

Herodotus and the Philosophy of History: Narrative, Ethical and Philosophical Dimensions of the Histories

Herodot ve Tarih Felsefesi: Tarih Eserinin Anlatısal, Etik ve Felsefi Boyutları

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Abstract: This article approaches Herodotus's Histories as an inquiry that transforms the mere recording of events into a reflective explanation. It highlights three concrete contributions: plural narration with explicit source criticism, a "double causality" that spans natural, human, and divine affairs, and ethnographic comparison that frames ethical questions about hubris, fortune, and custom. In doing so, the article also underscores the moral and universal dimension of Herodotus's vision, where human responsibility intersects with divine order. Placing Herodotus in a heuristic dialogue with Hegel, Collingwood, Ricoeur, White, and Koselleck, the study shows how his practice illuminates modern concerns with freedom and necessity, reenactment, narrative time, emplotment, and the tension between experience and expectation. However, rather than imposing modern categories anachronistically, it is argued that Herodotus can be regarded not only as the father of history but also as a precursor of the philosophy of history by establishing the conditions for historical meaning-making.

Keywords: Herodotus, histories, philosophy of history, historiography.



Introduction

Herodotus opens the *Histories* with a programmatic statement: to preserve the memory of human deeds and to explain the causes of conflict (Herodotus, 2013, Book I.1). This dual aim situates his work at the intersection of memory and inquiry. Rather than producing a chronicle, he transforms history into a reflective investigation that probes motives, contingencies, and meanings.

There has been a long-standing debate among scholars as to whether he should be seen as a storyteller, an ethnographer, or the father of history. For instance, Shapiro (Shapiro, 1996, pp. 348–352) emphasizes tragic motifs, Hau (2016, pp. 172–193) highlights moral didacticism, and Murray (2001, pp. 20, 32) situates him in the Ionian tradition. Yet the philosophical implications of his method remain underexplored. Although several scholars have noted the ethical, narrative, or moral dimensions of his work (Dewald, 1987; Harrison, 2018; Hau, 2016; Sheehan, 2018), he is seldom examined in systematic dialogue with the philosophy of history.

To situate Herodotus within this field requires a precise definition. Modern philosophy of history is generally divided into two branches: critical (or analytical) philosophy of history, which concerns the epistemology, methodology, and truth-claims of historical writing; and speculative (or substantive) philosophy of history, which seeks overarching patterns or meaning in the historical process (Danto, 1965; Walsh, 1967).

This article argues that Herodotus is a pioneer not because he constructed a systematic philosophy, but because his work contains the seeds of both branches. His *Histories* integrate inquiry, plurality, ethical reflection, and an analysis of human action within cultural and divine frameworks. His source criticism constitutes a proto-critical philosophy, while his focus on hubris and nemesis offers a substantive reflection on human fate.

The study contributes, first, by reinterpreting Herodotean historiography as an early form of philosophical reflection bridging myth and rational inquiry, narrative and explanation, particularity and universality; and second, by situating him in dialogue with modern philosophy of history. However, to avoid anachronism, modern concepts from thinkers like Hegel or Collingwood are employed here as heuristic tools rather than direct



equivalents, demonstrating how Herodotus anticipated central concerns of later historical thought.

From myth to inquiry: Herodotus's place in early historiography

Herodotus, who lived in the fifth century BCE, composed his *Histories* in the aftermath of the Greco-Persian Wars. A native of Halicarnassus in modern Bodrum, Türkiye, he traveled widely through the Greek world, Egypt, and the Near East (2013, Book I.1). These journeys furnished him with a cosmopolitan outlook that transcended a narrowly Hellenic perspective. His work emerged during a moment of intellectual transformation in Greece. Earlier logographers, such as Hecataeus of Miletus, had compiled local histories and geographical sketches, but their accounts remained tied to mythical genealogies (Herodotus, 2013, Book II.143). While Herodotus drew on Homeric epic and genealogical traditions, he reinterpreted them critically, seeking rational explanation alongside mythic inheritance (West, 1991, p. 146). In doing so, he inaugurated a new historical consciousness, placing inquiry (*historia*) and accuracy (*akribeia*) at the center of historiography (Momigliano, 1990, pp. 34–37).

