

Echoes of historical events in the *Medikos Logos* of Herodotus. Questions of the origins of the sources and their reliability¹.

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In his huge and famous work we know under the name of *Historiae*, Herodotus has amply dealt with the question of Persia and the history of its kings. Therefore, concerning the period which preceded the reign of Cyrus, many scholars asserted that the passage concerning the history of the Medes, the so-called *Medikos Logos* (Herodotus, I, 95 - 107), is a pure narrative construction devoid of any historical reality. Contrary to them, others have commonly taken the text for granted and strongly defended its reliability. Anyway their opposite positions nurtured a very long and sometime very harsh debate between historians. Whatever appreciation we can give to the work of Greek Historian it seems for us very difficult to follow either point of view.

We have first to take account that the main goal of the Greek historian was to report political events that happened about a century and half before he began to gather information. Obviously, Herodotus wrote for the Greeks of the 5th century BC to give them a better knowledge about the history and the people of the far from well known Oriental World.² Certainly Persia was for him a delicate topic according to the particularly hectic political situation of the time where war operations and diplomatic negotiations between the Greeks cities and the Achaemenid dynasty followed each other.

At the time when Herodotus writes his story the Greeks the great majority of the Greeks were not acquainted with the genesis of the Persian dynasty before Cyrus. His main objective is to explain to his readers how this Persian nobleman was able to seize the power and how he ruled successfully over a mighty empire and how he lead victoriously his army from a remote and mysterious country to the border of the Greek world (i.e.; the Aegean coast of the Anatolia).

The historian was forced to reconstruct the political events that took place before Cyrus as a sort of historical introduction. Probably, he was aware of the gap that lasted some 150 years between the fall of the Assyrian Empire and the rise of the Achaemenid Dynasty with Cyrus considered as the founder. Obviously to prepare the ground of his main chapter about Persia the Greek historian had to fill the gap but this indeed presented great difficulties for him before he found a narrative development. To fill this gap Herodotus' choice was to write a history of a Median dynasty through a chronological succession of four kings at the end of which he cleverly introduced the figure of Cyrus as the last successor of a royal lineage. Conspicuously, we have to recognize that his story may be on scholarly and historically points of view little convincing. But through his literary construction the Greek historian can introduce the beginnings of Cyrus' life in a satisfactory and comprehensive form for the

¹ ¹ This research has been funded by the Interuniversity Attraction Poles Programme initiated by the Belgian Science Policy Office.

² Herodotus is believed to have begun his work in the year 435.

Greeks readers. The unusual nature of Cyrus as successor of a Median ruler and the founder of the Achaemenian Empire seems not to have worried the Greek readers.

However we can not dismiss the fact that the making of such an introduction reveals a characteristic Greek historical concept. In the Herodotus' mind – and to the Greek mind of his epoch as well – an empire like Assyria with its mighty army and organization could only be crushed down by a political power as powerful and as organized as him.

Most of the detractors of the Greek Author's work have pointed out that there are no traces of a centralized Median empire as asserted by him³. Indeed it's not possible to confirm its existence through the archaeological discoveries or the Historical sources (e.g. the Assyrian and Babylonian written documents). However we have to admit that it would have been impossible for Herodotus to write about the so-called *Median dynasty* without the help of documents or oral traditions referring to the Medes.

From where Herodotus got his sources it's difficult to assert. According the existence of a well developed system of chancellery records that existed in the palaces of Assyria and after in the libraries of many temples in Babylon, the latest still in function during his time, we could reasonably believe he was duly informed by some circles of educated and learned people tacking some oral traditions back to him. Probably, these intellectual councils must be considered as the informants who gave him historical accounts. Indeed it is very difficult to believe that Herodotus took his information directly on place. Whatever the origins of these reports whether the were kept in mind by some Babylonian historians or if they were coming as notes taking during the reading of the written documents, the Greek Historian was probably forced to trust in accounts of his correspondents. Many clues seem to prove that he used what appears a somewhat hectic mass of information instead to have the possibility to work by himself on complete copies of authenticate correctly recorded official files.

