

Between Narrative and Interpretation: Writing History in the Ancient World

Unit 1: Before Herodotos

Introduction

All people, individually and collectively, have a past and in the vast majority of cases they also have the memory of their past. More importantly, most people and most collectives in their memory include the existence of their ancestors. The experiences of their ancestors, however, are lost if such experiences have not been expressed at the time and place necessary for them to become part of the memories of the next generation. The further back into the previous generations one travels, the less of their experiences in the memory of the individual or the collective. Contemporary and past events beyond the experience of the individual can also become part of individual or collective memory. Such memories are even less substantial than those of the ancestors, since their expression may not have been repeated.

As generations pass without a rigid account of the experiences and recollections of their ancestors, memory becomes blurred, events are collated and explanation is lost. In the majority of known human cultures, methods are found to alleviate this blurring of memory, particularly of the collective memory. In most predominantly oral cultures, these methods often centre on the creation of a body of easily-remembered and rendered data. Further, in many cultures these data become the province of specific individuals, groups or castes, who have the responsibility of collecting, remembering and passing on this body of collective memory snippets.

Oral accounts are not in their majority rigid and thus, albeit more slowly, the blurring of memory and loss of fact remains a problem. Still, however, for most cultures these blurred accounts of the past, which often include non-rational elements, are considered an

adequate representation of their collective memory and eventually become the memory itself. Under these circumstances, myth and legend are born.

In some cultures, by no means the majority, this process of oral account and blurred collective memory is at some stage halted in favour of a more rigid accounting system. In general, this change is often preceded by the invention or import of a system of preserving the rigid account beyond the memory of the individual. In many cultures, this preservation is affected by the invention or import of writing.

This move from the fluid to the rigid account often creates a need for the collection and collation of facts that are as close to the truth of what actually happened as possible. The final product of this process, which admittedly is often made in several small steps, is the creation of history or at least the historical account.

Early memories and the oral tradition

The earliest literary works surviving from Greek culture are the Homeric epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey. The exact date of their composition and the society they are referring to are matters of debate. Current scholarly opinion on the matter in its majority agrees that the poems were composed in the 8th century BCE using in part material composed earlier. Their first written edition is traditionally dated to the 6th century BCE and was created at the instigation of Peisistratos, tyrant of Athens at the time.

The subject of Iliad is an episode from the legendary Trojan war, while that of the Odyssey is the nostos of Odysseus after the fall of Troy. For Greeks of the classical and later periods, the Homeric epics were considered a blend of history and legend. The Greeks did not doubt the historicity of the Trojan war or the persons involved in it. However, from the classical periods onwards we find in the surviving sources a trend of rejection of the more irrational and fantastical elements found the epics as well as a tendency towards rationalising the mythical past. These trends are best exhibited in the following two sources:

“Then, Glaucon,” said I, “when you meet encomiasts of Homer who tell us that this poet has been the educator of Hellas, and that for the conduct and

refinement of human life he is worthy of our study and devotion, and that we should order our entire lives by the guidance of this poet, we must love and salute them as doing the best they can, and concede to them that Homer is the most poetic of poets and the first of tragedians, but we must know the truth, that we can admit no poetry into our city save only hymns to the gods and the praises of good men. For if you grant admission to the honeyed muse in lyric or epic, pleasure and pain will be lords of your city instead of law and that which shall from time to time have approved itself to the general reason as the best. Plato Republic 606e1-607a8

Translation: Plato. Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vols. 5 & 6 translated by Paul Shorey. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1969. (Perseus CL)

□Nor, indeed, is the statement of Eratosthenes true that Homer speaks only of places that are near by and in Greece; on the contrary, he speaks also of many places that are distant; and when Homer indulges in myths he is at least more accurate than the later writers, since he does not deal wholly in marvels, but for our instruction he also uses allegory, or revises myths, or curries popular favour, and particularly in his story of the wanderings of Odysseus; and Eratosthenes makes many mistakes when he speaks of these wanderings and declares that not only the commentators on Homer but also Homer himself are dealers in nonsense. But it is worth my while to examine these points more in detail. Strabo 1.2.7

Translation: Loeb Classical Library, 8 volumes, Greek texts with facing English translation by H. L. Jones: Harvard University Press, 1917 thru 1932. (Lacus Curtius)