Unlike his predecessors, Herodotus did not merely exclude myth; he reinterpreted it within a rational framework. However, this was not a total rupture with the mythical worldview. Hecataeus, as West (1991, pp. 144–145) notes, remained caught between genealogical poetry and geographical compilation, producing fragmented, list-like accounts. Herodotus, by contrast, transformed such proto-historical efforts into a coherent narrative that balanced empirical observation with critical reflection, animating the past with interpretive depth (West, 1991, pp. 144–146). The Ionian intellectual backdrop also shaped his historical vision. Thinkers such as Thales and Anaximander sought natural causes rather than mythic cosmology, a pursuit Aristotle (1933, Book Metaphysics983b6) later described as the search for a permanent principle (*archē*) beneath change. Yet, a crucial distinction remains: unlike the Presocratic natural philosophers who sought a single *archē* to explain nature, Herodotus applied a causal outlook to human affairs without discarding the divine. He operated in a transitional space where the "mythical" and the "historical" were not yet mutually exclusive categories but overlapping modes of explaining reality. This causal outlook shaped Herodotus's analysis of historical events: beneath the flux



of fortune, he probed enduring structures of order, justice, and responsibility.

The impact of this approach was decisive. Murray (1980, pp. 31–32) emphasizes that the Ionian tradition of history and ethnography inaugurated by Herodotus became a central current in Greek historical writing. While Thucydides, in the *History of the Peloponnesian War*, developed an analytical model focused on political and military causality, Herodotus articulated a broader vision that encompassed culture, geography, and human experience. According to Murray, these two traditions –the Herodotean (Ionian) and the Thucydidean (Athenian)- later converged in Hellenistic historiography. Universal historians such as Diodorus Siculus modeled themselves explicitly on Herodotus, while Polybius, despite his documentary emphasis, implicitly reinforced Herodotus’s foundational role (Champion, 2013, p. 156). Ultimately, Herodotus was not only a recorder of deeds but also a thinker who raised questions about order, justice, and human responsibility. His historiography probed the structures of experience, moral consequence, and cosmic balance.

Herodotus’s method: Inquiry, source criticism, and interpretation

Herodotus’s method diverges sharply from earlier narrative traditions. History is no longer passive transmission but active investigation. The very title of the work, *Historiai* (ιστορίαι), meaning “inquiries” in Greek, signals this shift. He frames his project as an *apodeixis* (a display of inquiry) with the purpose “so that human deeds may not be forgotten... and great and marvelous achievements not lose their glory” (Herodotus, 2013, Book I.1). History becomes not merely a chronicle, but a systematic questioning of causes and consequences.

His account of the Nile’s annual inundation illustrates this approach. He records three explanations; the Etesian winds, the encircling Ocean, and melting snow (Herodotus, 2013, Book II.19–22). After testing them against observation, he rejects each and concludes: “After having condemned the opinions proposed, I must indicate what I myself think about these obscure matters” (Herodotus, 2013, Book II.24). Here he acts as both critic and investigator, distinguishing “what he saw” from “what he was told” (Herodotus, 2013, Book II.29). This differentiation between *autopsy* (direct observation) and *akoē* (hearsay) constitutes an epistemological break



that anticipates modern source criticism.

Transparency undergirds his method. He reports “I was unable to learn anything from anyone else, but this much further I did learn by the most extensive investigation that I could make, going as far as the city of Elephantine to look myself, and beyond that by question and hearsay” (Herodotus, 2013, Book II.29). Later he adds “So far, all I have said is the record of my own autopsy and judgment and inquiry. Henceforth I will record Egyptian chronicles, according to what I have heard, adding something of what I myself have seen”(Herodotus, 2013, Book II.99). Even when recounting implausible reports, he preserves critical distance: “As for myself, although it is my business to set down that which is told me, to believe it is none at all of my business” (Herodotus, 2013, Book VII.152). By separating narration from belief, he articulates an early principle of critical historiography, establishing a space for skepticism within the narrative.

