

Chapter 5 Primary Source Activity

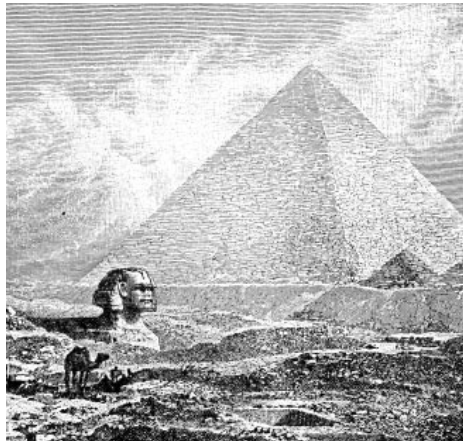
As you have read on textbook pages 120–121, modern historical writing began with the Greeks, particularly Herodotus, “the Father of History.” Herodotus often read his works aloud in public, and he knew that his readers and listeners expected to be entertained as well as informed. He told stories from his travels and created lively conversations. Here Herodotus visits the pyramids of Egypt, which were already several thousand years old and one of the “wonders of the world.” ♦ *As you read, think about what people can learn when they travel. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

Herodotus Visits the Pyramids of Egypt

The pharaoh Cheops made all the Egyptians work for him. . . . One hundred thousand men at a time worked for three months. Ten years of this forced labor were consumed merely in making the causeway along which the stones were hauled, which work, I consider, was hardly less than building the pyramid; for it is . . . all made of stones dressed [trimmed] and carved with images.

Ten years, they say, were taken by this work and the making of underground chambers for the king’s burial in the hill on which the pyramids stand, which he turned into an island by cutting a canal from the Nile. The pyramid itself took twenty years to build: it is square, each face being eight hundred feet wide, and the height the same, and made of dressed stones most exactly laid, none measuring less than thirty feet.

The pyramid was built after the manner of steps, which some call “ramparts” and others “altar-steps.” When this first stage of construction had been complet-



ed, the remaining stones were raised by means of contrivances of short logs of wood. . . . The highest part was the first to be finished, and then the part next below it, and last they finished the lowest part that rests on the ground.

There are inscriptions in Egyptian characters on the pyramid telling how much was spent on radishes and onions and garlic for the workmen, and if I remember rightly what the interpreter told me when he read me the inscriptions, they cost a thousand and six hundred talents of silver. Now, if that is so, how much must have been spent on the iron used for the work and on food and clothing for the

workmen? For I have said how long a time was taken by the building, and I am sure the hewing of the stones and the haulage and the digging of the underground works took no little time.

Source: *The Histories of Herodotus*, trans. Harry Carter (The Heritage Press, 1958).

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Questions to Think About

1. According to Herodotus, how long did it take Cheops’ workers to build the causeway, the chambers, and the pyramid itself?
2. What did Herodotus learn about how the workers were treated? How did he learn this? What else did he want to know?
3. **Drawing Conclusions** From the things that Herodotus reports and wonders about, what kind of person do you think he was? Would he have been a good person to travel with?
4. **Activity** Did it surprise you to learn that the pyramids were already about 2,000 years old when Herodotus visited them? Looking back at the chapters you have read so far, make a time line of major events up to Herodotus’s time. Include events from different parts of the world. Which of these events do you think Herodotus would have known about?