Numerous chronological, historical incoherencies (especially about the yoke of the Medes on the Persians⁴) and anachronisms (the story about the rise to the throne of the first Median king Deiokkes and the organization of his court) in the development of his story betray the efforts to gather different traditions together to present a continuous historical framework according to the traditional Greek perception of the History. For Helm, the Herodotus' story depicts a sort of saga of national liberation in which events and heroes are grouped in a continuous chronological but artificial framework⁵. In his efforts to reject the value of the Greek author's work, he stated this *saga* was directly passed on to Herodotus and simply reported by him without to take much cautions. Of course, this opinion is excessive even the reliability of some parts of his *Medikos Logos* are doubtful or even obviously anachronistic. Indeed the description of the Median State clearly reflects the organisation of the later and well-known Persian Empire. If the honesty of the historian could not be dismissed some passages of the text give the impression to be reported to make the story more attractive. It could be considered as a lack of prudence or a default in a necessary cautious examination about the origin of the information.

Unfortunately for us, this historical patchwork of this Median period doesn't correspond to the accounts on the Medes given by the historical written Assyrian and Babylonian sources from the end of 8th to the middle of the 6th century BC. Helm severely criticized all the attempts to compare events coming from these sources and those cited by Herodotus. He pointed out the absence of any possibility to bound one and another source by setting a

³ Helm 1981 ; Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1988 ; 1994 ; Kienast 1999)

⁴ This yoke is now definitively considered as a Persian invention coming from the time of Cyrus (Kienast 1990, Rollinger 1999). Nevertheless we are surprised to find this anachronism in the Herodotus' *Medikos Logos*.

⁵ Helm 1981, pp.81 & 88)

common chronology⁶. Indeed, on the chronological level the *Medikos Logos* as a Greek literary creation, rises serious problems when using the dates of the reigns. However it's beyond the aims of this study to present them here⁷.

However, a careful lecture of these two types of sources reveals that some passages in the Herodotus' text sound as echoes of ancient historical events. Many words and formulations that could appear something strange, enigmatic or even perplexing to the reader can bear traces of historical realities. The difficulty is that these historical clues are deeply hidden under the course of the narrative developments of the story.

Curiously, the majority of the possible parallels we can make concern precisely the period and the deeds of the two last kings of the Herodotus' list, Cyaxares and Astyages. For these two rulers, the Herodotus' report seems more trustworthy and reliable than the stories about the former reigns of his *Medikos Logos*. Indeed the Babylonian sources fit very well with some events also mainly happened during the reigns of Cyaxares and Astyages⁸.

Here we have to point out the great problem caused by the oral traditions in its role of passing on the historical information. In the case of the Herodotus' story, the reality of the problematic may find its best illustration. It's very likely that Herodotus was forced to rely to this form to obtain his information and whatever the nature of criticism we can make about the text, we have to agree that the accuracy and the precision of any translation or record gathered by the Greek historian can prove deceptive, of poor quality or even to be not completely reliable. However, Herodotus was alone to judge and he had to gather all of these in a uninterruptedly textual but intelligible story.

We agree very much the opinion of Sancisi-Weerdenburg who asserted that it is not unlikely that an oral tradition may have kept some traces of true historical events⁹. However these clues may be hidden by the use of words and the development of thoughts and ideas that make the story interesting, pertinent or simply presentable.

The difficulties may be more important if the subjects and topics gathered during a limited span of time were historically unrelated between them, of different versions or if they proved to be incomplete and hence of restricted interest. How was it possible in those conditions to enable him to reconstruct step by step a structured history of the Medes with more precision? However we have to bear in mind that without these sources even imprecise and incomplete they could have been, it would have been impossible for the Greek historian to produce with some accuracy a comprehensive history about kings, people and events that has been passed away for more than 150 years before he began to write.

