

A Critical Analysis of the Role of Herodotus's Histories in Representing the Conflicts between the Persian Empire and the Greek States

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Abstract. Herodotus' *Histories* is the first truly historical work in Western literature. It describes how and why wars took place from 680 BC to 479 BC. As a historical record, Herodotus used documentary techniques to record the human geography, national customs and political ideas of the society at that time. This information served as the background and causes of the Greek-Persian War so that later generations could better understand the history of that period. This paper takes the first volume as an example to interpret Herodotus' description of the Lydian Empire, the Persian Empire and the core figures of the empire as well as the theological thoughts mixed in the explanation of the war, and to enrich the reasons for the occurrence and results of the war through the description of the national political system and other background information. Therefore, Herodotus' *Histories* not only records the war but also shows the influence brought by the war, such as the exchange and development of culture. By recording and describing the Greek-Persian War, Herodotus revealed the history of the ancient Greek period and expressed his sense of responsibility and mission as a historian.

Keywords: Theology; War; Political system; Culture.

1. Introduction

Herodotus is the most famous historian in ancient Greece and a critical founder of western history. His *Histories* was the first Western historiography to distinguish between folklore and historiography, which could be called real history records [1]. Herodotus was born in Halicarnassus in Asia Minor. As an aristocrat, he received a good education from childhood, which laid the foundation for his excellent literary. At the age of thirty, Herodotus began to travel and visited almost all the cities that the Greeks could go to at that time [2]. In every place he went, he would learn about local customs, investigate historical sites, and collect folklore and stories, which accumulated many materials for his later creation [3]. Herodotus arrived in Athens in 447 AD; at that time, Athens prospered from its victory in the Greek-Persian War and continued to accumulate wealth through other wars and invasions of other states. In the process, the cultures and ideas of the nations were exchanged during war and communication. The most revolutionary and cutting-edge ideas of all of Greece were brought to Athens [4]. Meanwhile, Herodotus participated in various political and cultural activities and made friends with many politicians and writers. With the encouragement of his friends, he began to write the *Histories*, which lasted until he died in 425 BC [5].

Herodotus made a historical explanation with this book, solved the historical mystery of the ancient empire's society, culture, politics and even war, and expressed his historical thought. Herodotus' *Histories* is not a rigorous history textbook. He combined rational materialistic thinking and emotional idealism, like the theory of fate, to write a masterpiece full of sorrow and regret. He once expressed in the book that there are two kinds of people who have the same ending, the ordinary people accept the arrangement given by fate and heroes rebel against fate and try to change fate, but with the drive of God's power, they cannot escape the arrangement of fate.

In the historical background and development period of that time, Herodotus not only had the influence of the traditional ideas such as the fatalism of aristocrat origin but also accepted and absorbed the injection of the new culture of Athens and understood the materialism and democratic thought [6]. Under the integration of the old and new ideas, in the contradictory and complex social

background, Herodotus expressed his complex historiography in History and outlined the two hundred years of history from 680 to 479 BC, the rise and fall of the Lydian kingdom in Asia Minor and the rise of the Persian Empire and its invasion of other countries. The course of the Persian and Greek wars are mainly told, respectively. It not only introduces the background of the War but also makes a formal record of the war.

Therefore, it is worthy and necessary to analyze to show the value of this book to give people a concept about that part of history and history recording by analyzing book content and literature. First of this paper is the description of the Persian War and various related records in history based on Herodotus' historical ideas and the reasons why Herodotus wrote them; the historical ideas he intended to express will be explained. All of these will do a critical analysis of this book.

2. The Analysis of Greco-Persian Wars' History

The rise and fall of empires throughout history seem to follow a template, from rise to prosperity to a turning point of decline and then slowly to extinction. In the fall of this empire, it has begun to breed the rise of new empires. However, although history develops, its ups and downs are not simply repeated; the process is complex and changeable. Herodotus's Persian empire rose from internal and foreign troubles to forge a new path. The kingdom of Lydia had experienced the same fate, but in different ways and with different effects. This outcome provided an example for Athens at war to learn from, reflect on its shortcomings, and understand the rise and fall of power [7]. The two main sections of Herodotus's first book of History are about the development of two empires, both of which contain independent central figures, one is Croesus of Lydia, and the other is Cyrus of Persia [8]. Herodotus's description of these two figures is also a carrier and sustenance for the historical thoughts he wants to convey.