Of particular interest in the study of the origins of Greek historiography is the presentation of accounts in the epics themselves. In this, the two epics are subtly different. The *Iliad* is an account of war full of fantastical elements and the direct, as well as indirect, intervention of the divine. The proem of the *Iliad* sets the parameters of this account:

The wrath sing, goddess, of Peleus' son, Achilles, that destructive wrath which brought countless woes upon the Achaeans, and sent forth to Hades many valiant souls of heroes, and made them themselves spoil for dogs and every bird; thus the plan of Zeus came to fulfillment, [5] from the time when first they parted in strife Atreus' son, king of men, and brilliant Achilles. Homer Iliad 1.1-7

Between Narrative and Interpretation: *Before Herodotos*

Translation: Homer. The *Iliad* with an English Translation by A.T. Murray, Ph.D. in two volumes. Cambridge, MA., Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann, Ltd. 1924. (Perseus CL)

In the beginning of the *Iliad*, the poet sets out his aim, the theme of the story and, more importantly, his divine inspiration. The poet becomes the muse in an account of legend that is memory. Homer's *Iliad* may be the only early epic surviving until today but at the time it was merely one among many that dealt with the Trojan cycle, possibly distinguished by its length, the talent of its author, its incredible level of detail or simply the emotive power of its subject. The poetic start of the *Iliad* makes no distinction between true events, legend and the poet's own imagination. In the best of tradition on oral rendering of past memory, the *Iliad* is marketed as an account of true events with the truthfulness of the account testified by the divine in the person of the muse.

The *Odyssey* in terms of content is even more fantastic than the *Iliad* yet there is a fundamental division in the *Odyssey* that neither exists nor is ever alluded to in the *Iliad*. The *Odyssey* exhibits a consciousness of the potential warping and exaggerating of a story by the bard that the *Iliad* does not. It is important to remember here that the more fantastic elements in the *Odyssey* are recounted in a bardic account by Odysseus himself, a hero well-known for his cunning and tendency to exaggerate. Odysseus' ability to make up stories is shown in his made-up ancestry and life-account to Eumaios (Od. 14.191-359).

This consciousness of the practical realities of the bardic account in the *Odyssey* is particularly important since the first seeds of the historical account can also be found in the poem with a definite tendency towards the telling of true events. The best expression of this tendency is found in Odysseus' speech to Demodokos:

He spoke, and sat down on a chair beside king Alcinous. [470] And now they were serving out portions and mixing the wine. Then the herald came near, leading the good minstrel, Demodocus, held in honor by the people, and seated him in the midst of the banqueters, leaning his chair against a high pillar. Then to the herald said Odysseus of many wiles, [475] cutting off a portion of the chine of a white-tusked boar, whereof yet more was left, and

there was rich fat on either side: “Herald, take and give this portion to Demodocus, that he may eat, and I will greet him, despite my grief. For among all men that are upon the earth minstrels [480] win honor and reverence, for that the Muse has taught them the paths of song, and loves the tribe of minstrels.” So he spoke, and the herald bore the portion and placed it in the hands of the lord Demodocus, and he took it and was glad at heart. So they put forth their hands to the good cheer lying ready before them. [485] But when they had put from them the desire of food and drink, then to Demodocus said Odysseus of many wiles: “Demodocus, verily above all mortal men do I praise thee, whether it was the Muse, the daughter of Zeus, that taught thee, or Apollo; **for well and truly dost thou sing of the fate of the Achaeans, [490] all that they wrought and suffered, and all the toils they endured, as though haply thou hadst thyself been present, or hadst heard the tale from another.** But come now, change thy theme, and sing of the building of the horse of wood, which Epeius made with Athena's help, the horse which once Odysseus led up into the citadel as a thing of guile, [495] when he had filled it with the men who sacked Ilios. **If thou dost indeed tell me this tale aright, I will declare to all mankind that the god has of a ready heart granted thee the gift of divine song.**” So he spoke, and the minstrel, moved by the god, began, and let his song be heard, [500] taking up the tale where the Argives had embarked on their benched ships and were sailing away, after casting fire on their huts, while those others led by glorious Odysseus were now sitting in the place of assembly of the Trojans, hidden in the horse; for the Trojans had themselves dragged it to the citadel. [505] So there it stood, while the people talked long as they sat about it, and could form no resolve. Nay, in three ways did counsel find favour in their minds: either to cleave the hollow timber with the pitiless bronze, or to drag it to the height and cast it down the rocks, or to let it stand as a great offering to propitiate the gods, [510] even as in the end it was to be brought to pass; for it was their fate to perish when their city should enclose the great horse of wood, wherein were sitting all the best of the Argives, bearing to the Trojans death and fate. And he sang how the sons of the Achaeans [515] poured forth from the horse and, leaving their hollow ambush, sacked the city. Of the others he sang how in divers ways they wasted the lofty city, but of Odysseus, how he went like Ares to the house of Deiphobus together with godlike Menelaus. There it was, he said, that Odysseus braved the most terrible fight [520] and in the end conquered by the aid of great-hearted Athena. Homer *Odyssey* 8.461-520