If we dismiss the work of Ctesias considered as not very reliable and some brief or mundane mentions by Greeks authors¹⁰, Herodotus is the unique writer to have worked on the history of the Medes and on their dynasty. Also he is the unique author to have written about a Median Empire¹¹.

⁶ Helm 1981, p.85.

⁷ We invite the readers to consult the works of Henige (2004) and Scurlock (1990). See our bibliography.

⁸ Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1994, pp.51-52 ; Liverani 2003, p.5.

⁹ Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1994, p.42.

¹⁰ See Tuplin and his study about the references of the Medes in the Greek literary sources (Tuplin 1994, pp.237-244).

¹¹ His work was considered as a true historical report until the work of Helm (1981) who was the first to develop against the Herodotus' version of the history of Persia before Cyrus. The Median empire has been for long time a critical reflexions or doubts as an anticipation of the Persian Achaemenid empire. It's an dramatic example of both absence of valuable scientific questioning. See Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1988.

Therefore this is not the unique source about the existence of a people. Information about the Medes as a people appear (under the name of *Mada'a/Mada/Madayn*) in many Assyrian military campaign's reports and also in many Babylonian chronicles from the 8th century to the 6th century BC. A comparison with the Greek text would have been very interesting but we have to recognize unfortunately these sources don't offer enough detailed information about the Median homeland, neither the nature of the political structure of the Medes nor their cities and rulers¹². Unfortunately, through these accounts the Medes seem to have played a distant role in the political history of this troubled epoch where they are considered more as a group of loosely relationship tribes than a true politically structured nation (people)¹³.

That the position of the Medes doesn't square with the facts told in the text of Herodotus lead many scholars to consider the Herodotus' report as a pure literary imagination devoid of any historicity¹⁴. Others like Brown and Genito prefer to consider the work of the Greek author as a narrative adaptation of different unlinked stories coming from a oral tradition¹⁵.

The difficulty for any researcher is to find his way between these two point of view reflecting two significant differences of analysis.

Nevertheless, it also possible to chose the way of a careful and meticulous reading of the *Medikos Logos* where events and deeds of the Median kings are developed. Whatever the sources gathered by Herodotus, by no means they could allow him to create a work based only on a freely inspired interpretation or imagination. We have no right to doubt about the honesty of the writer. His *Medikos Logos* contains traces and indications of ancient historical events that allow us to reconstruct at least some short fragments of the history of the Medes and their political role between the Assyrian and Babylonian territorial expansions from the 8th to the 6th century BC. To put these evidences to light, we have to subject the text itself under scrutiny to reveal possible links with events of the Assyrian and Babylonian history.

The problem is the difference of the nature of the Greek text and the ancient written sources. If some events are developed by Herodotus as major ones sometimes with the hope to enhance the interest of his story, conversely what concerns the Medes in the Assyrian and Babylonian sources often appear as incomplete, brief or limited information. We have to bear in mind that we have to work with a bulk of dispersed and unconnected accounts.

Taken from our observations, we noted that Herodotus had correctly reported the gap that have existed between the fall of the Assyrian Empire and the rise of Cyrus considered as the beginning of the Achaemenid empire. The Greek Historian wrote: "*The Assyrians had been masters of upper Asia over a period of five hundred and twenty years, when the Medes set the example of revolt from their authority. They took arms in the cause of liberty and fought with such gallantry that they shook off the Assyrian yoke and became a free people...*" (H. I, 96). In his report, he gave the total number of years of each of the four reigns of the Median dynasty that lasted 150 years¹⁶.

If we accept the chronological sequence given by Herodotus, the so-called *Herodotean chronology*, the first king of the Medan dynasty began his reign in the year 700. Beyond this

¹² Radner 2003, p.63

¹³ Recently, Lanfranchi has pointed out some very interesting historical parallels about names given to some people in different cultures. In an article that a great amount of people were known under a generic (standard) name originally given by highly developed cultures. The name of Medes could be given condescendingly and only to a group of people or societies living with a modest and insignificantly organized political administration (Lanfranchi 2004, pp.87-88).

