Since the release of the film version of Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*, there has been renewed interest in the *Histories* of Herodotus—the book the dying patient treasures so much. The writings of Herodotus are the ground zero of Western history. He lived during the fifth century B.C.E., and his *Histories* chronicle the events of the Persian Wars, which were within living memory when he wrote. He was the first writer to examine real, rather than mythical history, and although his work lacks the rigor of later histories, it has a breathtaking scope. Herodotus is a wonderful storyteller, and in recalling the wars with Persian invaders, he ranges across the ancient world, mixing politics with natural history and anthropology. These are travelers tales, and a great deal of their appeal to a modern audience lies in the way Herodotus describes the cultures that influence his story. The societies of Scythians, Arabs, and Egyptians are depicted in detail, from their political structures to their dining habits. Herodotus created a sense of history for his people, and he gives us a picture of a distant past that reminds us of the vast continuum of civilization.

My Personal Review:
The nine books of *History* by Herodotus try to be a history of the Persian Empire and its wars with the Greeks, but by telling both peoples story, the author ends up by narrating the history of the whole world known to him. Although Herodotus is the first known serious historian, he is not the first scientific one (that would be Thucydides), due to the fact that Herodotus still believes in gods and their direct intervention in human affairs. Nevertheless, in an interesting sort of transition to modern history, he has doubts about the stories and legends he picks up, and then he tries to give rationalized explanations of the events he relates. Even so, with inexactitudes and mixing fact with fiction, he renders a most vivid portrait of the Ancient World, so like ours in substance and so different in form. Something to remark is how much we have inherited and preserved from the Greeks, our most influential cultural ancestors.
In Book I, H. talks about the mythical precedents of clashes between Greek peoples and Asian barbarians. Then he tells the story of the richest man in the world, Croesus, the king of Lydia, the first man to attack and conquer the Ionians, Greek peoples inhabiting the Eastern coast of the Aegean sea. Croesus then consults an oracle asking if he should attack the powerful Persians, to which the oracle answers: do it and you will destroy a great empire, as he does: he destroys his own empire. Thus begins the expansionist policy of the Persians. H. then goes on to tell the ancient history of the Medes, the predecessors of the Persians, and how king Cyrus takes power. Cyrus proceeds to attack practically all his neighbors, increasing his power. Cyrus proceeds to attack practically all his neighbors, increasing his empire before dying.

In Book II, Cambises inherits the Persian throne and decides to invade Egypt, which is the subject of the whole book. Herodotus, always and thankfully the king of digression, tells us the whole story of myths, geography, habits and recent history of Egypt, in one of the most fascinating parts of his work. Book III tells the story of Cambisess rule, the rebellion of the Magicians, the plot of the Seven and the ascension of Darius, whose kingdom is described in the last part. Book IV relates Dariuss (failed) campaign against the Scythes, peoples from the Northern coast of the Black Sea, truly exotic, primitive and savage guys. He elaborates on the habits and strange life they live. Book V includes the Thracian and Macedonian invasions, as well as the Ionian revolt. Book VI brings us to the First Median Wars first part, the expedition of Mardonius which finishes in the massive shipwreck of the Persian fleet in Mount Athos. Then comes a digression (a fascinating one) on the history of Sparta, and then the second expedition, which ends up in disaster in the battle of Marathon. In Book VII we see the start of the Second Median War. It includes preparations and the beginning of the invasion, as well as the naval battles of Magnesia and the battle of Thermopylae. Book VIII tells the end of the operations of year 480-479 B.C.: the naval battle of Arthemisius, the Persian advance through Central Greece, the evacuation and sack of Athens, the battle of Salamis (a crucial turning point of Western Cultures history), Persian King Xerxes flight and the winter recess at Thessalia. Finally, in Book IX Herodotus talks about the military operations of the following year, the second take of Athens, the battle of Plathea, the Greek decisive victory, the Persians escape, and the final digression over the wisdom of Cyrus.

Few books are so rich in information, stories, legends, and analysis as this one. Herodotus comes alive as a superb, good-willed historian, a hard worker. For all its depth and amplitude, his style is always quick and easy to read. He includes many a good story and has a sense of humor. It's fun to hear his admonitions and preventions like you were a man of his time, a contemporary reader. He was born in Halycarnassus, where today is South Western Turkey. Born to a rich family, they are forced to escape, for political reasons, to the island of Samos. There he decides to travel around for ten years, time during which he collected the material for his masterpiece. Almost always, he tries to give more than one account of
facts, leaving the reader to decide which one to believe. He interviews everyone he can, compares official records and documents, analyzes the situation, and when he tells his own opinion, he is straightforward about it. Fun, interesting, educational, this book is truly a time machine.

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