Translation: Homer. *The Odyssey with an English Translation* by A.T. Murray, PH.D. in two volumes. Cambridge, MA., Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann, Ltd. 1919. (Perseus CL)

Between Narrative and Interpretation: *Before Herodotos*

The work of the bard as seen in the *Odyssey* is twofold. On the one hand, it is the recounting of mythical tales, which Demodokos does with the tale of Ares and Aphrodite. On the other hand, it is the recounting of news from abroad. In this second category, truthfulness rather than art is seen to be more important. Odysseus even resorts to testing the bard by asking for a tale of himself, in other words something that he can verify from experience.

Interestingly, the truthfulness of events is ratified by the real or supposed existence of an eye-witness. Demodokos knows what happened in Troy either because he was there himself or because he was told the events by someone who had been there. This conflation of eye-witness and hearsay testimony is one of the major characteristics of the early prose historical accounts, most importantly Herodotos' *Histories*. At these early stages of the invention of historiography by the Greeks, the stories of others are as trustworthy a source as one's own eyes. The more trustworthy position of the eye-witness as against the hearsay account will not become a part of Greek historiography until Thucydides and the importance of the rigid account until the fourth century.

From poetry to prose

The next step in the invention of historiography by the Greeks was the recounting of events in prose. The first to attempt such a feat was Hekataios of Miletos in the late 6th century BCE. We know little about Hekataios himself beyond what has survived in later sources, while of his work only a few fragments survive. Clearly, however, Hekataios was considered an important historian and man of letters:

A man of Megalopolis in Arkadia, by the name of Kerkidas, when he was dying, he was telling his family not to grieve for he gladly left life as he had the hope to consort with Pythagoras among the philosophers, Hekataios among the historians, Olympos among the musicians and Homer among the poets. And just then, as he was speaking, he surrendered his soul. Aelian *Varia Historia* 13.20 (FGrH 1 T8)

Translation: E. Bissa

Hekataios certainly was one of the pioneers of the prose revolution in the 6th century BCE. Since so little of his own work survives, we are forced to rely upon the opinions of later writers interested in the history of historiography. Like other prose pioneers, Hekataios is said to have written prose in a manner greatly related to poetry, thus making his work pleasing to the audience:

But prose and discourse — I mean artistic prose — is, I may say, an imitation of poetic discourse; for poetry, as an art, first came upon the scene and was first to win approval. **Then came Cadmus, Pherecydes, Hecataeus, and their followers, with prose writings in which they imitated the poetic art, abandoning the use of metre but in other respects passing the qualities of poetry.** Then subsequent writers took away, each in his turn, something of these qualities, and brought prose down to its present form, as from a sublime height. In the same way one might say that comedy took its structure from tragedy, but that it also has been degraded — from the sublime height of tragedy to its present "prose-like" style, as it is called. Strabo 1.2.6 (FGrH 1 T16)

Translation: Translation: Loeb Classical Library, 8 volumes, Greek texts with facing English translation by H. L. Jones: Harvard University Press, 1917 thru 1932. (From Lacus Curtius)

Hekataios of Miletos, to whom Herodotos is indebted, is clear and distinct, and he is quite sweet. He used the dialect of the Ionians as it was and did not mix it, nor did he, like Herodotos, embroider it, he was most poetic in his words. Hermogenes *Peri Ideon kai Logon* 2.12.193 (FGrH 1 T18)

Translation: E. Bissa

It is probable that Hekataios, like the archaic poets, intended his work to be read aloud to an audience rather than read silently by individuals. Thus, it is probable that he used techniques perfected in poetry to enhance the listener's appreciation of the text. With the exact style of his writing lost along with the work itself, we cannot judge the poetic value of Hekataios, nor his literary merit. It is clear, however, that later Greeks of the educated classes saw him a romanticised view of his literary merit.