Herodotus reinforces this reflexivity by recording multiple versions: “There are no less than three other accounts of Cyrus which I could give” (Herodotus, 2013, Book I.95). In preserving alternatives, he makes visible the epistemological horizon of inquiry. This methodological pluralism does more than record variant traditions; it invites the reader to participate in the evaluation of truth. This resonates with modern hermeneutics, though the comparison is structural rather than direct. Gadamer’s “fusion of horizons” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 305, 367) finds a heuristic precedent in his juxtaposition of competing accounts. Ricoeur’s (1984, pp. 91–93, 207–208) reflections on narrative temporality are likewise prefigured in his layered representations of the past. Sheehan (2018, pp. 243–246) stresses that this openness resists closure and anticipates modern debates on contingency and meaning.

Ethnography and geography further expand his method. History for Herodotus encompassed not only wars and rulers but also lifeways. His account of Libya (Herodotus, 2013, Book IV.168–199) demonstrates this ambition. Harrison (1998, pp. 1–2) notes his systematic record of languages, religions, and customs. Language emerges as the defining marker of identity, as in the Athenians’ refusal of Persian surrender on the grounds of kinship, speech, and cult (Herodotus, 2013, Book VIII.144). Through such catalogues of difference, Herodotus turns history into proto-ethnography



and poses the philosophical problem of *nomos* (custom) versus nature.

Modern critics emphasize the duality of this method. Grant (1983, pp. 283–284) identifies him as both meticulous investigator and credulous storyteller. He shows *akribeia* (precision) when discussing the Nile, yet lapses into vagueness elsewhere. The twelve-year Lydian-Milesian war (Herodotus, 2013, Book I.16) is read by Dale (2015, p. 158) as symbolic rhythm rather than strict chronology. His claim that the Colchians were of Egyptian origin (Herodotus, 2013, Book II.103–105) reflects an impulse toward comparative linguistics, which Lloyd (1975)(Grant, 1983, p. 284) regards as advanced for its time. Conversely, his account of Xerxes’s 2.6 million infantry (Herodotus, 2013, Book VII.186–187) is implausible, yet his careful Egyptian king lists (Herodotus, 2013, Book II.99) reveal a consistent prioritization of cultural-historical meaning over technical accuracy.

His narrative technique amplifies this interpretive stance. Instead of explicit moralizing, he deploys recurring motifs; the fall of the arrogant ruler, the warning of the wise advisor, the inevitability of nemesis. Shapiro (1996, p. 352) notes how these motifs establish a dramaturgical rhythm. Kirkland (2022, pp. 57–63) shows that Dionysius of Halicarnassus already viewed him as a dramaturgical architect. These motifs are not merely decorative; they serve a philosophical function by revealing the hidden structures of causality. In combining inquiry, reflexivity, ethnographic curiosity, and narrative dramaturgy, Herodotus earned his dual reputation as “father of history” and –as Bowen (1992, p. 13) and Evans (1968, pp. 11–12) argue– “father of stories.”

Thucydides later distinguished his method by privileging stricter verification (*akribeia*) (Momigliano, 1966, pp. 213–214; Thomas, 2011, pp. 229–246). Yet modern perspectives affirm that Herodotus, through this blend of empirical inquiry and narrative construction, laid the philosophical foundations of historiography. His enduring legacy lies not in factual precision alone but in establishing history as an interpretive, meaning-generating practice that negotiates between the particular event and universal human patterns.

Herodotus in dialogue with modern philosophy of history

Having outlined Herodotus’s method, his historiography can now be placed in dialogue with modern philosophy of history. However, this



comparison is not meant to suggest a direct historical continuity, but rather to use modern concepts as heuristic lenses to illuminate the philosophical structures inherent in the Histories.

Collingwood's well-known claim that history is the "re-enactment of past thought" (1994, pp. 282–302) finds a striking structural precedent in Herodotus. By recording multiple versions of events -what he heard, what he saw, and what others believed (Herodotus, 2013, Book II.29)- Herodotus invites the reader to inhabit the perspectives of historical actors. Instead of presenting a single authoritative narrative, he opens history to interpretive reconstruction. While Herodotus lacks Collingwood's systematic epistemology, his practice is consistent with Collingwood's (Collingwood, 1994, pp. 282–283, 444–447) principle that historical knowledge requires the historian to think again the thoughts of past agents. Herodotus's plural accounts thus constitute a proto-re-enactment that invites readers to reconstruct agents' reasoning, thereby establishing the conditions for historical understanding that Collingwood would later theorize.

