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Solon to Peisistratos: Athens in the 6th Century BC

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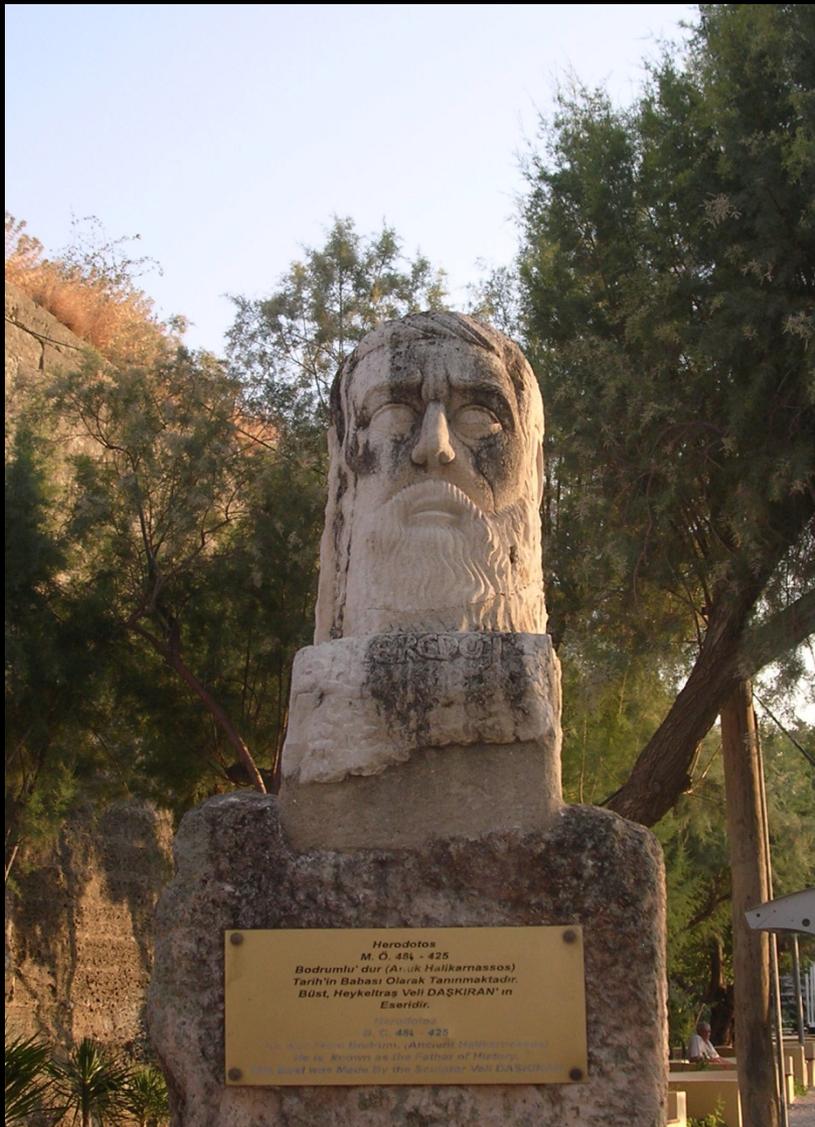


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Herodotus

- 5th century BC historian (? – c. 420 BC)
- From Halikarnassos (modern Bodrum)
- Wrote “The Histories”
- NB Greek *historia* = “enquiry”
- An account of the Persian Wars (490 and 480 BC)
- also earlier events to explain why east and west came into conflict
- Famous for his digressions
- Geographical/ethnographical information
- Travelled extensively
- “Father of History”?

Herodotus, *The Histories* (trans. A. de Selincourt), Penguin, London (any edition or other translation)

Herodotus: the Father of History?

“This is the account of the enquiries made by Herodotus of Halikarnassos, made so that men’s achievements should not be forgotten with the passing of time, and in order that the great and marvellous deeds done by both Greeks and foreigners should win renown, and especially the reasons why they warred against each other”

Herod. 1.1.

Herodotus: the Father of History?

