

Herodotus of Halicarnassus is partly the heir of the *epos*, literary compositions that narrate the deeds of a hero or a people, as he explains: “[...] that great and marvelous deeds done by Greeks and foreigners [...]”¹.

In this passage the reader can understand the figure of Herodotus as an historian, his main strengths and his search for a new methodology that gives meaning to the way of telling history², but, at the same time, understand how this historiography could be “imaginative” thus showing a weakness when he tells of events that he could not see in the first person³ and uses the *γνώμη*, the morality, to create the course of events.

Herodotus was called by Cicero *pater historiae*⁴, “father of history”, for two complementary reasons: according to Citti⁵, Herodotus was the first to follow a line of logical interpretation and specify his aims “in order that the memory of the past may not be blotted out from among men by time”⁶, supported by extensive documentation and his interest in foreign cultures, “[...] done by the Greeks and foreigners [...]”⁷, which made him also the father of the history of customs and cultures, laying the foundations of anthropology and distinguishing him from his predecessors, the logographers, who limited themselves to recording only what was handed down by oral tradition without using a rigorous and univocal method⁸.

According to Herodotus his main work could be divided into four working tools, which he clearly communicates to the reader: “All I have said is the record of my own autopsy and judgment and inquiry. [...] according to what I have heard, adding something of what I myself have seen.”⁹.

The *αὐτοψία*, composed of *αὐτός*, “same”, and *ὄψις*, “sight”, means “what he sees with his own eyes”. The *γνώμη* “thought, opinion based on intelligence and experience”, are the judgments, responsible for the evaluation of the verisimilitude of a story and often also concerns divine morality. The *ἀκοή* are the oral sources, what is told to him by witnesses and by oral tradition¹⁰.

In addition, as Herodotus points out, the written sources like those left by previous authors, are fundamental, one for the whole Hecataeus of Miletus¹¹.

Therefore, from one point of view, this search for a method represents a strength, however from another this method is also penalizing: it is not possible to have the

¹ Hdt Book I, 1

² Citti, 2009, p.300-308

³ Citti, ibidem

⁴ Cic., De Leg., I, 5

⁵ Citti, ibidem

⁶ Hdt, ibidem

⁷ Hdt, ibidem

⁸ Citti, ibidem

⁹ Hdt Book 2, 99

¹⁰ Citti, ibidem

¹¹ Hdt Book 5, 36

certainty of all that he wrote, as it was impossible to realize what was noteworthy, as explains Betalli¹².

Herodotus himself knows the limits of his knowledge, as he admits: “As for the land of which my history has begun to speak, no one exactly knows what lies northward of it; for I can learn from none who claims to know as an eyewitness. [...] But as far as we have been able to hear an exact report of the farthest lands, all shall be set forth.”¹³.

Even if he has not witness everything he recounts, he has trusted some sources over others. As Citti says, Herodotus is the first who tries to escape from the typical “ellecentrism” of his time, to understand the reasons of the behavior of the barbarians like the Greeks, the Athenians and Spartans¹⁴.

His ethnographic interests lead him to tell history using the *γνώμη*, “the morality” also linked to the divinity’s prophecies, to which in any case it is not possible to oppose, interpretable only, sometimes, by prodigies and oracles. For this reason, this was seen, by the historians who came after him, as the main weakness, one of them being Thucydides who said “[...] prefer to turn to the first accessible information”¹⁵, with clear allusion to Herodotus.

Even so, as stated by Citti¹⁶ modern scholars have found evidence in archeology and anthropology, Greek and eastern anthropology that prove the veracity of his words.

To conclude, it is important to underline how the figure of Herodotus, as historical, although it has strengths and weaknesses, finds a common purpose in the words of the historian himself: “For myself, though it be my business to set down that which is told me, to believe it is none at all of my business; let that saying hold good for the whole of my history”¹⁷.

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¹² Betalli, 2009 pp. 47-66

¹³ Hdt, Book IV, 16

¹⁴ Citti, 2009, p.300-308

¹⁵ Thuc P.W. Book I, 20

¹⁶ Citti, ibidem

¹⁷ Hdt, Book VII, 152