¹⁴ Helm 1981, pp.87-88

¹⁵ Brown 1986 ; 1988 ; Genito 1995 ; 2005.

¹⁶ Once again the Herodotus' work produce a controversial debate about his chronology. Scurlock proposed two options for the Median dynasty and its four kings according the option to add up (or not) the 28 years of the Scythian yoke of Cyaxares (Scurlock 1990). Henige rejected the two chronologies arguing that the Herodotus' count of years is not reality (Henige 2004).

The four reigns of the Median Dynasty are traditionally defined as: Deioctes (700-647) – Phraortes (647-625) – Astyages (584- 550).

round number, the date proposed here seems plausible. Indeed, the reign of King Sargon II (720 - 705) represents the peak of the Assyrian military campaigns in the North and Central Zagros¹⁷. During his reign Assyria tried to ensure the control on territories and cities against the threat caused by the military pressure mainly but not exclusively by the Median aggressive bands. After Sargon II, the written documents show a gradually decrease of the Assyrian political influence in this neighbouring mountainous region and at this epoch the situation is mainly due to the role of the Medes.

We have already pointed out that some passages cited in the *Medikos Logos* can conceal traces of real historical facts. It's noteworthy for those in relation with the collapse of Assyria or with the immediate period when the new Babylonian kingdom took over its succession. We have to point out that unfortunately the written documents coming from any royal Assyrian chancellery and describing events dated of the last years (and the fall) of the Assyrian Empire and its capital Niniveh are till now missing. Their absence led many scholars to imagine the possibility that during this period of political confusion an outbreak of a Median centralised state took place. Indeed, the historical chronology places the fall of Assyria at the very end of the 7th century BC. This period coincides with the reign of Cyaxares who is reported in the *Medikos Logos* to have definitively captured (and ruined) the capital Niniveh (H.I,103).

It's worthy to say that we have to take some cautions about the names of the Median Kings given by Herodotus. Some doubts remains till now since some former studies have proposed to establish parallels between them and those we can encounter in the Assyrian and Babylonian sources.

Usually a careful analysis of these occurrences based mainly on a firm historical chronology, prove that the resemblances if not ambiguous or doubtful are purely fortuitous and must be rejected.

We have to recognize that any attempt to establishing real, objectives and fully detailed historical parallels between a narrative text like the one proposed by the Greek Author and historical records like campaign's accounts, can not give us anything else than a desperately few number of similarities.

According to the opinion of Liverani¹⁸ the Herodotus' text mentions only two events that could (directly) find their equivalent or counterpart in the Assyrian and Babylonian sources. These are the Cyaxares's attack on Niniveh and the surrender of the Median army to Cyrus.

For us instead, the Herodotus' *Medikos Logos* can reveal much more. In the Herodotus' account Cyaxares is said to have command the attack on Niniveh (H.I 103). This event is duly confirmed in the Nabopolassar Chronicle in which the Median King appears as the chief of the Umman-Manda bands¹⁹, a name already used in the written documents to design the bulk of the enemies of Assyria coming from the mountainous regions, and among them were the Medes. The historical chronology agrees with the Herodotean one. If the fall of Assur (and other cities not always mentioned) must have happened in the very end of the 7th century BC

¹⁷ The main goal for the Assyrians was to ensure and secure a continuous long distance trade to import horses and wood, metal...) in Assyria. During the time the political effects of the military control transformed the Zagros monopoly (Tourovets 2010). The establishment of many trading centres (the *karn*) and four controlled provinces Sargon II: 721-705) has to be considered as a secondary task. This was only justified by the instability and the political and administrative organisation of the people with which the Assyrians were in contact (Liverani 2003; To

¹⁸ Liverani 2003, pp.5-8

¹⁹ Grayson supposes that for an unknown reason the scribe made a graphical fault by replacing the sign *ma* by *man*. This fault has been reported directly by the sculptor on the stele (Grayson 1975, pp.90-96 – Chronicle n°3).