Hekataios according to tradition was a native of Miletos and took part in the Ionian revolt. He was a member of the aristocracy of Miletos and in Herodotos, he is portrayed as the voice of reason in the Ionian Revolt that is dismissed by the conspirators:

Son of Hegesandros, of Miletos. Born in the time of Dareios (the one who ruled after Kambyzes), contemporary of Dionysios of Miletos, in the sixty-fifth Olympiad.[1] Historian. Herodotos of Halikarnassos is indebted to him, being more recent (for he was born after him).[2] Hekataios was a pupil of Protagoras.[3] He was the first to express history in prose, whereas Pherekydes [wrote the first prose] composition [of any sort]. Suda s. v. Hekataios (FGrH 1 T1)

Translation: W. Hutton, Suda On Line (www.stoa.org/sol)

[7] Notable men were born at Miletus: Thales, one of the Seven Wise Men, the first to begin the science of natural philosophy and mathematics among the Greeks, and his pupil Anaximander, and again the pupil of the latter, Anaximenes, and also Hecataeus, the author of the *History*. Strabo 14.1.7 (FGrH 1 T3)

Translation: H. L. Jones, *The Geography of Strabo*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, Ltd. 1924.

Herodotos 5.36 (FGrH 1 T5)

With this intent, then, Histiaeus sent his messenger, and it chanced that all these things came upon Aristagoras at one and the same time. He accordingly took counsel with the members of his faction, stating his own opinion as well as the message which had come to him from Histiaeus. [2] **All the rest spoke their minds to the same effect, favoring revolt, with the exception of Hecataeus the historian who, listing all the nations subject to Darius and all his power, advised them that they should not make war on the king of Persia.** When, however, he failed to persuade them, he counselled them that their next best plan was to make themselves masters of the sea. [3] This, he said, could only be accomplished in one way (Miletus, he knew, was a city of no great wealth), namely if they took away from the temple at Branchidae the treasure which Croesus the Lydian had dedicated there. With this at their disposal, he fully expected them to gain the mastery of the sea. They would then have the use of that treasure and their enemies would not be able to plunder it. [4] The treasure was very great, as I have shown in the beginning of my account. This plan was not approved, and they resolved that they would revolt. One out of their number was to sail to Myus, to the army which

Between Narrative and Interpretation: *Before Herodotos*

had left Naxos and was there, and attempt to seize the generals who were aboard the ships.

Translation: Herodotus, with an English translation by A. D. Godley. Cambridge. Harvard University Press. 1920. (from Perseus Classical Library)

Hekataios is the first in the noble tradition of many Greek and Roman historians, such as Thucydides, Xenophon, Polybios or Caesar, who took an active part in the political and military affairs of their states. As an aristocrat, Hekataios had the opportunity not only to receive an excellent education but also to travel and meet a great variety of people. Further, he would both the leisure and the ability to access alternative accounts of events in the oral tradition of different areas.

Hekataios according to a tradition wrote only a historical work but also a geographical one:

For the moment what I have already said is sufficient, I hope, to show that Homer was the first geographer. And, as every one knows, the successors of Homer in geography were also notable men and familiar with philosophy. Eratosthenes declares that the first two successors of Homer were Anaximander, a pupil and fellow-citizen of Thales, and Hecataeus of Miletus; that Anaximander was the first to publish a geographical map, and **that Hecataeus left behind him a work on geography, a work believed to be his by reason of its similarity to his other writings.** Strabo 1.1.11 (FGrH 1 T11)

Translation: Loeb Classical Library, 8 volumes, Greek texts with facing English translation by H. L. Jones: Harvard University Press, 1917 thru 1932. (From Lacus Curtius)

Anaximander the Milesian, a pupil of Thales, was the first to dare to sketch the world. **Later Hekataios the Milesian, a man who traveled a lot, examined his findings in practice so that the sketch was admired.** Hellanikos of Lesbos without any conceit wrote down the story. Afterwards Damastes of Sigeion copying most information from Hekataios wrote a Periplous. After that Demokritos, Eudoxos and other wrote Descriptions of the Earth and Sea-voyages. Agathemeros Geographiae Informatio 1.1 (FGrH 1 T12)