A concrete case appears in Croesus's misinterpretation of the Delphic oracle. Told that crossing the Halys would destroy a great empire (Herodotus, 2013, Book I.53–56), Croesus assumed Persia's downfall. Herodotus underscores both the oracle's ambiguity and Croesus's reasoning, requiring the reader to reconstruct his assumptions, expectations, and choices. This dramatization exemplifies what Collingwood (1994, pp. 282–283, 444–447) viewed as the historian's task: to recover not only external events but also the inner dimension of action, the reasoning of past agents.

Ricoeur's reflections in *Time and Narrative* (1984, pp. 91–93, 207–208) emphasize how narrative mediates between chronological time and lived experience. Herodotus intuitively applies what Ricoeur would later theorize as 'mimesis': the configuration of discordant events into a concordant whole. He anticipates this by structuring events through cycles of *hubris* and *nemesis*. Croesus's downfall, for example, is not presented as a string of contingencies but as a temporal pattern where fortune and reversal function as interpretive categories. In embedding lives within such rhythms, Herodotus confirms Ricoeur's thesis that human time becomes intelligible only through narrative configuration.

White's (1973, pp. 7–11) concept of "epitome" further illuminates



Herodotus's practice by clarifying the specific literary mode he employs: Tragedy. Meaning arises not from facts alone but from their literary arrangement. Motifs such as the ignored counselor, the arrogant ruler punished, and the pious community saved reveal that Herodotus shaped historical understanding dramaturgically, echoing the tragic stage (Shapiro, 1996, p. 352). By casting history in this tragic mode, Herodotus demonstrates that historiography was, from its inception, a poetic act of meaning-making.

Considered collectively, these parallels are heuristic: they show that Herodotus was grappling with issues of agency, narrative time, and interpretation long before they were formalized as "philosophy of history." His reconstruction of multiple voices recalls Collingwood's re-enactment; his temporal structuring echoes Ricoeur's narrative time; and his dramaturgical motifs prefigure White's emplotment. However, Herodotus does so within a mythopoetic worldview distinct from modern secularism. Gadamer's hermeneutic horizon provides a frame for understanding this distance. Herodotus does not merely precede philosophical reflection on history, he provides the primal scene of its emergence. Beyond methodology, his *Histories* also engage fundamental themes of human existence -agency, fate, and the gods-revealing the philosophical depth of his vision.

The moral and metaphysical dimensions of Herodotus's *Histories*

Herodotus's *Histories* is more than a chronicle of events; it is a layered narrative that probes the moral, religious, and metaphysical dimensions of human existence. History unfolds on a stage where individual agency intersects with divine will and the workings of fate (Dewald, 1987, pp. 147-153; Lateiner, 1989, pp. 82, 163-186). The choices of rulers, soldiers, and communities are presented within a larger framework of divine justice and cosmic order.

A central challenge in reading Herodotus philosophically is the nature of causality. While modern historiography often assumes a secular, mechanical causality, Herodotus operates with what scholars have termed "double causality" (Lesky, 1966; Gould, 1989). An event in the *Histories* often has two simultaneous and non-contradictory causes: a human one (ambition, error, revenge) and a divine one (fate, retribution, cosmic balance).



The paradigmatic example is the Croesus-Solon exchange. When the Lydian king proudly displays his wealth, Solon warns that no man can be called fortunate before death (Herodotus, 2013, Book I.32). Croesus's later misfortunes, his son's death (Herodotus, 2013, Book I.34-45), his defeat by Cyrus (Herodotus, 2013, Book I.85-86), and his recollection of Solon on the pyre (Herodotus, 2013, Book I.86-91), fulfill the pattern of hubris and nemesis, underscoring that both divine wrath and divine favor lie beyond human control (Dewald, 1987, p. 148). Here, double causality is evident: Croesus falls because of his own strategic arrogance (human cause) but also to expiate the ancestral sin of Gyges (divine cause). Polycrates of Samos offers a similar illustration. Warned by Pharaoh Amasis that uninterrupted prosperity invites divine envy (Herodotus, 2013, Book III.40), he discards his most precious possession; when it ominously returns from the belly of a fish, betrayal and death soon follow (Herodotus, 2013, Book III.39-56). As Shapiro (1996, pp. 352-353) notes, this reprise of Croesus's fate dramatizes the punishment of "excessive success" (Dewald, 1987, pp. 148-149; Lateiner, 1989, pp. 163-166). Xerxes's excesses, such as ordering the Hellespont flogged after a storm (Herodotus, 2013, Book VII.33-36), prefigure his downfall at Salamis (Herodotus, 2013, Book VIII.84-97). As seen in these episodes, arrogance consistently invites destruction, a pattern that mirrors Aeschylean tragedy (Dewald, 1987, pp. 153-154; Shapiro, 1996, pp. 360-362).

