

Herculean Historians
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Scholars have paid almost no attention to the way in which Greek and Roman historians sometimes associated themselves or their fellows with mythical figures such as Heracles.¹ In this paper, I explore four cases in which Heracles or Hercules serves as a model to which a historian might be compared.

In the famous letter in which Cicero writes to his friend Luceius and discusses the work on history on which he is engaged (*Ad Fam.* 5.12.3), he indicates that in a *proemium* to one of his works Luceius compared himself to Xenophon's Hercules (a reference to Xenophon's telling of Prodicus' moral tale about Heracles at the Crossroads: *Mem.* 2.1.21-34). To Luceius, therefore, Hercules' suitability as a model is due to his virtuous character. In the prologue to his work Diodorus Siculus refers to Heracles in a way which is clearly meant to present him as the prototype for universal historians (1.2.4, cf. 1.1.1). Other references to the hero in Book 4 of Diodorus connect Heracles even more closely with the historian, especially when seen in connection with his comments in Book 1. However, Diodorus' emphasis on Heracles' exemplary labors and travels indicates an interesting difference from Luceius.

The epitomizer Justin sounds much like Diodorus when he says that Pompeius Trogus attacked with Herculean boldness ("Herculea audacia," pref. 2) the task of composing a vast universal history. However, Nicolaus of Damascus provides the most striking incidence of Heracles being compared to a historian. In one of his fragments (*FGrH* 90 F135) Nicolaus claims that, if Eurystheus had assigned Heracles the task of producing his massive universal history, it would have nearly killed him. In examining these separate passages, I will contextualize the allusions to Heracles or Hercules, discuss why ancient historians found him a pertinent model, and suggest which Hellenistic historians might have initiated the practice of using him as a model for themselves.

¹ J. Marincola has discussed Odysseus as a model for historians in "Odysseus and the Historians" *Syllecta Classica* 18 (2007) 1-79. In *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography* (1997), he makes some interesting but brief remarks about both Odysseus (pp. 4 and 149-50) and Heracles (pp. 46, 59, 150 n. 101, 154-5) being models for ancient historians.