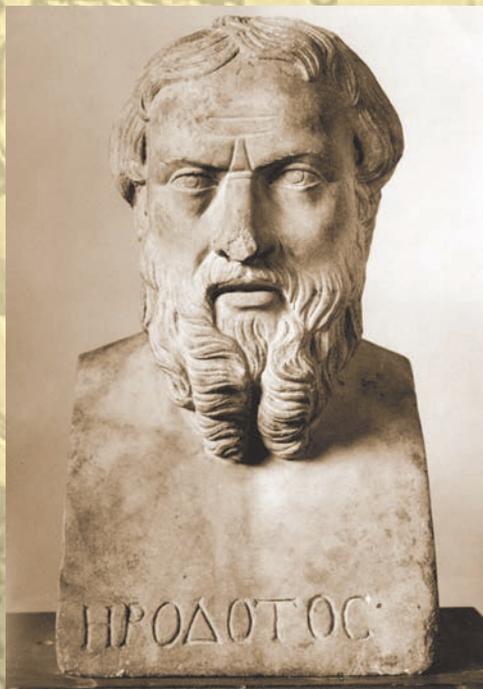


BIOGRAPHY FROM
ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS
LEGENDS, FOLKLORE, AND STORIES OF ANCIENT WORLDS

The Life and Times of

HERODOTUS



Jim Whiting



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Jim Whiting has been a remarkably versatile and accomplished journalist, writer, editor, and photographer for more than 30 years. A voracious reader since early childhood, Mr. Whiting has written and edited about 200 nonfiction children’s books. His subjects range from authors to zoologists and include contemporary pop icons and classical musicians, saints and scientists, emperors and explorers. Representative titles include *The Life and Times of Franz Liszt*, *The Life and Times of Julius Caesar*, *Charles Schulz*, and *Juan Ponce de Leon*.

Other career highlights are a lengthy stint publishing *Northwest Runner*; the first piece of original fiction to appear in *Runners World* magazine, hundreds of descriptions and venue photographs for America Online, e-commerce product writing, sports editor for the *Bainbridge Island Review*, light verse in a number of magazines, and acting as the official photographer for the Antarctica Marathon.

He lives in Washington state with his wife and two teenage sons.

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PUBLISHER’S NOTE: This story is based on the author’s extensive research, which he believes to be accurate. Documentation of such research is contained on page 46.

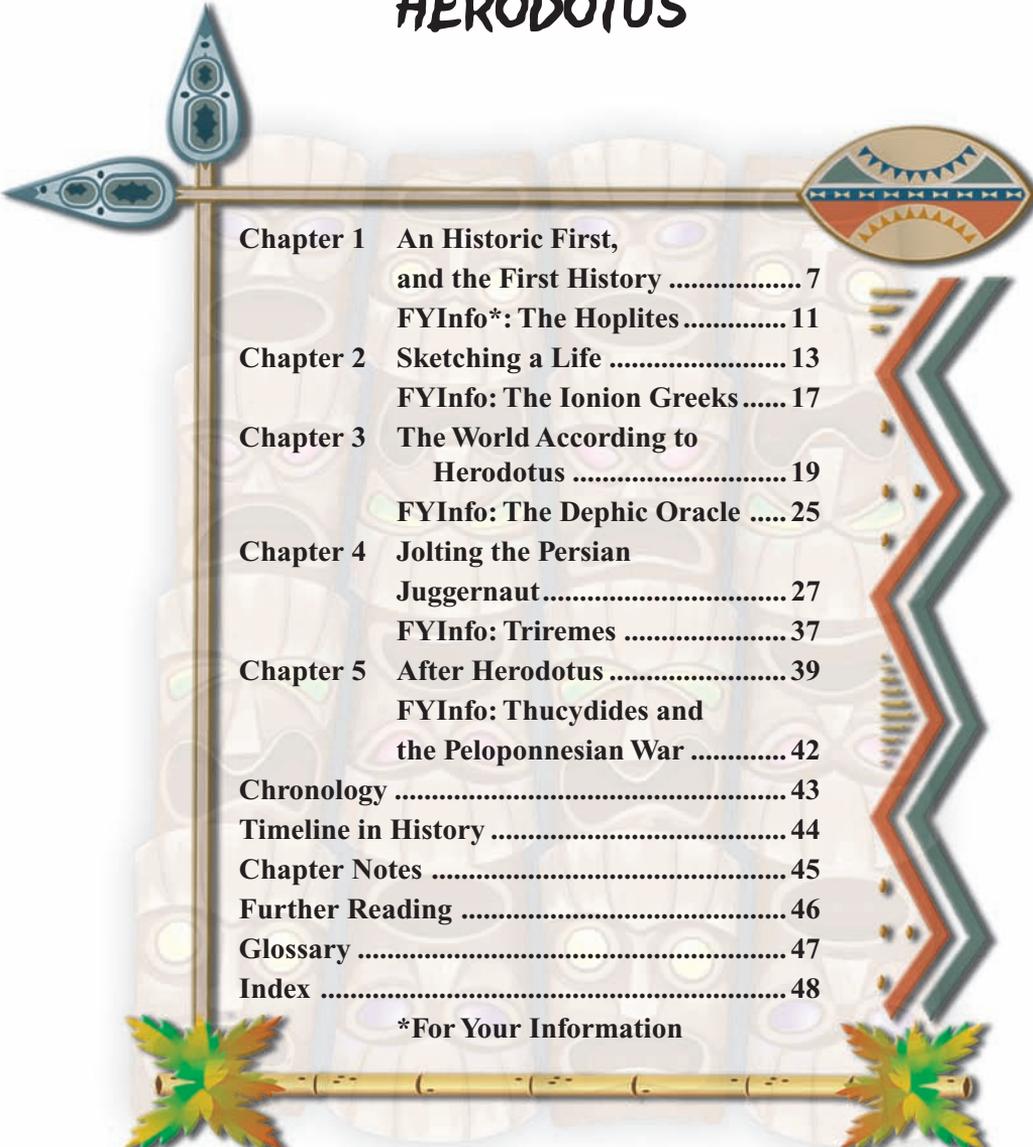
The internet sites referenced herein were active as of the publication date. Due to the fleeting nature of some web sites, we cannot guarantee they will all be active when you are reading this book.

