables of Xerxes' bridge on the Hellespont, in order to dedicate them in Greek sanctuaries (9.121). This action symbolically puts an end to Persian aggression against mainland Greece and reestablishes a firm boundary between Asia and Europe. Beyond H.'s chronological range are the foundation of the Delian League under the leadership of Athens (478), its transformation into the Athenian Empire, and the break-up of the fragile coalition of the states that had fought against the Persians (c. 460). Relations among Greek states became increasingly hostile. The uneasy Thirty Years' Peace (446) lasted only fifteen years. The latest

²³ Plutarch *De malig.* 31 = *Mor.* 864D reports that Aristophanes the Boeotian, to whom he attributes this anecdote, said that it was their boorishness and hatred of learning (ἀγροικίαν αὐτῶν καὶ μισολογίαν) that caused the Theban magistrates to take this measure.

²⁴ Plutarch *De malig.* 35 = *Mor.* 868A retorts that H. had no business being so critical of medizing states since he, after all, was himself related to those Dorians 'who marched against Greece taking their harem with them', a reference to the Halicarnassians and their leader Artemisia.

event H. clearly mentions in passing belongs to 430;²⁵ we are therefore certain that he lived to see the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War (431). Whether he was still writing after the plague had claimed many Athenian lives, including that of Pericles (429), or after the Athenian capture of Pylos (425), or even after the end of the Archidamian War (421), largely depends on how we interpret different passages in the *Histories* where the narrative of the past suggests possible allusions to much later events and conditions. Like most scholars, we continue to think that the *Histories* as a complete whole probably became available to the public between 430 and 424, but a serious case has been made for a date as late as 415 or even post 404.²⁶

5.1 *The Evidence of Comedies and Tragedies*

In Aristophanes' *Birds* (1124–64) a character describes the building of the walls of 'Cloudcuckooland' with Herodotean expressions and using terms that recall H.'s description of Babylon at 1.178.3–179; the passage has been taken as parody and evidence that the *Histories* had just been published in 415, the year of production of *Birds* (Fornara 1971a). All it shows, however, is that by that time parts of H.'s work were very likely well known and remembered at Athens.

Athenian audiences seem to have been familiar with at least some of the *Histories* in 424, when Aristophanes' *Acharnians* was produced. The Athenian ambassador's report of how he was wined and dined in Persia (68–93) has been taken as a parody of H.'s description of Persian banquets at 1.133. At lines 524–9 Dicaeopolis derides as trivial the causes of the Peloponnesian War:

Some young men in their cups go to Megara and steal the whore Simaetha. And then the Megarians in turn counter-steal two of Aspasia's whores. And from there the beginning of the war broke out for all the Greeks, on account of three sluts.

The multiple abductions of women and the tit-for-tat motif recall the proem of the *Histories*, where H. relates the Persian explanation of the beginning of the East–West conflict (1.1–4). For his own satirical reasons, Aristophanes might be adopting from H.'s account the idea that the alleged causes of war are often ridiculous.

²⁵ 7.137; cf. Thucydides 2.67.

²⁶ See the discussion of H. 6.98.2; 7.235.2–3; 9.73.3 in Fornara 1971a; and 1981; cf. Cobet 1977; Irwin 2018.

6 H. OF THURII

A large portion of H.'s work on the *Histories* quite plausibly was done at Thurii. The narrator never mentions Thurii and does not refer to extensive travels in the West. But although Italy is secondary to the plot of the *logos*, it appears at least briefly in every book except 2 and 9. These passing references are signs of a familiarity the narrator does not need to advertise with a part of the world that he does not need to explain. H.'s reports or echoes of Sybarite and Crotoniate polemics (5.44–5; cf. 6.21), and his verification of how a Black Sea tradition dovetails with a tradition at Metapontum (4.15), suggest autopsy and direct contact with local sources.²⁷ At least on two occasions he is clearly addressing listeners for whom southern Italy is home (n18 above).

Athens sponsored the foundation of Thurii in 444 to enhance its influence in the area and its overall image as the leading city of Greece. But the project also constituted a utopian experiment in the building of a new state that was free, harmonious, and at the same time deliberately diverse. The founders invited the participation of Greek individuals from cities unfriendly to each other, as well as a number of intellectuals with widely different views of the world. If the soothsayer Lampon led the expedition, the progressive and religiously agnostic sophist Protagoras of Abdera was charged with writing laws. Hippodamus of Miletus, the architect of Piraeus and a political theorist, designed the grid-like urban plan.²⁸ It is not known when H. joined this company, how long he lived there, whether he ever returned to Greece, or when and where he died. But fellow citizens of Thurii may be an important implied audience of the *Histories*.

2 FORM AND THOUGHT IN HERODOTUS' HISTORIES

H. is an acute and unsentimental observer of human νόμοι (customs, laws, and cultural beliefs), and he writes an endlessly entertaining narrative. He is sometimes called the 'father of history' (Cic. *Leg.* 1.5). As a historian, he articulates three prominent objectives: he intends to preserve a record of past human accomplishment (1.0); although he recognizes the difficulties inherent in his project, he wants his account to be as accurate as possible (1.5.3, 95.1); finally, he intends to practice radical inclusivity about what he reports, because he does not know what details of the past

²⁷ Raviola 1986; Munson 2006.

²⁸ Diod. Sic. 12.10.7. For Hippodamus, see Arist. *Pol.* 1267b22.