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REVIEW DISCUSSION
Herodotus Now and Then

DEWALD, Carolyn, and Rosaria Vignolo MUNSON. 2022. *Herodotus:* Histories *Book 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. £99.99. 9780521871730.

Robert Fowler

Perhaps not many people now, as they did in the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, consider Thucydides to be the *true* father of history — the scientific, Rankean historian; objectivity personified. Searching questions have long been put to the Athenian about his methods, biases and omissions, and it is widely taken for granted now that rhetoric and historiography are joined at the hip (something the ancients hardly doubted). No one takes, or should take, Thucydides' truth claims just at face value. Conversely, Herodotus' talk of sources, doubts, points of view and opinions (including his own) has raised his stock in this postmodern world. One can perhaps say too that Thucydides' sharp focus on military and political history appeals less to recent tastes than Herodotus' hospitable inclusion of ethnography and social history. Although a rough count of entries in *L'Année philologique* (if that is a measure) does not reveal any Herodotean preponderance in the scholarly world of recent decades, and although Thucydideans have certainly not been idle, one feels nonetheless that advances in the study of historiography have done more for Herodotus than Thucydides, and generated a louder buzz. Even in his seemingly fantastic stretches, we are finding ways to vindicate Herodotus' sense of truth and understand his methods — very different from modern ideas, to be sure, but not false or mendacious for all that.

Amid the flood of Herodotean editions, monographs and articles, there have been numerous commentaries. In the Cambridge 'Green and Yellow' series alone we have Books 9 (Michael Flower and John Marincola, 2002), 8 (A.M. Bowie, 2007), 5 (Simon Hornblower, 2013), 6 (Simon Hornblower and Christopher Pelling, 2017), and now Book 1 from Carolyn Dewald and Rosaria Vignolo Munson. In many ways theirs was the most challenging book, given not only its length and variety of material, but also the fact that it announces and illustrates Herodotus' historiographical principles, and introduces themes that will run for the entire work. More than others, our authors have had to address both the whole and the part, and find ways to include more material in a limited space. And they come to their task after the decades-long boom in Herodotean studies mentioned above. Understandably, in spite of its admirable conciseness, this is one of the longest Green and Yellows on any classical author.

Dewald and Munson have themselves been luminaries in Herodotean studies throughout the period I am speaking of, and few people are as well suited to undertake the writing of this commentary. Let me say at once that they have discharged their commission superbly. The depth of knowledge, judgement and experience is plain to see on every page. There are few Herodotean topics where one could not get profitably started, or more than started, by looking into this thesaurus. It is a pleasure too to see the multi-lingual bibliography; although English inevitably dominates, key publications in other languages are

well represented. Of course, one always misses some things; I might mention Katherine Clarke's *Shaping the Geography of Empire* (Oxford 2018), Katharina Wesselmann's *Mythische Erzählstrukturen in Herodots* Historien (Berlin 2011) and Walter Burkert's 'Herodot als Historiker fremder Religionen', in Giuseppe Nenci (ed.), *Hérodote et les peuples non grecs* (Geneva 1990), 1–39 (reprinted in his *Kleine Schriften* VII (Göttingen 2007) 140–60). Jan Bremmer points out to me the absence of Peter Högemann and Norbert Oettinger, *Lydien* (Berlin 2018). But this is a short list.