To reflect current usage, we have chosen to use the secular era designations BCE (“before the common era”) and CE (“of the common era”) instead of the traditional designations BC (“before Christ”) and AD (*anno Domini*, “in the year of the Lord”).

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***For Your Information**



CHAPTER
ONE

**AN HISTORIC FIRST,
AND THE FIRST HISTORY**

For hours the thousands of exhausted men trudged along the narrow dirt road. They had been up since dawn, and now it was midafternoon. The hot, late-summer sun beat down on them. There wasn't much water to quench their thirst. The first few miles of their trek had been flat, then the road began to rise. The uphill slog had continued for nearly ten miles.

Finally they reached the top of the long hill. The worst was over. Off in the distance they could see the outlines of their home city of Athens. The last few miles into the city sloped gently downhill. As they neared it, the jubilant inhabitants poured out with a heartfelt welcome. They clapped the men on the back and offered them brimming cups of cold water. Wives kissed their husbands, children waved to their fathers, parents warmly greeted their sons.

The men had no time to join the joyous celebration. They hadn't reached their final destination. They continued on for a few miles to the seashore and arrived just in time. Black specks appeared on the horizon. The specks transformed into hundreds of Persian galleys. Galleys were vessels propelled by dozens of oarsmen. Each boat contained fighting men bristling with weapons. The Athenians were also well armed. It was a standoff. The ships hovered just offshore. It is likely that the men shouted insults at one another.

Chapter ONE

It wasn't the first time the Athenians and Persians had faced each other on that September day in 490 BCE. When the sun rose, the two sides had been drawn up on a plain about twenty miles from Athens. The Athenians charged. It seemed a foolish thing to do. The Persians were the odds-on favorites to win: They had many more men than the Athenians. They were the ancient world's primary superpower. They felt confident that they would easily add Athens to their steadily growing empire.

The Athenians defied the odds. They employed superior tactics. Their soldiers, known as hoplites, broke the Persian lines. They killed thousands of their suddenly panic-stricken enemies. Fewer than 200 of their own men perished. The desperate Persian survivors clambered aboard their galleys and continued fighting. They knew they could still win.

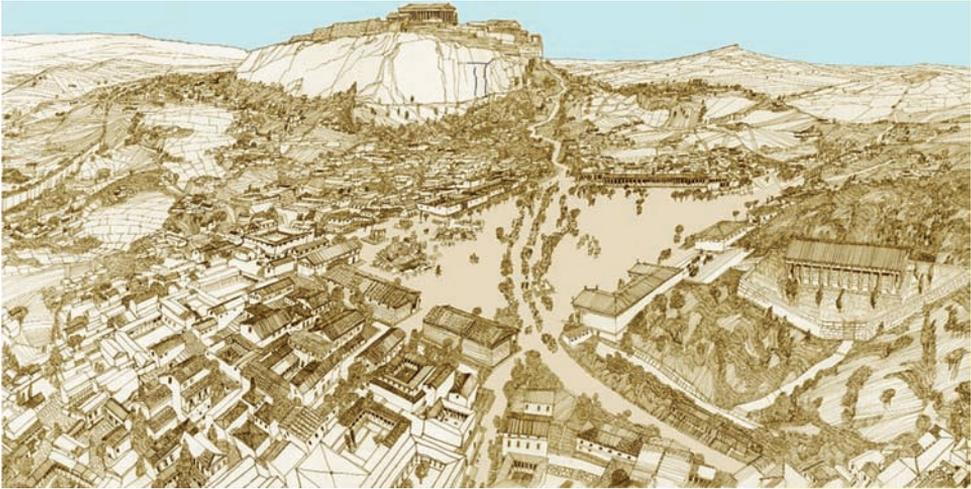
The battle lay on one side of a peninsula. Athens was on the other. The city was defenseless, because all its fighting men were at the battle.

