CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE PERSIAN INVASIONS

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If we may say of Thucydides that he 'wrote the Peloponnesian war' (Loraux (1986a)), it is no less true to say of his predecessor that the unsuccessful Persian invasions of Greece in the early fifth century are his own creation. At the same time, it is clear that the Persian Wars are the centrepiece, the culmination of his Histories, as the words of his Proem make clear: 'the great and marvellous deeds, both of Greeks and barbarians, and especially through what cause they made war with one another'.

Clearly the 'great and marvellous deeds' are made up of much that has only the most tenuous link to the build-up to the Persians' expedition to Greece. The unity of any literary work, as Charles Fornara has written ((1971a) ch. 1), is relative, and the Histories present themselves, at least initially, as no more than a loosely unified structure, one that pushes to the margins of human experience, which in its course takes in such wonderful-but-true stories as that of the Pedasian priestess who grew a beard whenever trouble brewed (1.175, 8.104). Nevertheless, one of the most significant advances in scholarship on Herodotus has been to show the subtle ways in which Herodotus' narrative is structured.\(^1\) The Persian invasion of Xerxes, though it is marked off from the rest of the Histories by the episode of the dreams that come to the king and to Artabanus at the beginning of Book Seven, is at the same time immaculately prepared in earlier books. Implicit in Herodotus' structure is his explanation of the war's causes.

\(^1\) See e.g., the introduction of Dewald (1998).
The Persian Empire. Adapted from S. B. Pomeroy et al.,
*Ancient Greece: A Political, Social, and Cultural History* (Oxford 1999), 183 fig. 5.6.