Translation: E. Bissa

Hecataeus the historian was once at Thebes , where he made a genealogy for himself that had him descended from a god in the sixteenth generation. But the priests of Zeus did with him as they also did with me (who had not traced my own lineage). [2] They brought me into the great inner court of the temple and showed me wooden figures there which they counted to the total they had already given, for every high priest sets up a statue of himself there during his lifetime; [3] pointing to these and counting, the priests showed me that each succeeded his father; they went through the whole line of figures, back to the earliest from that of the man who had most recently died. [4] Thus, when Hecataeus had traced his descent and claimed that his sixteenth forefather was a god, the priests too traced a line of descent according to the method of their counting; for they would not be persuaded by him that a man could be descended from a god; they traced descent through the whole line of three hundred and forty-five figures, not connecting it with any ancestral god or hero, but declaring each figure to be a “Piromis” the son of a “Piromis”; in Greek, one who is in all respects a good man. Herodotos 2.143 (FGrH 1 T4)

Translation: Herodotus, with an English translation by A. D. Godley. Cambridge. Harvard University Press. 1920. (from Perseus Classical Library)

We cannot be quite certain whether Hekataios truly wrote this geographical work attributed to him and certainly, according to Strabo’s testimony, the later Greek writers were not 100% certain of the attribution either. Hekataios’ interest in geography, not only of the Greek world but also of far away places, cannot be disputed. Of the surviving fragments, the greatest majority deals with matters of geographical interest. It is probable that this slant of the fragments towards geographical rather historical information is a product of the state of the fragments themselves, since the majority of survivals come from geographical or reference works (see the two examples below from Stephanos of Byzantion):

Amfanai: A Dorian polis. Hekataios Genealogies 1. Theopompos calls in Amfanaian in Philippica 5. There is also a village in Thessaly of the same name. Stephanos Byzantius s. Amfanai (FGrH 1 F3)

Translation: E. Bissa

Oine: A polis in Argos. Hekataios Histories 1. The ethnic name is Oinaios, Oinaia, Oinaion. Horos calls it Oinoe, of which the ethnic is Oinoates and the

Between Narrative and Interpretation: *Before Herodotos*

female Oinoatis Artemis, as in Oinoe of Argos founded by Proitos. Stephanos Byzantius s. Oine (FGrH 1 F4)

Translation: E. Bissa

The fragments certainly testify that Hekataios in both of the works securely to him, the *Histories* and the *Genealogies*, provided geographical information and was interested in the geography of the places he referred to. This interest in geography is a common element of Greek and Roman historiography, since many historians found it necessary to provide information about the geography and past, both historical and mythical, of the places they referred to.

Hekataios' historical method is in its majority lost to us, beyond a single fragment, which may or may not be the whole of his statement of method:

Ps-Demetrios *De Elocutione* 2.2. (FGrH 1 F1)

Thus Hekataios the Milesian wrote: "These I shall write as they seem to me to be true; for the stories of the Greeks are many and to me seem to be ridiculous".

Translation: E. Bissa

Hekataios appears, like Herodotos later, to be reliant upon stories and hearsay about what happened, as well as about places that he had not visited himself. Unlike Herodotos, interestingly enough, Hekataios appears from this statement of intent to have made rational choices between what he reported and what he rejected based on the level of the fantastic element in the stories. Given that all past events until that moment in time were part of the oral tradition, mainly poetic, stories, myths and legends were all that Hekataios had to work with.

Certainly both the mythical and the fantastic had a place in Hekataios' work, as he was later criticised for his inclusion of fantastic accounts of foreign lands:

But Hecataeus of Miletus says that the Epeians are a different people from the Eleians; that, at any rate, the Epeians joined Heracles in his expedition against Augeas and helped him to destroy both Augeas and Elis. And he says, further, that Dyme is an Epeian and an Achaean city. **However, the early historians**

say many things that are not true, because they were accustomed to falsehoods on account of the use of myths in their writings; and on this account, too, they do not agree with one another concerning the same things. Strabo 3.8.9 (FGrH 1 T10)

Translation: Strabo. ed. H. L. Jones, *The Geography of Strabo*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, Ltd. 1924. (Perseus CL)

