

Dealing the meaning of the term “ἱστορίη”, “enquiry”, in Herodotus’ masterpiece, Giulio Guidorizzi notices: “a certain horizontality of Herodotean history”¹. In fact great (war, politic changes) and minor events (private facts, anecdotes, uses) are mixed up in the treatment. This method is surely a point of weakness, if one considers the precision and the historical accuracy of that work, as many critics noticed (Plutarch, Libanius and others)². Nevertheless the same aspect shows itself as a point of strength, because Herodotus analyses, in a very modern way, not only the geopolitical conquests of the population in question, but also “the spiritual and material achievements”³.

Thucydides gives a punctual definition of what is historical and what not, in the first book of his “History of Peloponnesian War”. In a famous passage, he says that he composed a work without logographical “fabulous” (μυθῶδες), but “with the greatest possible accuracy (ὅσον δυνατόν ἀκριβείᾳ)” (Thuc. XXII, 3-4). This methodological declaration is near our conception of history: precision in dates and descriptions, principle of historical credibility, no scope for fables and myth.

On the contrary, Herodotus uses folkloric and epic themes and anecdotes, making them history, with or without rationalization. For example: the cause of contrast between Greeks and Persians (Hdt., I,1) is researched in the mythical rape of Io by Phoenicians, that leads to various abductions (Europe and Helen), hence the fall of Troy and the Persian hatred. The birth of Pisistratus (I, 59) is announced by a series of divine signs. But Herodotus can also report curious anecdotes and notions about various subjects: history of literature (Arion, I,23), sculpture (Glaucus of Chios, I, 25) and others. The reader can see how little this method is analogous to the modern scientific historiography.

Although our concept of history is much more complex than that of Thucydides. In his treatment he considers only two aspect of history: the “speech” of politicians or generals (λόγῳ) and the “facts” (ἔργα), mostly wars and political decisions (Thuc., I, XXII, 1-2). From Idealism, history becomes a process, thanks to which the “World-Spirit” (“Weltgeist”), the historic course of humanity, is enriched by the nations in forefront. And this “forefront” is not only political, but also technological and spiritual⁴.

Now, one of Herodotus’ most important features is the presence of “λόγοι”. These are a sort of “*ex-cursus*” about single aspects of barbarian (that is not-Greek) populations. According to Felix Jacoby’s theory⁵, these λόγοι represent a previous phase of Herodotus, as a public declamator (following the logographic tradition of Hecataeus of Miletus); only subsequently, thanks to the contact with Pericles and his entourage, he started to compose a Persian λόγος (Περσικά), and then the history of Persian Wars. This “analogue” thesis is confirmed for example by some inconsistencies: the narrator affirms that he will talk about Ephialtes’ death (VII, 213) or Assyrian λόγος (I, 184), but none of these projects are in the work. Albin Lesky’s theory⁶, according to whom these are “oversights [...] like Homer”, seems simplistic. Therefore Herodotus was at first an ethnographer and geographer⁷, but the reader has to remember the unitary idea of all these subjects in the semi-oral society, at least up to first V century B.C. (cf. the concept of “tribal encyclopaedia”)⁸. One of the most important λόγοι, for example, is the Egyptian λόγος (Hdt., II book), for two reasons: its length (one complete book), and the cultural importance of this population who developed many fundamental aspects of Greek culture (calendar, religious habits and even divinities like Heracles, Hdt., par. 4 and 43-44).

¹ Guidorizzi, 2012, p. 546

² Momigliano, 1966, pp. 127-143

³ Guidorizzi, *ibidem*, p. 584

⁴ Hegel, 1820, par.347

⁵ Jacoby, 1913, Suppl. 2, 205-520

⁶ Lesky, 1957

⁷ Hartog, 1988, Preface

⁸ Ong, 1982; Havelock, 1963, p.66, for the concept of “tribal encyclopaedia”

Finally the reader can understand the definition that Hartog gave: “the mirror of Herodotus” (1988)⁹. In the same historiographer, anachronistic and modern aspects are both present: the author of λόγοι never split from μυθῶδες, ancient heritage for public’s pleasure. In the other hand, the founder of a multifaced view of the historical research, that uses the same λόγοι to describe the cultural identity and the national contribution to history of the humanity.

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⁹ Hartog, 1988, *ibidem*, XXIII