

Stylistic and Methodological Comparison in Herodotus and Thucydides

The debate as to whether the title, “Father of History,” would best be applied to Herodotus or Thucydides has been well visited in classical scholarship. The two authors, despite having a good deal in common stylistically and methodologically, present very different approaches to history, and as such merit a great deal of in-depth comparison. This research project does not attempt to solve the aforementioned argument, but rather to contribute to the discourse surrounding it by comparing the differences and similarities between the two authors’ descriptions of events and topics which are specifically addressed in both of their texts. This analysis will include, but is not limited to, the two authors’ differing treatments of the Trojan War (Hdt. 1.1-4, Thuc. 1.9-12); their descriptions of the murder of Hipparchus by Harmodius and Aristogeiton (Thuc. 1.20.2 and 6.54, Hdt. 5.55 and 6.123.2); Thucydides’ denial of specific “facts” mentioned by Herodotus (such as the existence of the Spartan Pitanate *Lochos* and the ability of Spartan Kings to cast two votes in the gerousia) (Thuc. 1.20.3); and both authors’ accounts of the Theban attack on Plataia (Hdt. 7.233.2, Thuc. 2.2.1). Such a comparison, which focuses on examining how each of the two authors treats the same issues, topics, and events, could prove to be extremely useful in elucidating the stylistic and methodological differences between Herodotus and Thucydides. More specifically, it may help readers evaluate the oft-made claims by scholars that Herodotus is less a historian and more a story-teller and that Thucydides utilizes a more scientific historical approach (as broached, for example, in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature I: Greek Literature*). As a brief example, if one examines Herodotus’ description of the causes of the Trojan War in Book I of his *Histories*, one sees a list of rationalized mythological references, centered around the rape of Io, Europa, Medea (an

obvious reference to Jason and the Argonauts), and finally Paris' abduction of Helen (Hdt. 1.1-4). However, upon examination of Thucydides' treatment of the Trojan War, one finds, among other things, the author openly questioning Homer's account of the size of the Greek force which sailed against Troy, and providing a proposal as to the reason the Trojan War lasted for ten years: a scarcity of resources for the Greeks and, because of this, a need to split the force between supply gathering and battle (Thuc. 1.9-12). In this example, numerous differences between the two author's approaches to presenting and analyzing history are apparent, such as Herodotus' use of rationalized mythological accounts, and Thucydides' more specific treatment of political and logistical issues. This article attempts to present a new approach to the comparison of the two authors by focusing on the analysis of specific topics which are addressed by both authors in their respective texts.

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