Herodotus' methods and sources:

- Written sources (including inscriptions)
- Visual sources (buildings, monuments, dedications)
- Oral sources (first hand accounts, oral traditions)
- NB only knew Greek (though refers to interpreters)
- Describes sources, their agreements/disagreements, his own belief/disbelief/inability to decide, the impossibility of arriving at an answer in some cases (e.g. Herod. 4. 148 ff. on the foundation of Cyrene) or on the Battle of Lade:
“ I cannot say for certain which of the Ionian contingents fought well and which fought ill; for the reports are confused, everybody blaming everybody else” (Herod. 6.14)

BUT... compare (for example) Herod. I. 103 ff on the birth of Cyrus the Great...

... or the Father of Lies?

On the giant gold-mining ants of India:

... there are found in this sandy desert ants... bigger than foxes; the Persian king has some of these, which have been caught there. These ants make their dwellings underground, digging out the sand... and the sand which they carry forth from the holes is full of gold...the Indians come to this place [when the sun is hot and the ants are underground] with their sacks, they fill these with the sand and ride away with all speed; for, as the Persians say, the ants sniff them out and give chase... being so much swifter than other creatures that if the Indians did not hurry away while the ants were mustering, not one of them would escape...

Herod. 3. 102-5

See also Herod. 1.8-12 for some bedroom antics...

Athens in the 7th century BC

- Signs of a wealthy elite class in Dark Age Athens
- 7th century Athens ruled by the *Eupatridai* (“well born”) ie an aristocratic class
- NB archon = “magistrate”
- NB “tyrant” from Greek *tyrannos*
- Failed attempt at tyranny c. 632 BC by Kylon (married to daughter of Theagenes, tyrant of Megara: Herod. 5.71)
- c. 621-0 Dracon produced first written Athenian law code (“Draconian”)
- Tensions between rich and poor

Image Source Page: <http://www.utexas.edu/courses/introtogreece/lect10/img5dipylnamph.html>

For a long time there was *stasis* (= civil strife) between the notables and the masses. For the Athenian constitution was in all respects an oligarchy (= rule by the few), and the poor were enslaved to the rich – themselves, their children and their wives... the whole land belonged to a few men. The hardest and bitterest aspect of their life as citizens was that they were slaves. They had other complaints as well, for they had no share in anything at all

Aristotle(?) *Constitution of Athens* 2

Solon

- Archon 594/3
- Introduced a set of reforms including:
 - A new law code
 - Cancellation of debts
 - Grants of citizenship to immigrant craftsmen
 - Ban on export of agricultural products other than olive oil
 - Organisation of Athenian citizens into 4 property classes:
 - *Pentakosiomedimnoi* (500+ *medimnoi*)
 - *Hippeis* (300+ *medimnoi*)
 - *Zeugitai* (*nb hoplites*) (200-300 *medimnoi*)
 - *Thetes* (less than 200 *medimnoi*)
 - Creation of the Council of 400
- Presented his reforms in poetry

I brought back to Athens, to their home which the gods established,
Many men who had been sold, some unjustly,
Some justly, and some forced to flee because of debt
Who were not longer speaking Attic,
As they had been wandering in many places.
Others, who were suffering shameful slavery here,
Trembling at their masters' moods, I set free.

Solon 36. 8-15

When he gained control of affairs, Solon set the people free for the present and for the future, by forbidding loans on the security of the person; he also passed laws, and caused a cancellation of debts, both private and public, which the Athenians call *seisachtheia* (“shaking off of burdens”) since they have shaken off the weight which oppressed them.

Aristotle(?) Constitution of Athens 6.1

After Solon...

While Solon was away, there was still confusion in the city, but peace reigned for four years. In the fourth year after Solon's rule, however, no archon was elected owing to *stasis* and again, four years later, the same thing happened. After another four year gap, Damasias was elected archon and held office for two years and two months until he was removed by force. The Athenians then decided to appoint ten archons because of the *stasis* and they held power for the year after Damasias...