Yet what Apollodorus states in the preface to the Second Book of his work *On Ships* can by no means be asserted; for he approves the declaration of Eratosthenes, that although both Homer and the other early authors knew the Greek places, they were decidedly unacquainted with those that were far away, since they had no experience either in making long journeys by land or in making voyages by sea. And in support of this Apollodorus says that Homer calls Aulis “rocky” (and so it is), and Eteonus “place of many ridges,” and Thisbe “haunt of doves,” and Haliartus “grassy,” but, he says, neither Homer nor the others knew the places that were far away. At any rate, he says, although about forty rivers now into the Pontus, Homer mentions not a single one of those that are the most famous, as, for example, the Ister, the Tanais, the Borysthenes, the Hypanis, the Phasis, the Thermodon, the Halys; and, besides, he does not mention the Scythians, but invents certain “proud Hippemolgi” and “Galactophagi” and “Abii”; and as for the Paphlagonians of the interior, he reports what he has learned from those who have approached the regions afoot, but he is ignorant of the seaboard, and naturally so, for at that time this sea was not navigable, and was called Axine because of its wintry storms and the ferocity of the tribes that lived around it, and particularly the Scythians, in that they sacrificed strangers, ate their flesh, and used their skulls as drinking-cups; but later it was called “Euxine,” when the Ionians founded cities on the seaboard. And, likewise, Homer is also ignorant of the facts about Egypt and Libya, as, for example, about the risings of the Nile and the silting up of the sea, things which he nowhere mentions; neither does he mention the isthmus between the Erythraean and the Egyptian Seas, nor the regions of Arabia and Ethiopia and the ocean, unless one should give heed to Zeno the philosopher when he writes, “And I came to the Ethiopians and Sidonians and Arabians.” But this ignorance in Homer's case is not amazing, for those who have lived later than he have been ignorant of many things and have invented marvellous tales: Hesiod, when he speaks of “men who are half-dog,” of “long-headed men,” and of “Pygmies”; and Alcman, when he speaks of “web footed men”; and Aeschylus, when he speaks of “dog-headed men,” of “men with eyes in their breasts”, and of “one-eyed men” (in his *Prometheus* it is said); and a host of other tales. **From these men he proceeds against the historians who speak of the “Rhipaeon Mountains,” and of “Mt. Ogyium,” and of the settlement of the Gorgons**

and Hesperides, and of the “Land of Meropis” in Theopompus, and the “City of Cimmeris” in Hecataeus, and the “Land of Panchaea” in Euhemerus, and in Aristotle “the river-stones, which are formed of sand but are melted by the rains.” And in Libya, Apollodorus continues, there is a “City of Dionysus” which it is impossible for the same man ever to find twice. Strabo 7.3.6 (FGrH 1 T13)

Translation: ed. H. L. Jones, *The Geography of Strabo*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, Ltd. 1924. (From Perseus CL)

Still Hekataios, in the best tradition of later historiography, made a conscious effort to explain and rationalise mythological material. That this effort of rationalisation started as early as Hekataios testifies to the Greeks’ desire for a fact- rather than myth-based past. Interestingly, the fantastical in Hekataios, like in Herodotos, seems to be more appropriate to far away places rather than the Greek homelands.

From Pyrrhichus the road comes down to the sea at Teuthrone. The inhabitants declare that their founder was Teuthras, an Athenian. They honor Artemis Issoria most of the Gods, and have a spring Naia. The promontory of Taenarum projects into the sea 150 stades from Teuthrone, with the harbors Achilleius and Psamathus. On the promontory is a temple like a cave, with a statue of Poseidon in front of it. [5] Some of the Greek poets state that Heracles brought up the hound of Hades here, though there is no road that leads underground through the cave, and it is not easy to believe that the gods possess any underground dwelling where the souls collect. **But Hecataeus of Miletus gave a plausible explanation, stating that a terrible serpent lived on Taenarum, and was called the hound of Hades, because any one bitten was bound to die of the poison at once, and it was this snake, he said, that was brought by Heracles to Eurystheus.** [6] But Homer, who was the first to call the creature brought by Heracles the hound of Hades, did not give it a name or describe it as of manifold form, as he did in the case of the Chimaera. Later poets gave the name Cerberus, and though in other respects they made him resemble a dog, they say that he had three heads. Homer, however, does not imply that he was a dog, the friend of man, any more than if he had called a real serpent the hound of Hades. Pausanias 3.25.4-6

Translation: Pausanias *Description of Greece with an English Translation* by W.H.S. Jones, Litt.D., and H.A. Ormerod, M.A., in 4 Volumes. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1918. (Perseus Classical Library)