This moral dynamic can be illuminated through a heuristic comparison with Hegel's reflections on history. In his *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, he (1988, pp. 20-21, 35-36, 56-57) describes the dialectic of individual freedom and the necessity of the "world spirit" (*Weltgeist*). Figures like Croesus, Polycrates, and Xerxes embody human will, yet their destinies unfold within larger patterns. Herodotus thus seems to anticipate Hegel's "cunning of reason" (*List der Vernunft*), where subjective aims are redirected into higher historical order (Hegel, 1988, pp. 35-36).

However, a crucial distinction must be made to avoid anachronism. Unlike Hegel, who saw history as a rational, teleological progression toward freedom, Herodotus views history as cyclical and tragic. There is no ultimate "end" of history, only the endless rise and fall of powers: "cities that were once great have become small, and those that were great in my



time were formerly small" (Herodotus, 2013, Book I.5). Thus, Herodotus's "cunning of reason" is not a mechanism of progress, but a mechanism of cosmic balance. Xerxes's invasion of Greece, meant to destroy the poleis, ultimately secures their autonomy (Herodotus, 2013, Book VII.8-24). Croesus, misreading the Delphic oracle, engineers not Persia's ruin but his own downfall (Herodotus, 2013, Book I.53-56). These reversals suggest that history contains an inner logic that transcends individual agency, but this logic is restorative rather than progressive.

Equally significant is the precariousness of fortune. Solon's maxim "Call no man fortunate until he is dead" (Herodotus, 2013, Book I.32) captures this principle (Dewald, 1987, pp. 153-154; Pelling, 2006, pp. 152-153). Herodotus repeatedly stages abrupt reversals; wealth turns to captivity, imperial confidence to ruin (Herodotus, 2013, Book I.86-91; VII.84-97; IX. 60-70). Sheehan (2018, p. 72) argues that these cycles resist determinism by foregrounding contingency and surprise, anticipating modern reflections on historical temporality. Koselleck's (1985, pp. 267-288) analysis of the tension between "space of experience" and "horizon of expectation" finds early expression in such accounts of fortune's instability.

The gods in Herodotus's account remain ambivalent, at once just and capricious. Xerxes's uncle Artabanus observes: "When God sees one man exalted far above others, he grows envious and casts him down" (Herodotus, 2013, Book VII.46). Storms destroy Xerxes's fleet before Salamis (Herodotus, 2013, Book VIII.13), while Greek victory is credited to divine deliverance (Herodotus, 2013, Book VIII.109). Natural disasters appear as omens, such as the collapse of a school in Chios (Herodotus, 2013, Book VI.27). Immerwahr (1966, pp. 232, 248) reads such episodes as evidence of a tragic worldview where destiny foreshadows catastrophe. By contrast, Thucydides explains plagues and disasters without divine reference, privileging *akribeia*-precision and empirical detail (Momigliano, 1966, pp. 213-214; Thucydides, 2009, Book VII.29). This contrast underscores Herodotus's integration of human affairs into a moral-religious cosmos (Dewald, 1987, pp. 148-149), where the divine acts as a limiting boundary to human ambition.

Another striking element is Herodotus's reflections on cultural norms. In Darius's experiment, both Greeks and Callatians defend their



funerary practices as best, leading to the conclusion: “Custom is king of all” (*nomos pantōn basileus*) (Herodotus, 2013, Book III.38). This has been read as an early articulation of cultural relativism (Dench, 2007; Dewald, 2007). Harrison (2018, pp. 353–354) emphasizes that Herodotus uses relativism methodologically, underscoring the contingency of values and the impossibility of a single universal standard. His ethnographic digressions on Egyptians, Scythians, Arabs, and Indians (Herodotus, 2013, Book II.35–90; IV.1–82; III.98–106) both acknowledge diversity and reveal shared human patterns. As Murray (1980, p. 41) observes, while institutions differ, all address the universal conditions of existence.