Ummân(i) signifies troops or armed bands of warriors.

(most probably in 612) the reign of Cyaxares, which lasted between 625 and 585 (*Herodotean* chronology) seems to suit very well to allow us to consider the king as the conqueror of the Assyrian city.

Even if the Median troops under the command of Cyaxares succeeded alone or not to capture the city of Niniveh, we have at least to recognize at this date the existence of an organized force described as the Medes. The Herodotus' report establishes a link between the development of this Median military force and the reign of Cyaxares who is said to have re-organised his army (H.I 103). The Greek historian seems to consider this event as representative of the great difference that distinguish his reign from the two former ones.

Of course the yet unexplained apparent disappearance of any written Assyrian sources at the same time increases the likelihood for the emergence of a centralized Median state during these years. Indeed this reference about the existence of a well trained and organized army supposes the existence of a stable political power able to control its military forces during this period of troubles and regional disorder. Obviously, Herodotus seemed not to have been told about any Median state's formation but according the nature of his account he could have detected a change or a shift in the reports about the situation linked to the Medes. Obviously he was believed that the political modification occurred during the reign of Cyaxares.

The nature of the accounts about the Medes changed completely after the fall of Niniveh in the Babylonian sources. Medes were hereafter considered as mighty enemies even we could not find any references about the existence of a real Median state's army. Sancisi Weerdenburg pointed out the minor role of the Median troops in comparison with the efforts brought by the Babylonian State to destroy the Assyrian empire²⁰.

Recently Jursa has focused our attention on the Babylonian reports dated of the 6th century BC, which describe territories that were previously in the hands of the Assyrian like North Mesopotamia, Syria and the South-East Anatolia, as under the control of the Neo-Babylonian empire²¹. There are no evidences that a sharing out of the ancient territory of Assyria has been established between Babylonia and the Medes.

If we return to the text of Herodotus we can be really surprised to find some passages where are described the situation of conflict that existed between Assyria and the other polities of the Zagros. He seems to make a connection between the rise of the Cyaxares' military power and a sudden desertion of the allies of Assyria (H, I 102). In another passage, as an echo of historical events Herodotus tells us that his father named Phraortes succeeded to unite all the Asian people (and forces) under his wing. Some scholars had seen in these accounts the evidence that the Medes already formed if not an empire, at least a centralized state at the time of the Cyaxares' predecessor. It means that Media conquered, absorbed by union treaties or at least federated a number of polities in the Zagros during the first half of the 7th century BC. As we have already said this event could not be other than a pure fiction or a literary addition to the story because it doesn't seem that a centralized kingdom of the Medes existed. In his search to produce a continuous logical development for the history of Media Herodotus probably inserted a glorious event to enliven a somewhat modest and poorly documented part of his story.

As we have already seen Herodotus' story doesn't represent the unique sources of documentation about the Medes. Here again we can find some support through the Assyrian written accounts on the growing difficulties for their kings and army to keep the control on the mountainous regions of the Zagros during the 7th century BC. After the reign of Sargon II (in 705 BC), it seems that the military pressure of the Medes (and their allies) became gradually and dangerously intrusive. Territories once placed under the control of Assyrian governors

²⁰ Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1988

²¹ Jursa 2003

were definitively lost and very important commercial centres on the strategic Khorassan road²² cease to pay tribute²³. The so-called Omen texts of Essarhaddon (dated of 672) proves that at that time the eastern border of Assyria was threatened by the military pressure of a number of enemies among them are different groups of Medes²⁴. Documents called *Treaties* (dated of 672) show the deep motivations for Assyria in its search of (new) alliances. Indeed, alliances were concluded with different people and cities of the Zagros to hold back this menace.