2.1. Two Clues of War

In the first part, Herodotus tells the story of the rise of the Lydian kingdom, and Croesus is a hero in this period of history. This part covers the rise and fall of the Lydia kingdom and the reign of the two families, of which Croesus' reign was a large part. He discussed with Solon about happiness at a time when Lydia was at its strongest when Croesus was proud of what he had and considered himself the happiest man. Moreover, feeling resentful of not being recognized in the same way. This moment was also a turning point in Croesus' fate and changed the direction of the Lydian kingdom. The gods punished Croesus for his arrogance, and when Croesus tried to defy his fate and fight against the gods, it backfired and caused a tragic outcome; his own son died eventually [9]. What followed was also an unexpected development. Croesus, after receiving an oracle, wanted to follow it to choose a powerful ally to help him fight the Persians. Although he understands Solon's words about happiness and the impermanence of the world when he is about to burn and is finally saved by the falling rain, the answer he finally gets is that Croesus needs to follow his fate and be punished and that the only empire he can destroy is his own country.

The second clue is that of Cyrus, whose background is also highly theological but also mixed with family hatred and betrayal, which prompted Cyrus to form an army against the Medes' oppression and exploitation of Persia. After successive victories, Cyrus' aggressive ambition was revealed. At first, he followed Croesus' advice to show his mercy when attacking Babylon, but as he conquered other peoples and occupied other cities, Cyrus also began to become arrogant and cruel. Cyrus believed that he was no ordinary man and that his army was mighty. One of the worst battles occurred when he tried to conquer the Massagetae on the east coast of the Caspian Sea. Cyrus himself was killed in this battle, and his body was dishonored by the Queen of Massagetae [10]. This is the end of Cyrus. After his death, the succession of his son Cambyses and a series of atrocities led to the downfall of the Persian Kingdom, which eventually led to wars between the Persians and the Greeks.

The destruction of the Lydian empire was thus established in the operation of God and fate, and the cause of Lydia's defeat in the war against Persia was also God's will. In fact, this part reflects

Herodotus's perceptual historical thought, that is, the theory of destiny. Herodotus added a large number of divine guidance to this part of the description. For example, when something great happens in real life, God will always give certain guidance or signs [4]. For example, Croesus dreamed that his son died, the dream about the prophecy of Cyrus, and what triggered Cambyses to kill his relatives were all dreams, and no one could escape the fate arrangement. The Greek-Persian War was finally won by Greece. This expression was based on the social theology and religious doctrines of the time. Herodotus has actually done many realistic descriptions, and this description is due to the limitations of that time. In the eyes of the Greeks, the occurrence of any natural phenomenon and social time was arranged by God [11].

Although it is impossible to avoid the influence of theology and to record it in a purely scientific documentary way, Herodotus has made great progress in this aspect of idealism as a kind of narrative method in which he uses God's will to describe to his readers and listeners the causes and effects of events. In his words of divine guidance and fatalism, Herodotus is trying to tell the world that if doing wrong, there will be death and that arrogant Kings who try to war on others will be punished, and their families will be destroyed. Moreover, the nation, in the name of justice, will eventually win, even when it is in a disadvantageous position to win. This is also Herodotus's respectful sense of responsibility and mission as a historian [5].

2.2. The Role of Politics

Herodotus' *Histories* is not only not satisfied with telling the story of the war, but in addition to the above, he constructs the background of the history and the main actors involved in the history by describing the different threads of the history, he also tries to explore the reasons for the occurrence of these historical events. In this context, in addition to the will of God, Herodotus also used the theory of manifest destiny to connect history and explain the causes of wars. He also helps explain the context and reasons for the war by interpreting the politics of the time. Herodotus offered praise for democracy and attributed the victory of Greece to such a political system. The Greek city-states, for example, like ants that could be crushed at will against the invincible Persian Empire; they are small in size, small in population, and weak in combat, but why did the Greeks beat the Persians? It was because its citizens enjoyed democratic freedoms that Athenian democracy defeated Persian autocracy. It was because the citizens of Athens had equal rights of autonomy that they fought every war for themselves and for their freedom [12]. Nothing is more powerful than the desperate fight for freedom by those who have enjoyed it and refuse to accept the rule of others. Persian soldiers had to fight out of fear of their rulers, but when they fought alone with others, they were intimidated by their courage and lost. The tyranny of Persia could not bring strength to the country, and under Darius, democracy was stifled so that all the decisions of the country would be made by one man, who, when he was drunk with pride, when he was full of his own desires and interests, could not take the country for the better. The superiority of institutions, in contrast to the great contrast of power between nations, explains the outcome of the war [13]. Herodotus, of course, did not extol the virtues of democracy; he also pointed out that democracy pays for ignorance when the masses are ignorant. Praise was also given to the great strength of the Persian army as well as its tactics and capabilities. The war between Greece and Persia was not simply a war between different peoples but also a war between two civilizations and two political systems. At the same time, it was precise because many great men, such as Aristotle, also could not treat individuals equally at that time, Herodotus had such a progressive political view, which enabled him to understand and describe the development of history and the causes of historical events more objectively [14]. Herodotus actually gave answers and guidance in this book about the war between two systems and two civilizations. After Darius became the king of Persia, he continued his invasion, which occupied parts of the territories of Europe, Asia and Africa, moved the center of the Western world from Tigris Euphratesxila to the Mediterranean region, broke the geographical boundaries and barriers between civilizations, and strengthened the cultural exchanges between the East and the West. The Greece- Persia War was also a great fusion of human history and culture. This is the influence of the war described in the *Histories*, and this seems

to be one of the few benefits of the war. It also promoted trade, although it suppressed trade in some of the invaded areas, Persia also developed maritime trade in the occupied areas. Such exchanges between civilizations and trade have also promoted the development and progress of human society, which is a by-product of war. Greece, as the victorious party in this war, also made the development of ancient Greek civilization continue for a longer time, leaving a precious cultural treasure for history.