Hekataios certainly kept to his statement of intent in providing accounts and explanations of the Greek mythological past. Indeed his tendency towards censoring was such that he was criticised by his immediate successor, Herodotos:

Miltiades son of Cimon took possession of Lemnos in this way: When the Pelasgians were driven out of Attica by the Athenians, **whether justly or unjustly I cannot say, beyond what is told; namely, that Hecataeus the son of Hegesandrus declares in his history that the act was unjust;** [2] for when the Athenians saw the land under Hymettus, formerly theirs, which they had given to the Pelasgians as a dwelling-place in reward for the wall that had once been built around the acropolis--when the Athenians saw how well this place was tilled which previously had been bad and worthless, they were envious and coveted the land, and so drove the Pelasgians out on this and no other pretext. But the Athenians themselves say that their reason for expelling the Pelasgians was just. [3] The Pelasgians set out from their settlement at the foot of Hymettus and wronged the Athenians in this way: Neither the Athenians nor any other Hellenes had servants yet at that time, and their sons and daughters used to go to the Nine Wells for water; and whenever they came, the Pelasgians maltreated them out of mere arrogance and pride. And this was not enough for them; finally they were caught in the act of planning to attack Athens. [4] The Athenians were much better men than the Pelasgians, since when they could have killed them, caught plotting as they were, they would not so do, but ordered them out of the country. The Pelasgians departed and took possession of Lemnos, besides other places. **This is the Athenian story; the other is told by Hecataeus.** Herodotos 6.137.1

Translation: Herodotus, with an English translation by A. D. Godley. Cambridge. Harvard University Press. 1920. (from Perseus Classical Library)

In this particular incident referred to by Herodotos, it is quite probable that Herodotos' criticism has less to do with the common opinion on the matter and less with pleasing his Athenian hosts. Herodotos has a tendency to criticize Hekataios, both directly by name and reference and indirectly. Possibly, these criticisms have not only to do with Herodotos' desire to prove himself and his work as a worthy replacement of Hekataios (particularly the first part of Herodotos' *Histories*) but also because Hekataios clearly had an eastern Greek perspective upon events, unlike Herodotos' pro-Athenian views.

Later Greek authors that had access to both Hekataios and Herodotos were clear in their opinion that Herodotos, the Father of History, was greatly indebted to Hekataios, particularly in the first two books of the *Histories*:

Herodotos in his second book copied many parts from Hekataios of Miletos word for word and from the Periegeses he slightly changed them. Eusebius *Preparatio Evangelica* 10.3.16 (FGrH 1 T22)

Translation: E. Bissa

Hekataios was the first Greek to try to record the past in prose. His work cannot be securely identified as history, since it has not survived, and it appears that a great part of it dealt with the mythological past. Thus, Hekataios is often numbered among the logographers, or those who recorded stories (logoi). Still in his effort to record faithfully, make rational choices about the stories he recorded and his efforts to provide rational explanations of the mythical past, Hekataios represents one of the greatest steps in the invention of Greek historiography.

Suggested reading:

1. Evans, J. A. S. 'Herodotus and the Ionian Revolt' *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (1st Qtr., 1976), pp. 31-37. JSTOR: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4435483>
2. Knoppers, Gary N. 'Greek Historiography and the Chronicler's History: A Reexamination' *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 122, No. 4 (Winter, 2003), pp. 627-650. JSTOR: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3268069>
3. Moyer, I. S. 'Herodotus and an Egyptian Mirage: The Genealogies of the Theban Priests', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 122, (2002), pp. 70-90 [Available from JSTOR: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3246205>]
4. Raaflaub, K. 'Epic and History' in Foley, J. M. (ed.) *A Companion to Ancient Epic*, Malden MA, 2005, pp.55-70 [Available from NetLibrary, www.netlibrary.com, via Athens, <http://www.athensams.net/myathens/>]
5. Toye, David L. 'Dionysius of Halicarnassus on the First Greek Historians' *The American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 116, No. 2 (Summer, 1995), pp. 279-302. JSTOR: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/295445>

6. West, S. 'Herodotus' Portrait of Hecataeus', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 111, (1991), pp. 144-160 [Available from JSTOR: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/631892>]

Short Assignment: How do you judge Hekataios' method and his rationalisation efforts?