The Persian commanders ordered their oarsmen to get to the city before the Athenian troops. If they could do that, the situation would be reversed. They would be inside the city's stout defensive walls, and the Athenians would have to break in to save it.

The Persians knew they were in a race. They knew that the Athenian soldiers would march back to the city as fast they could. They knew that the Athenians didn't have to travel as far as they did. The sea route around the tip of the peninsula and up the other side was nearly seventy miles. The land route was twenty miles. But galleys could travel much faster than marching men, more than ten miles an hour in short bursts.

As they saw the galleys powering away, the Athenian commanders realized the danger they were in. Their men were already tired from fighting in the battle, and some were wounded. Yet there was no time to rest. They had to get going immediately. The Athenians had another handicap: They had to carry their equipment. The gear was cumbersome and heavy—up to seventy pounds per man. Like the Persians, they knew they were in a very desperate race. That knowledge drove them forward. They walked as fast as they could. Some of the more energetic ones would even break into an occasional jog. These jogs wouldn't last long. Their gear was just too heavy.

AN HISTORIC FIRST, AND THE FIRST HISTORY



Athens in the fifth century BCE was protected by the sea and a defensive wall (left in picture). If Persia had captured the city in 490 BCE, many of Athens' temples, including the Parthenon (on the hill), would never have been built.

The troops didn't know it, but they were competing in history's first marathon. The morning's battle took place on the Plain of Marathon. A village named Marathon lay a few miles north of the actual fighting. The Persian galleys had landed on the shores of the Bay of Marathon.

The eight thousand Athenians won that first marathon race. When the Persians saw the grim men waiting for them, they knew they had lost. The Persians still outnumbered the Athenians, but soldiers trying to come ashore on a heavily defended beach are at a severe disadvantage. Many Persians would be slaughtered. Their commanders realized they had no chance to capture Athens. They turned around. They had many miles to row before they would reach safety.

Finally the exhausted Athenian warriors could celebrate what they had just accomplished. A relative handful of men had administered a stinging defeat to an army previously thought to be invincible.

Centuries later, a legend would arise from this day. According to the legend, a messenger ran from the battlefield. When he arrived at the

Chapter ONE

gates of the anxiously awaiting city, he gasped, “Rejoice! We conquer!” Then he died from his exertions.

It is very unlikely that this incident happened. Greek messengers were trained to cover much longer distances comfortably. Such a feat had been accomplished just a few days earlier, in fact.

“The Athenian generals sent off a message to Sparta,” a famous account says. “The messenger was an Athenian named Pheidippides, a professional long-distance runner. . . . He reached Sparta the day after he left Athens and delivered his message to the Spartan government.”¹

There was good reason for appealing to Sparta. The Spartans were regarded as the best warriors in ancient Greece. Their presence on the battlefield would tilt the odds in the Athenians’ favor.

The two cities were about 140 miles apart, so Pheidippides averaged 70 miles each day. He found the Spartans in the midst of an important religious festival. They could come in a week, they said.

Pheidippides immediately began his return journey. For him, running nearly 300 miles was all in a few days’ work. It is unlikely that a man capable of running so far and so fast—whether it was the legendary Pheidippides or another professional messenger—would have had any trouble running the twenty miles from the battlefield to Athens.

Nevertheless, the legend persisted. When the Olympic Games were revived in 1896, the European organizers had all studied Greek history and knew about the legend. They decided to have a race to “commemorate” the messenger. The race followed the same route from Marathon to Athens that an ancient messenger would have taken. Appropriately, the winner of the first official marathon was Greek. He didn’t have any special training. He didn’t die. Nor did any of the other men who had entered. That run was the first modern marathon.

The Battle of Marathon is one of the highlights of another historic first. The account appears in a book called the *Histories*. Scholars consider the book to be the first history. Its author was born a few years after the Battle of Marathon.

His name was Herodotus.

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