This policy seems to find an echo in the Herodotus' passage about the yoke on the Medes from the Scythians (H, I 105). Indeed the Scythians invaded Asia from the Caucasus and launched raids near the territory of Assyria since 689. For the Greek historian this episode lasted during 28 years before Cyaxares was able to defeat their king Protothyas²⁵. This invasion is confirmed in the written sources. Also they inform us that the king Essarhaddon of Assyria established a treaty with the Scythians by giving his daughter to the chief named Partatua king of the *Ishekuzza* (the name under which the Scythians were known by the Assyrian)²⁶. We have some problems to fix a date for this political agreement. Therefore the end of the reign of Phraortes (in 653 according the *Herodotean chronology*) is marked by the failure to capture Nineveh and resulted in the death of the king (H, I 103). The real and deep nature of this event arise some very important remarks. Indeed one can imagine that if the military and political implications of this event were not so important, Herodotus would simply not have recorded it. Was it really politically significant or not? As the report of the campaign ends abruptly we lack of more information coming especially from the Median camp.

However this failure could be considered as the results of the military assistance of the Scythians troops. However it's clear that no one Assyrian document confirms such hypothesis. If it would have been known by any local governor or chief paying tribute this help could be considered as a proof of the weakness of Assyria. Indeed Assyria could be seen as unable to control Babylonia and Syria and, in the same time, to secure his northern border.

On the other hand, the silence of the Assyrian sources can be highly logical if the vain "Median" assault was seen as a simple raid of some unorganized enemy forces or some audacious tribes. By no means, this attack could be launched neither by a centralized state nor a neighbouring empire. If so, it would have been encountered (and reproduced on many documents) as a triumphal victory by the Assyrian. Though, the silence of the documents proves the contrary. It means that at that time Media was not the mighty state that Herodotus tries to make us believe.

Here we are once again confronted with the highly problematic *Herodotean chronology*. Obviously Herodotus derived from the reality by transforming what appears to be a simple raid as a great performance of a king. By no means Phraortes who is said to have reigned between 647 and 625, could be seen as the king who commanded the united Medes against Assyria. Obviously Herodotus derived from the reality by transforming what appears to be a simple raid as a great performance of a king.

²² The so called Khorassan Road is for the Assyrian the main way of penetration in the Zagros. Along its course were placed the most part of the cities, towns and people controlled or encountered by the Assyrians. It is supposed this road followed the line of the modern motorway from Kermanshah to Hamedan (former Ecbatana). Unfortunately the geographical location and the setting of the majority of the names appearing in the written documents are till now conjectural.

²³ Brown 1986.

²⁴ One of these tribal groups was under the leading of a chief named Kashtariti. This one was believed to be the same person as the Median King Phraortes/Phraartish. This assertion was based on the text of Bisutun in which Phraartish a opponent to Darius I is said to have taken the name of Khshatrithra which was compared with Kashtariti. (Parpola and alii 2002: vol 2/II L-N, p.608; §:Kastaritu)

²⁵ This invasion seems to have leaved no direct archaeological traces even some triangular-shaped arrow-heads attributed to the Scythians have been discovered in a burned layer in the famous citadel of Ziwiye. (Genito 2005, p.328; Mo'tamedi 1995: 143-170)

²⁶ Here we point out the similarity of the names bearing by the chief of the Scythians in the two texts.

In some Babylonian documents like the so-called *Chronicle of Nabopolassar*, dated from the year 614, the fall of Niniveh (also with other cities like Arrapha and Assur) was reported but contrary to the story told by Herodotus, Cyaxares (who is named here Umakishtar) doesn't appear as the king of the Medes but only a sort of commander of little structured and loosely united bands. Much more, Cyaxares is considered in this document as an ally or a sort of assistant of the Babylonian troops²⁷. Here the Herodotus' account seems to deviate seriously from the political reality.

