

**"They Say": A Study of the Use and Function of Source-attributing  
Words in the *Histories* of Herodotos**

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## **Abstract**

The repeated statements by Herodotos that "the Greeks (or Egyptians or Persians) say" or "it is said" are among the most notable features of the *Histories*. These source citations generally involve phrases containing the verbs λέγω and φημί. In this study these citation phrases are collectively termed "source-attributing words". The function of these source-attributing words has received scant attention. It has been maintained, however, that when Herodotos states "the Athenians say" he is suggesting to the audience that it is the people cited who are responsible for the accuracy of the information, not Herodotos. In this way the source citations act as a disclaimer, distancing Herodotos from the information he records.

This study advances a different view of source-attributing words by means of an examination of a substantial number of the passages in which they occur. I argue that Herodotos' frequent use of source-attributing words was, in part, a methodological response resulting from his reliance upon oral traditions as source material and his intellectual position on the cusp between oral and written methods of presentation.

The recording of details of his sources by Herodotos was part of his dialogue with his audience. Through techniques such as direct authorial commentary and source-attributing words, the audience was informed that, although they are dealing with a work based largely on oral tradition and technique, Herodotos' information, unlike that of the epic poets, had not been derived from the Muses. It was therefore necessary for Herodotos to indicate to his audience that the information he records has a credible source or emanated from oral tradition, especially in instances where facts, interpretations or opinions were likely to be disputed. This indication was made through source-attributing words, especially where the informants can be assumed to have accurate knowledge. Herodotos, therefore, uses source-attributing words as part of his technique to persuade his audience of the credibility of his account. Source-attributing words are one way Herodotos distinguished his move away from the oral traditions and techniques of epic.

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## Abbreviations

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Journals have been abbreviated in accordance with *L'Année Philologique* except as follows:

AA	<i>Artibus Asiae</i>
HSCPh	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>

**Notes:**

**1. The text used:**

Wherever I have quoted Greek from Herodotos in this study I have followed the text of C. Hude (ed.), *Herodoti Historiae*, 2 vols., Oxford, 1927.

**2. Translations:**

I have included translations when a point needs to be illustrated or the force of the Greek highlighted. These translations are indented in the body of the study and are in Times font following the Greek. In places where the English sentence in the study includes the substance of Herodotos' Greek, no special translation is made.