Ethical lessons are also conveyed through the motif of the wise advisor. Artabanus’s counsel to Xerxes (Herodotus, 2013, Book VII.10–18), Tomiris’s defiance of Cyrus (Herodotus, 2013, Book I.212), and Themistocles’s strategic advice (Herodotus, 2013, Book VIII.57–65) dramatize wisdom opposed to reckless ambition. As earlier noted, the rejection of prudent counsel frequently leads to downfall, reinforcing a quasi-tragic pattern (Harrison, 2018, pp. 353–354).

In sum, Herodotus situates human action within a metaphysical horizon where fate and divine justice shape outcomes. Immerwahr (1966, p. 18) highlights the proem’s reference to “marvelous deeds performed by Greeks and barbarians” as emblematic of this duality. History thus oscillates between tragic time and historical time, which represents a tension between human freedom and divine necessity. Although Herodotus offers no systematic theology, he affirms both divine agency and human responsibility. Through the framework of double causality, he bridges the gap between the mythic past and the historical present. Xerxes ignoring Artabanus’s prudent counsel (Herodotus, 2013, Book VII.46–52) or Dienekes’s defiance at Thermopylae, “then we shall fight in the shade” (Herodotus, 2013, Book VII.226), illustrate the decisive force of human will (Pelling, 2006, p. 147). Figures such as Croesus, Polycrates, and Xerxes embody human vulnerability, yet Herodotus also celebrates resilience: the Athenians’ refusal to betray freedom (Herodotus, 2013, Book VIII.143–144), the Spartans’ sacrifice at Thermopylae (Herodotus, 2013, Book VII.201–239), and the unity of the Greeks (Herodotus, 2013, Book VII.139). In this interplay of downfall and endurance, he anticipates Koselleck’s tension between “experience”



and “expectation,” where history becomes a field in which memories of reversal coexist with hope for renewal (Harrison, 2018, pp. 341-344; Koselleck, 1985, pp. 267-288).

Taken together, these teachings reveal a conception of history that is both moral and philosophical. Herodotus does not merely catalogue events but frames history as a mirror of human experience, where arrogance, fortune, cultural identity, and wisdom are tested. By making history at once cautionary and inspirational, he anticipates Polybius’s dictum that history is the “teacher of life” (*historia magistra vitae*) (Grethlein, 2011, pp. 253-254).

A bridge between early historiography and the philosophy of history

Herodotus’s *Histories* marks both a turning point in the development of historiography and one of the earliest attempts to subject history itself to philosophical reflection. In this sense, the work functions as a bridge between early narrative traditions and later philosophy of history. His project was rooted in Homeric epic, Hesiod’s genealogical mythmaking, and the logographers’ compilations. Yet unlike these predecessors, he sought to move beyond myth by prioritizing observation (*opsis*) and testimony (*akoē*) as the foundations of knowledge. By juxtaposing different accounts and testing them critically, he produced what may be called the first multidimensional representation of the past. As Dewald (1987, pp. 153-158) notes, he presented himself as an eyewitness investigator, distinguishing what he saw, what he heard, and what he judged credible, transforming myth into inquiry. In this sense, the *Histories* exemplify the transition from *mythos* to *logos* (Gould, 1989, p. 9), though -as previously noted- without abandoning the divine framework entirely.

Although Herodotus never fully excluded divine agency (Herodotus, 2013, Book I.32; VII.77), his narratives reveal a deliberate search for causality within human affairs. This orientation raised questions that would later shape the philosophy of history: Are there patterns in history? Can general principles be derived from conduct? What is the relation between power and justice? While not posed systematically, these questions emerge implicitly from his narrative choices and open history to philosophical speculation.

