Examining the Mirror of Herodotus: Oppositional Writing and Hellenic Identity in The Histories

Abstract

In this paper I examine Herodotus’s use of oppositional writing in the Histories as it relates to Hellenic identity in the 5th century BCE. As Greece was divided socially, politically, and linguistically, the presence of Hellenic identity at that time is questionable. Through literary analysis I determine the characteristics of antitheses and identify various cultural oppositions as either implicit or explicit. Explicit oppositions create a Hellenic Identity by emphasizing the difference between Greeks and non-Greeks. Implicit oppositions however rely upon a common knowledge of Greek customs and therefore indicate the existence of a Hellenic Identity in the 5th century BCE.