An expansive Introduction (ninety-one pages) provides compendious overviews of a great many topics, to which economical reference can then be made in the commentary. This device creates at the same time a handy first port of call for these topics, from where you can follow the links to the commentary and other reference material. The main headings are: Life of Herodotus; Form and Thought in Herodotus' *Histories*; Ethnographies (Lydians and Phrygians; Persians and Medes; Ionians; Mesopotamians; Northeastern Peoples); Herodotean Greek (debt acknowledged here to the Flower & Marincola and Bowie commentaries mentioned above); Text and Critical Apparatus. Underneath these headings there is a plethora of sub-headings and sub-sub-headings that make navigation easy and also reveal the reach (and challenge) of the task. Under 'Mesopotamians', for instance, you will find brief treatments of Early Mesopotamia, The Neo-Assyrian Empire (934–609), The Fall of Nineveh (612), The Neo-Babylonian Empire (c. 626–539), The Last Neo-Babylonian King, then a section (with four sub-sections) on Greek perspectives on Assyrian history including Herodotus', and a section on Assyrian-Babylonian ethnography. The Ionians get twelve pages, considering among other aspects their three definitions in Herodotus, their foundation stories, the Lelantine War, trade, the major cities, Cyrus' relations with them and other East Greeks, their relation with Egypt, and their role in the *Histories*.

'Form and Thought' alludes to Henry Immerwahr's influential book of 1966, and the question naturally arises of how this new commentary, and recent commentaries in general, compare with previous work. Many of the topics are perennial, recurring in most books on Herodotus, but exercising their authors to different degrees, and eliciting different analyses. Immerwahr worked hard to discover thematic links between sections of the text with (as he argued) unifying force and philosophical significance, whereas the prevailing view then was that many episodes are but loosely integrated, or just bunged in because Herodotus thought them interesting. Dewald and Munson are less concerned with unity of this kind (noting in passing that Irene de Jong's work on narratology — a concept not available to Immerwahr — shows 'how H[erodotus] maintains a sense of narrative coherence and temporal unity despite the many shifts in style and achronic [anachronic?] and analeptic digressions that the *Histories* contain', 15 n.14) than they are with the narrator Herodotus' relationship with his text. They stress the polyphony of the *Histories*, with its many competing voices and points of view (13); while fully alive, as any reader is, to Herodotus' favourite themes (such as the cycle of history), they are not worried that (for instance) his different takes on causality cannot easily, if at all, be melded into a coherent philosophy of history, in spite of his emphatic assertion that he intends to explain why the Persians and the Greeks fought each other (on causality see Christopher Pelling's excellent

2019 book). It is, I think, a safe generalization that scholars now are happier with aporia; indeed, they consider it a Herodotean virtue that he engenders it. That very polyphony and uncertainty is a fundamental principle in the *Histories*, going naturally with its awareness of the observer's difficulty in evaluating the data.

The analytical approach to which Immerwahr reacted assumed, of course, that there ought to *be* unity; if it was not present then an explanation had to be found (in this case, in terms of development). 'Unity', if defined at all, could have a totalizing, authoritarian appearance, like the explanatory schemes imposed on the data by these same modern historians. It is plain enough that on this definition Herodotus didn't have any. Our understanding of unity, and tolerance of supposed disunity, has changed much. Nevertheless, the book's concept probably did change over time, and notions like evolution or development may still appeal to some scholars or may appeal again in the future. One of these scholars was David Asheri, whose commentaries are indispensable masterpieces. That on Book 1 appeared first in the Italian Fondazione Lorenzo Valla series (Asheri 1988), and was then revised and translated in the Oxford commentary on Books 1–4 (Asheri, Lloyd and Corcella 2007), which includes also his General Introduction to Herodotus and commentary on Book 3. Throughout, his discussions are more detailed than those of Dewald and Munson, being aimed at a more advanced readership; he does not need to make space for help with the Greek (lots of that in the book under review). The beautiful conclusion to his General Introduction (55–6) summarizes Herodotus' massive contribution to historical method and theory, and justifies once and for all his right to be called a historian. Asheri devotes space to the question of how originally independent *logoi* came to be integrated into a larger design, and how Herodotus' travels turned him from an ethnographer into an historian — questions to which Dewald and Munson give hardly any air time. Though stressing, as already Felix Jacoby did in that other indispensable masterpiece (Jacoby 1913: 253), that attempts to draw up a chronology of the travels are futile, Asheri bears the back-story in mind, and reaches for it on occasion to explain a problem. Thus, in 1.5.3, Herodotus says he will begin his history with the person who first committed 'unjust deeds' against the Greeks, and goes on immediately to identify this person as Croesus the Lydian, but in subsequent chapters he tells us about others who had harmed the Greeks before him. Various explanations have been offered, including a distinction between temporary or targeted raids and permanent subjugation (so Herodotus himself on the Cimmerians at 1.6.3; compare Dewald and Munson ad loc. and on 1.26.3). Asheri knows all about these explanations, but remains unpersuaded; instead, he argues that Herodotus' characterization of Croesus changed over time from that of a tyrannical despot to 'a King devoted to Delphi, who converses with Greek sages, becomes an ally of Sparta, and is preferred by the Greeks of Asia Minor to the Persian conquerors' (62), and that he failed to resolve the contradiction and integrate the Croesus-*logos* smoothly into the whole (compare Jacoby 1913: 338–41). Personally, I prefer Michael Lloyd's explanation of the thought sequence in 1.5–26 based on a feature of paratactic style, that before the main subject is taken up relevant but less significant points may be aired (Lloyd 1984: 11); note the emphatic closure of the ring at 1.26.1. As for Croesus having two sides, so do many other people (and themes) in Herodotus (on Croesus, compare Dewald