Two Babylonian texts report the submission of the Median army to Cyrus in 550 BC, the so-called the *Chronicle of Nabonidus* and the so-called *Inscription of Nabonidus*, which was engraved on a stele placed in the temple of Harran²⁸. These sources are considered as bearing clear similarities with what is told in the *Medikos Logos*. Astyages who appears under the name of Ishtumegu is said to be betrayed by his army, which joined the Persian forces of Cyrus²⁹. It's very worthy to note that in the Babylonian texts Ishtumegu and Umakishtar (Cyaxares) are neither cited as chief-commanders of the Median forces (an organized Army ?) nor as kings of the Medes. Unfortunately we are not informed about the political preamble of what seems to be an internal war and the reason that could explain this final clash between the two armies³⁰. If this event was reported by Herodotus his version in which he introduced the Median army commander in chief Harpagus represents a much-romanced reworked adaptation (H, I 108-129). However the difference of the function between Harpagus and Astyages suits better with the historical sources where it's told that the military forces were only commanded and led by the great commander of the army and never by the king himself³¹.

However the Babylonian *Chronicle of Nabonidus* agrees with that Astyages first have attacked the Persian forces. If a Median empire really existed in the form like Herodotus describe it, how to explain the curious reversal of the "imperial" army's attitude?

This situation seems very curious in the case of an army of a centralized state. Probably, Herodotus was aware of the lack and the weakness of the historical information he can bring in the report of these events. Instead the highly surprising introduction of the story of the commander Harpagus has been done to form a literary continuum for his readers

As a conclusion, we propose to illustrate the problem of the distortion that could affect an oral transmission. As an example, we chose the very well known description by Herodotus of the royal city of Ecbatana (modern Hamedan) and its fortification walls (H,I 98).

Most probably, Herodotus never visited the city but he was certainly aware how the capital of the Medes was important and great. In the passage concerning the construction of the city and the palace by Deiokes as the centre of his royal court, he focuses his description almost exclusively on the precinct of the city. He notes it was surrounded by seven concentric and differently coloured walls whom the last one encircled the palace of the king.

The walls "*were planned that each successive circle was higher than the one below it by the height of the battlements*". Obviously this architectural (and urban) description of such a succession of walls seems highly more fantastic and imaginary than real. It would be very difficult to find a point

²⁷ Lines 59-64 of the *Chronicle of Nabopolassar*.(see Grayson 1975, p.90)

²⁸ This inscription is now considered as less reliable than the *Chronicle of Nabonidus* because it seems to postdate what it is previously announced , for example, the accession of Cyrus to the throne. See Schaudig 2001, pp.514-529.

²⁹ *Chronicle of Nabonidus* (II, 1-4). This passage is now considered as an anachronism operated by a scribe during the period of Darius the Great (late 6th century BC or early in the 5th century BC). Cyrus is recognized as king of Anshan (under Elamite cultural influence) and the language of the court during the first achaemenid kings was without any doubt Elamite.

³⁰ Grayson 1975, 106.

³¹ Grayson 1975, pp.91 & 106.

of view outside a walled city from where it's possible to observe exactly the same panoramic arrangement.

By chance, the British Museum in London owns in its collections an Assyrian palace relief where a multi-walled city is depicted with all the details of its fortifications. The artists who were in charge to produce this image displayed the different walls in overhanging parallel lines showing only their battlements.

It results of a succession of battlements placed exactly in the same position as in the Herodotus' description of the walls of Hamedan.

This connexion between a text and an image is really interesting. We can assert that Herodotus received his information about the walls of the city by someone who has seen Assyrian reliefs where cities are depicted in the same way. Unfortunately for Herodotus, his informant didn't understand very well the nature of the artistic conventions in space and landscape representations.

Basically, the distortion that could affect any transmission takes its origin from a lack of understanding of the document. Herodotus who could not have direct access to the original sources and documents was dependent to the information brought by his informants. Of course, he was limited in his judgements to keep or to reject information about so strange and so unusual things for him.

Did Herodotus lie? Did Herodotus overemphasize the information he received from his informants? Maybe he was enough sincere and honest to do not. However, obviously he had work with different and not connected events. The major critic we can oppose to the Greek historian is to have sought for a historical continuity between the Assyrian and the Achaemenid dynasty. Most probably he fell into the trap searching to please and interest his readers.

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