

Styles of historiography: herodotus vs einhard essay



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The Styles of Historiography: Herodotus vs. Einhard Herodotus and Einhard write history in two completely different styles. Einhard's style is about giving specific details, while Herodotus's style is about giving his own personal opinions and information that he has from secondary sources. The biggest effect of the difference amongst the two historian's style of writing is the fact that Einhard's history of Charlemagne's life gives information that makes it seem as if the events were realistic, while some of the events that Herodotus talks about seem conjured.

The Two Lives of Charlemagne gives details about the life of Charlemagne. The entire story praises Charlemagne as a great hero and leader. All the qualities of the emperor seem perfect, like the fact that he is fair to not only his sons but also his daughters,[1] or that he gives alms to all Christians from different areas of the world. [2] The ever so perfect qualities of Charlemagne make it seem as if Einhard's interpretations are a bit embellished because it brings up the question that how can anyone be so ideal?

It is through some of his bad qualities that help show that Einhard's style of historical writing is believable. One of Charlemagne's bad qualities is shown when Einhard mentions the dangerous conspiracies against Charlemagne. He mentions that due to a conspiracy against Charlemagne, " all the plotters were exiled, some having their eyes put out first. "[3] This shows that Einhard does depict some of Charlemagne's flaws rather than just acknowledging his greatness. Einhard also makes it seem as if Charlemagne is good at doing everything.

He is said to be a great horseback rider and an excellent swimmer[4], however he is not able to learn to write. [5] Though Charlemagne has these flaws, Einhard covers them up through excuses. In the case of having the plotters exiled Einhard states, “ the cruelty of Queen Fastrada is thought to have been the cause of both these conspiracies, since it was under her influence that Charlemagne seemed to have taken actions which were fundamentally opposed to his normal kindness and good nature. [6] In the situation that Charlemagne did not learn to write there is the excuse that he started learning too late. [7] Though Charlemagne’s flaws are covered up, the historiography still mentions them. There is no sorts of ideas in Einhard’s work that are based off of mysticism or personal opinions so his biography of Charlemagne can be credible. On the other hand there is The Histories, by Herodotus which does not seem as credible. This piece of writing was written much earlier then the Two Lives of Charlemagne. Though Herodotus is from Athens, he focuses a lot on Egypt and the Nile.

Unlike Einhard, Herodotus’s style of writing is that he gives information that he heard from other sources or through his own personal opinions. The reason for this is because many of the things that he writes about happened before his time. One of these cases is when Psammetichus wants to find out which was the oldest civilization. [8] A story that seems very unlikely about two infants that are left in a lonely cottage for two years is told to find out what language the babies would utter first, but Herodotus mentions that he got this information from priests. 9] This shows how Herodotus did not have a first hand encounter with events that he writes about, and through logic it is hard to believe that two infants can learn to speak without human contact

making this seem unlikely to have happened. Another case is that Herodotus makes an opinion on how far Egypt extends. Without actually having measured it or being told by someone who has measured it he concludes he is right because it is confirmed by an oracle.

He states, " the opinion that I have expressed about the extent of Egypt is supported by an oracle delivered from the shrine of Ammon which came to my notice after I had formed my own conclusions. "[10] This shows how the style of writing by Herodotus is written through the belief of telling of the future and predictions which makes it not an accurate source of history. The styles of writing differ through the fact that Einhard gives what seems to be accurate details, while Herodotus gives information through other people and personal beliefs. The reason for this may be the difference in when the two historiographies were written.

The Histories, was written much earlier and beliefs in oracles and having babies talk on there own might have seemed likely to people of that time. Two Lives of Charlemagne was written by someone who encountered the events he wrote about and lived in a time period where mystical beliefs were not as common. The biggest effect between the two writers is that we can believe that most of what Einhard says was true, while we cannot take all of Herodotus's beliefs as seriously. Works Cited 1. Einhard, " The Life of Charlemagne," in Lewis Thorpe, trans. Two Lives of Charlemagne (London: Penguin, 1969). 2. Herodotus, " The Histories Book 2," in Aubrey de Selincourt, trans. , Herodotus The Histories (London: Penguin, 1954).

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80. [3] Einhard, 75-76. [4] Einhard, 77. [5] Einhard, 78. [6] Einhard, 76. [7] Einhard, 79. [8] Herodotus, "The Histories Book 2," in Aubrey de Selincourt, trans., *Herodotus The Histories* (London: Penguin, 1954), 129. [9] Herodotus, 130. [10] Herodotus, 135-136.