and Munson succinctly on 1.6.2). Nevertheless, Asheri gives us pause. Reflection on how we got from there to here in the history of scholarship is always salutary, indeed compulsory, and the question of how to assess problems in a provisional text will never be straightforward. Asheri's remark that 'the real unity of the first book does not reside in its compilation, but in the ethical, historical, and philosophical spirit that pervades it' (Asheri Lloyd and Corcella 2007: 63) is one we can all subscribe to; the extent to which one then simply accepts, or conversely explains away, the many digressions and unevennesses, and on what principles, remains a matter of continuing debate.

One way in which the evolutionary/developmental approach still leaves its traces is in the assessment of oral versus literate elements in Herodotus. Much ink has been spilled on this; Dewald and Munson characteristically steer a middle course. On the one hand it is reasonable to assume that Herodotus gave oral performances of his material (12 n.6). And it is true that 'oral transmission of knowledge continued to be normative in Greek culture long after writing was invented' (192). But in the note cited, Dewald and Munson think it probable that Herodotus gave 'oral readings [of what?] for a considerable length of time before writing the *Histories*'; and in the second passage, they go on to say that Herodotus 'sustains the convention, even as he expresses the goal of producing a fixed and durable record'. Both formulations, however unobtrusively, presume a progression from oral to written. Surely that is uncontentious? Well, it has been, but I think it needs to be problematized (I am writing an article on this at the moment). We cannot know what relationship a transcript of his oral performances might have borne to the text we have, whether delivered before, during or after its composition. Its author is clear about the text's writtenness, since he refers to the act of writing, and envisages a future readership. The models in his day for writing about the past in prose, or about anything in prose, so far as we can assess them from our poor fragments, have fewer traces of orality, or perhaps we should say face-to-face immediacy and vivacity, than we find in Herodotus. These models had been around for a century. One could just as well argue that Herodotus put the oral *back into* prose. Instead of trying to gauge the percentage of oral versus written in the text, or place him on a spectrum of development from one to the other, we should simply analyze the unique text-world that Herodotus has created, a text-world that conjures up vivid *images* of oral presentations by a charming, world-travelled raconteur and sage, a text that draws us in, invites our collaboration and creates a 'contract' with its readers (192). It is precisely these characteristics of the text that have caused all that ink to spill. The question of oral presentation hardly arises with Thucydides after him, or Pherecydes before, or even Hecataeus, even if he does present a lively persona in his text, and incorporates direct character speech (fr. 30); his first words identify his book as, in effect, an open letter to the Greeks ('Thus speaks Hecataeus of Miletus: I write what follows...').

I could chase other hares started in this commentary, but it is time to close. Our authors deserve the warmest thanks and congratulations for this and many other services they have rendered Herodotean studies over the years.

University of Bristol
robert.fowler@bristol.ac.uk

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