The Herodotean model profoundly influenced subsequent historians. As Murray (1980, p. 28) observes, his ethnographic and cultural orientation



carried into the Hellenistic period, shaping Strabo's *Geography*, Diodorus's *Universal History*, and Ephorus's universalizing approach. Even Livy, who blended moral reflection with military accounts, reflects Herodotean inheritance. Munson (2012, pp. 210–211) stresses the philosophical significance of this stance; the historian's task is not only to record but also to interpret and evaluate. Pausanias's *Description of Greece*, interweaving myth, history, and geography, shows the persistence of this model into the second century CE (Elsner, 1992, pp. 7–11).

Herodotus also engaged themes that paralleled philosophy, yet this relationship is characterized by a distinct epistemological tension. Plato's reflections on hubris in the *Republic* (2004) and cultural relativism in the *Laws* (2015) echo Herodotean concerns. However, a fundamental gap separates their methods. For Plato, true knowledge (episteme) concerns eternal, unchanging forms, whereas history, which deals with the changing, particular, and contingent world of human affairs, belongs to the realm of opinion (doxa). Therefore, while Herodotus and Plato share an ethical concern with excess, their epistemologies remain distinct: Herodotus embraces the "messiness" of the particular as the locus of truth, whereas Plato seeks to transcend it.

Aristotle, in the *Poetics* (1996), famously distinguished history as concerned with particulars, from poetry as concerned with universals. Yet Herodotus complicates this dichotomy; while narrating particulars, he also conveys insights that approach the universal. Dewald (1987, pp. 159–160) highlights the affinities between his historiography and tragedy, both offering moral and emotional encounters with human vulnerability. Thus, Herodotus offers an alternative path to philosophical insight: thinking through the narrative of particulars rather than abstracting from them.

For these reasons, Herodotus occupies a foundational place in the genealogy of historical thought. He shows that history is not only a repository of memory but also a hermeneutic endeavor that uncovers the meaning of human experience. Modern thinkers such as Collingwood, Ricoeur, and Koselleck argue that the philosophy of history begins precisely with this dual orientation: reconstructing the past while interrogating its significance for human self-understanding. At this threshold, historiography first becomes inseparable from philosophical reflection (Collingwood, 1994, pp.



205–249; Koselleck, 1985, pp. 271–276; Ricoeur, 1984, pp. 3–6).

The reception and legacy of Herodotus from antiquity to modernity

The legacy of Herodotus extended far beyond his own narrative, shaping both historiographical and philosophical traditions across antiquity and beyond. His distinctive method-combining inquiry, ethnography, and moral reflection was adapted by later historians and engaged by philosophers exploring questions of human nature, power, and fate. In the Hellenistic world, his ethnographic and universalizing tendencies provided a crucial template. Strabo's *Geography* consciously built on his descriptions of landscapes, customs, and cultures, integrating geography with history (Dueck, 1999, pp. 468–470). Ephorus in his *Universal History* followed Herodotus's vision of recording the totality of human affairs, though with greater systematization. Diodorus Siculus likewise emulated his broad cultural horizon, seeking to encompass the deeds of all peoples (Momigliano, 1982, pp. 542–543; 1990, pp. 19–53). In Rome, Livy's interweaving of cultural and moral reflection with warfare shows indirect Herodotean influence. While Livy moralizes more overtly in celebrating Roman virtue, the embedding of character and culture within history reflects Herodotus's inheritance (Moles, 1993, pp. 142–146). Polybius, though critical of Herodotus's narrative style, shared his universal scope and advanced his rationalist impulse through systematic causal explanation (Champion, 2013, p. 150).

Herodotus also left a mark on philosophy, though this relationship is marked by a distinct tension between narrative and theory. Plato's reflections on hubris in the *Republic* (VIII.562a-b) and his discussions of cultural relativism in the *Laws* (2015) echo Herodotean themes. However, a fundamental epistemological divergence exists: while Plato sought to transcend the flux of becoming to reach eternal Forms, Herodotus embraced the shifting, contingent world of human customs (nomoi) as the proper subject of inquiry. Similarly, Aristotle's distinction between poetry and history in the *Poetics* (1996, 1451b) -where poetry is more philosophical because it deals with universals, while history deals with particulars- implicitly engages Herodotus. Yet, Herodotus complicates this binary; his *Histories* demonstrate that universal ethical insights can indeed be extracted from the narration of particulars.