2.3. Additional Information in Histories

There is also a section of history devoted to the natural environment and the customs of the people, which may seem to have little to do with the Greco-Persian war, but which, in fact, lays a rich foundation for it. All of this information is very useful, Herodotus shows that the influence of natural conditions on nations is very strong. Because cities with good natural conditions have high labor productivity and relatively faster development speed, on this basis, civilization will develop faster, and people's life quality, social development degree and national prosperity are strongly positively correlated with them. He extensively described the mountain's geography, ethnic distribution, religious belief, economic life and various customs and interesting things of various countries. These were not limited to the scenes of war but provided fertile soil for the description of war and historical evidence [15]. Due to its superior geographical advantages and mild climate, the soil is suitable for crops, and the rivers are convenient for irrigation. Abundant food resources can be obtained without spending a lot of manpower and tools. It is in this geographical environment that people have the energy to develop spiritual things and help the further development of human civilization. The country's prosperity also benefited from this favorable geographical advantage. Various religious beliefs and customs have also shaped the qualities of these people, and the abilities of these people will also be reflected in the performance of the war. These messages seem to have nothing to do with the war, but in fact, they enriched the background of the war, enriched the understanding and conception of the society and people at that time for future generations to understand the situation of the war.

2.4. Criticism of Histories

Of course, it is undeniable that Herodotus' *Histories* also had defects. If it is required by the standards of historical works, there are still many points worthy of criticism. First of all, in the narration of this book, Herodotus writes in a way of telling the story to the audience, which makes reading the storyline confusing and difficult to understand the correlation between events. Herodotus switching back and forth between topics can lead to confusion and fallacies for readers who did not have basic knowledge about that time [16]. Such a deviation would make it difficult for future generations to confirm the objectivity of the event and make it less readable. Herodotus made it clear that he would write down everything he heard, without sifting or evaluating it, in order to let future generations know more and judge for themselves, which means that many of the information points in this book cannot be regarded as authentic records [17].

Secondly, in the process of recording events and historical figures, Herodotus added personal feelings and made subjective evaluations of the figures. Although he knew that Nicias was said to be "too addicted to the habit of piety", he called those who were naturally conservative "fanatical adherents". He criticized Corleone for his "recklessness to the point of insanity" rather than an objective description of "imprudence"[18]. Readers can feel his obvious subjective attitude towards the characters from the text, which will affect their judgment and form preconceived feelings. So this book lacks a neutral and objective description due to the basic rules of historical books. Although some historical figures are generally acknowledged to be bad, other history books also describe events from a dialectical perspective. Herodotus, on the other hand, accepted all the negative information and created the image of a sinner. In the account of the deeds of Cleon, for example, Herodotus records all possible evil deeds without mentioning anything that would have a positive effect on the description [18]. Such a record is unfairly influenced by too many personal feelings and influences the depiction of historical facts. It is also suspected of channelling the feelings of the masses.

3. Conclusion

Herodotus was a historian with a strong sense of historical responsibility and mission. The *Histories* he wrote was one of the most groundbreaking history books in western history and culture. This book systematically recorded the course of history, including the background of the Greek-Persian War, the main tasks involved in the war, the course of the war and the speculated causes of the war. Although the records of the Greek-Persian War could not get rid of gods, prophecies, fatalism, and other theological idealism, which was an unavoidable limitation of the time, Herodotus also described the war in detail through documentary techniques, getting rid of the creation of God as the protagonist at that time, and for the first time recorded with people as the main and facts as the main. In the descriptions of the rise and fall of empires and the start and end of wars in the book, Herodotus also expressed his dissatisfaction with the invasion of other countries and the tyrannical dictatorship by virtue of the Greek-Persian War, and at the same time, explained from a higher level including the aim of war and morality why Greece, a weak country, defeated the powerful Persia. It not only provides the background of the time and society at that time with the help of human geography but also describes the situation of the participating countries in multiple dimensions, explains the causes of the results of the war from the perspective of the political system like the conflict between democracy and autocracy, and praises the democratic system of Greece and the idea of equality for all. Even though it still has many defects if judged it based on professional historical product, it is very important for future generations' understanding of this period, of these countries, of the Greek-Persian War.

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