

Nigel Nicholson's Overview of Herodotus' Histories

This is an outline of the whole work, with more detail concerning the sections on the reading list. Adapted from the introduction to de Selincourt's Penguin translation and the very detailed, chapter by chapter summaries at <http://web.reed.edu/academic/departments/classics/Herodotus.html>.

The Histories are structured primarily by the reigns of four successive Persian Kings: Cyrus (I.1.-I.216), Cambyses (I.1-III.66), Darius (III.67-VII.4), and Xerxes (VII.5-IX.122), who is still alive at the end, and in fact continued to reign for another 14 years. (The book divisions are not Herodotus' own.)

I.1-I.216 Cyrus (c.559-530 BCE)

Before Cyrus: the Lydian Empire of Croesus (c.560-546 BCE) (I.6-86)

- accession of Croesus (I.7-25), including the tale of Gyges (the great, great grandfather of Croesus) and Candaules (c.700 BCE) (I.8-12)
- Arion and the dolphin (I.23-24)
- Croesus and Solon, and the death of Croesus' son; the nature of happiness (I.29-45)
- Croesus' oracle "you will destroy a great state" (I.53)
- excursus on the pre-Greeks, and then Athens and Sparta in the 6th century (I.56-68), including the Phye trick (I.60) and the tyranny of Pisistratus (I.59)

Cyrus, King of the Persians (I.87-216)

- exposure of Cyrus, punishment of Harpagus by Astyages (I.107-30). Note that Astyages is a Mede, but his daughter marries a Persian, Cambyses, and Cyrus is thus both his grandson and a Persian.
- Persian customs (I.131-40)
- Asian Greeks, and their conquest by Persia (I.141-77)
- (Assyrian (=Iraqi)) Babylon, and its conquest by Persia (I.178-200)
- Caspian region; but Tomyris, queen of the Massagetae, defeats Cyrus (I.201-16)

II.1-III.66 Cambyses (530-522 BCE)

Egyptian campaign:

- Egypt's geography, including the Nile (II.2-34), customs and religion (II.35-98), and history (II.99-182), including correction of Homer's history of Helen (II.113-20)
- Cambyses in Egypt
- Conspiracy of Magi, and death of Cambyses (III.61-66)

III.67-VII.4 Darius (521-486 BCE)

Accession:

- Prexaspes tells the truth (III.74-75)
- Constitutional debate of Darius, Megabyzus, Otanes (III.80-82)
- Tribute and extent of Persian empire (III.89-97); cf map in Grene pp.674-5

Enlarges empire: Asia Minor (including Greeks), Scythians (this ends in defeat), North Africa, Balkans, North Aegean Coast

(First) Ionian Revolt (revolt of Greeks in Asia Minor from Persian rule, and its suppression)

- background history of Athens, taking up from I.59-64 (V.55-96)
- origins, suppression and settlement of revolt (V.97-VI.42)

Invasion of Mainland Greece under Mardonius

- Spartan kingship examined (VI.52-59)
- Land battle of Marathon (490 BCE); victorious Athenians led by Miltiades (VI.94-120)
- Cleisthenes' wedding party; Hippoclitides dances away his chances, while Megacles (an Alcmaeonid and ancestor of Pericles) seizes his (VI.126-31)

VII.5-IX.122 (end) Xerxes (486-465 BCE)

480 BCE: Xerxes' invasion of Greece:

- invasion debate between Artabanus and Xerxes (VII.8-11); Xerxes' dreams (VII.12-19)

- bridging (and whipping) the Hellespont (VII.33-36, 54-57)
- Pythius' son bisected (VII.38-39)
- 2nd invasion debate between Artabanus and Xerxes (VII.45-52)
- Demaratus on the Greek character (VII.101-4)
- Boges, Persian governor (VII.107)
- Sparta sacrifices Sperthias and Bulis (VII.133-37)

Persian defeat at sea:

- land battle of Thermopylae and naval battle of Artemisium (VII.175-VIII.17)
- no cash prizes at Olympics (VIII.26)
- naval battle of Salamis (VIII.40-99), featuring queen Artemisia (VIII.67-69, 87-88, 102-3) and Themistocles' trickery (VIII.75-76)
- withdrawal of bulk of Persian force (VIII.100-144)

Operations of 479 BCE:

- defeat of remaining Persian armies under Mardonius at Plataea (IX.1-89)
- Greek offensive, naval battle of Mycale, and (2nd) Ionian Revolt (IX.90-122)
- Athenian expedition to Hellespont (IX.114-22)