Aristotle(?) *Constitution of Athens* 13

Peisistratos

In the course of time there was a feud between the men of the coast (*Paralioi*) under Megakles son of Alkmeon, and the men of the plain (*Pedieis*) under Lykourgos the son of Aristolaides. Peisistratos, with tyranny in mind, organised a third faction, collecting supporters and taking command of the men of the hills (*Hyperakrioi*) as they were called.

Herod. 1.59.3

NB Alkmaeonids

- Claimed descent from the Neleids of Pylos (ie Nestor's family)
- Came to prominence with his success in the war against Megara (565 BC)
- Died 527 BC

Image Source Page: <http://www.utexas.edu/courses/larrymyth/6Artemis2009.html>

Sanctuary of Artemis, Brauron

Peisistratos:

- Claimed descent from the Neleids of Pylos (ie Nestor's family)
- Came to prominence with his success in the war against Megara (565 BC)
- Died 527 BC

Attempt no. 1 (c. 560)

This was his plan: after wounding himself and his mules [Peisistratos] drove his carriage into the agora with the tale that he had just escaped from his enemies, who intended to murder him as he was driving into the country. Then he asked the people to give him a bodyguard, for he had previously distinguished himself in the war against Megara in which, as Athenian commander, he had captured Nisaea and performed other great exploits. The Athenian people were taken in and enlisted a number of citizens who followed him as a bodyguard, carrying clubs instead of spears. These men, led by Peisistratos, rose up and captured the Acropolis

Herod. 1.59.4

Another go...

In the village of Paiania there was a woman called Phye, who was almost six feet tall, and generally good-looking. They dressed her in full armour, put her in a chariot, showed her how to pose in the most striking way, and drove her to the city. They had sent some heralds ahead, who when they arrived at the city made proclamations as they had been instructed:

“Men of Athens, give a hearty welcome to Peisistratos! Athena herself has honoured her above all men and is escorting him to her own Acropolis!”.

The heralds went about and spoke thus; the news quickly reached the villages as well that Athena was bringing Peisistratos back and the city folk, believing that the woman was the goddess herself, worshipped her and welcomed Peisistratos.

Herod. I.60

[Megakles and Peisistratos] devised the most ridiculous charade I have ever encountered. From ancient times the Greeks have been considered more clever and less prone to silliness than foreigners, and yet it was amongst the Athenians, said to be the cleverest of the Greeks, that these two devised this plan.

Herod. I. 60

- Peisistratos marries Megakles' daughter, as agreed
- BUT he already has 2 adult sons (Hippias and Hipparchos) from his first marriage
- PLUS the Alkmaeonids were said to be under a curse...
- Peisistratos does not sleep with his new wife, and Megakles finds out

Third time lucky... c. 546 BC

Peisistratos and his followers, setting out from Marathon to attack the city, arrived at the Temple of Athena at Pallene... Amphilytos, a soothsayer from Arcarnia, approached Peisistratos with the following prophecy in hexameter verse:

Cast is the net, the meshes spread out wide,
In rush the tunny fish in the bright moonlight

Peisistratos understood these inspired words, said he accepted the oracle and led his army forward.

The Athenians in the city were having their midday meal, and some of them were playing dice after the meal or enjoying a siesta; and so Peisistratos and his men attacked and routed them... and so for the third time Peisistratos gained control of Athens.

Herod. 1.62-3

The Tyranny of Peisistratos

- Generally benevolent
- Furthered Athenian interests through his foreign policy
- Trade and coinage
- Centralisation of cults, reorganisation of festivals including:
 - The Great Panathenaia
 - The Great Dionysia (or City Dionysia) – moved from Eleutherai?
 - The Mysteries at Eleusis
 - Artemis Brauronia on the Acropolis?
 - Delos
- Development and monumentalisation of Athens

Image Source Page: <http://www.cngcoins.com/Article.aspx?ArticleID=249>

Athenian “Wappenmünzen” coin
2nd half of the 6th cent. BC?

He purified Delos in accordance with the bidding of an oracle in the following manner: he dug up all the dead which were buried within sight of the temple and transferred them to another part of the island

Herod. I.64