Later Stoic and Peripatetic traditions, with their concern for natural



law, fortune, and divine justice, likewise reflect Herodotean concerns. Although less widely read in the Latin West than Thucydides, his work persisted in Byzantium and was revived in the Renaissance. Humanists praised his ethnographic detail and narrative vividness while critiquing his supposed credulity. Lorenzo Valla's 1444 Latin translation restored Herodotus to European intellectual life, where he reentered scholarly debates on human diversity (Foley, 2016, p. 213).

In modern theory, Herodotus has been reassessed as a precursor to central historiographical debates. However, it is crucial to frame this not as a direct lineage, but as a heuristic correspondence. Collingwood (1994) saw in him the first signs of history as the "re-enactment of past thought", a concept that provides a modern vocabulary for understanding Herodotean speeches. Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative* (1984) finds anticipation in his temporal structuring of events. Koselleck's (1985) notion of the "tension between experience and expectation" resonates with Herodotean reversals of fortune, showing that the temporal dynamics of history were intuitively grasped by Herodotus long before they were theoretically formalized. White's (1973) theory of "emplotment" corresponds to his use of motif, repetition, and dramaturgical design.

Viewed as a whole, these receptions place Herodotus at the beginning of a long intellectual tradition linking ancient historiography to modern philosophy of history. His *Histories* not only inspired ancient successors but also established the enduring problematic of the discipline: debates about causality, narrative, and the balance between human agency and fate.

Conclusion

Herodotus's *Histories* is more than the earliest extended narrative of past events. By redefining *historia* as inquiry, he transformed memory into critical reflection and turned inherited traditions into rational investigation. His distinction between observation and hearsay, his juxtaposition of competing accounts, and his ethnographic curiosity together marked the birth of history as a reflective discipline.

Equally significant is the ethical and universal dimension of his work. Lessons on hubris, fortune, and cultural diversity frame history as a moral laboratory. Through the framework of "double causality," Herodotus demonstrates how human responsibility intersects with divine order



without being negated by it. In this way, Herodotus does not simply record events but probes their meaning for human life.

Placed within the broader trajectory of intellectual history, Herodotus's reflections on causality, temporality, and narrative engage in a heuristic dialogue with debates later developed by Collingwood, Ricoeur, Koselleck, and White. It must be conceded that he did not construct a systematic philosophy in the modern sense; strictly speaking, he offers a mode of inquiry rather than a doctrinal system. However, the *Histories* nonetheless represent the first sustained attempt to integrate causality, cultural relativism, and ethical reflection into a coherent framework. By balancing rational inquiry with a tragic understanding of the limits of human power, Herodotus established the very conditions for historical thought. For these reasons, Herodotus should be read not only as the "father of history" but as a foundational figure in the genealogy of the philosophy of history.

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Öz: Bu makale, Herodot'un Tarih eserini, olayların salt kaydını tutmaktan öte, onları düşünsel bir açıklamaya dönüştüren bir inceleme olarak ele almaktadır. Çalışma; açık kaynak eleştirisiyle desteklenen çok sesli anlatım, doğal, insani ve ilahi meseleleri kapsayan bir "çifte nedensellik" ve kibir, talih ve töreye ilişkin etik soruları çerçeveleyen etnografik karşılaştırma olmak üzere üç somut katkıyı öne çıkarmaktadır. Bu bağlamda makale, insan sorumluluğunun ilahi düzen ile kesiştiği Herodot vizyonunun ahlaki ve evrensel boyutunu da vurgulamaktadır. Herodot'u Hegel, Collingwood, Ricoeur, White ve Koselleck ile keşifsel bir diyalog içinde konumlandıran bu çalışma, onun pratiğinin özgürlük ve zorunluluk, yeniden canlandırma, anlatı zamanı, olay örgüsü ve deneyim ile beklenti arasındaki gerilim gibi modern tartışmalara nasıl ışık tuttuğunu göstermektedir. Bununla birlikte makale, modern kategorileri anakronik bir şekilde dayatmak yerine, tarihsel anlam üretiminin koşullarını tesis etmesi bakımından Herodot'un yalnızca tarihin babası değil, aynı zamanda tarih felsefesinin bir öncüsü olarak da değerlendirilebileceğini savunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Herodot, tarih, tarih felsefesi, tarih yazımı.

