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## REVIEW DISCUSSION

### Herodotus for a New Era

KIRKLAND, N. Bryant. 2022. *Herodotus in Imperial Greek Literature: Criticism, Imitation, Reception*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. £74.00. 9780197583517.

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The appearance of a book on Herodotus' influence on imperial Greek literature is a welcome event, particularly for specialists in the latter field. Herodotus was a staple of Roman Greek elite education, and we see his presence, explicit or lurking, not just in historiography – given what we see in the extant examples of that genre, and Lucian's exaggerated complaint in *How to Write History 2* that contemporary historians all fancy themselves Herodotuses or Thucydideses or Xenophons rings true – but throughout the imperial Greek literary landscape. It is also a profoundly challenging subject. 'Imperial Greek literature' is a vast and diverse milieu; those terms can even describe single authors' corpuses. To the degree that we see it as a 'milieu' at all, we do so because of its uniform drive to maximize learned display using a multiplicity of touchstones, classical and beyond, but this drive does not result in uniformity of thought, subject matter or style. If Herodotus is evoked by an author, how important is he compared to other influences? Does using Herodotean style mean taking Herodotus 'seriously', especially given the increasingly rhetorical (style-oriented) nature of all writing in this era (including historiography)? Then there is the Roman present, always lurking in the background (and sometimes even dwelling in the foreground). Can trends in Herodotean allusion tell us anything about how Greek writers navigate their relationship with Rome? In short, there can be no straightforward way to summarize Herodotus' influence in the huge and highly diverse body of imperial Greek literature. But paths forward must be taken, and we can thank N. Bryant Kirkland for providing such an erudite, painstaking and thought-provoking foray into the woolly world of Herodotean reception in *Herodotus and Imperial Greek Literature*.

Kirkland takes on this ambitious task by analysing a limited number of much-read imperial authors who are inarguably linked to Herodotus. His basic aim is to demonstrate the multifarious ways in which authors engage with Herodotus beyond his status as the teller of the greatest story ever told about the Greeks: their momentary Panhellenic unification to defeat the fifth-century Persian invasion. The book falls easily into two sections, with some thematic overlap. The first (chapters 1–3) is on literary criticism of Herodotus and discusses the author as an object of praise in Dionysius of Halicarnassus and an object of scorn in Plutarch. The second section (chapters 4–8) is on allusion to and integration of Herodotus and takes on three authors who respond to Herodotus in various ways, some of which are more self-evident than others: Dio Chrysostom in his *Borysthenitic Discourse*, a typically complex work that takes from Herodotus' material on Scythia and on the Magians (Chapter 4); Lucian in his *True History*, which presents an outlandish outer-space version of Herodotean ethnography (Chapter 5), and in

his *Anacharsis*, which reimagines Herodotus's account of a man who dared to cross cultural boundaries and was punished for it (Chapter 6); and, finally, Pausanias, who in addition to his well-known echoes of 'Herodotean phraseology and tone' (311), tacitly alludes in his *Periegesis* to Herodotus' ideas about divine retribution, and also seems to apply a Herodotean sense of wonder to Greece itself, as if it were a kind of 'foreign land'.

Kirkland's discussions, most of which involve very close readings of Greek texts, are richly detailed and sometimes sprawling, and I understand why he declines to summarize his chapters in his introduction, outlining instead four aspects of what he calls the 'Herodotean sensibility' that will recur throughout the book as relating to Herodotean reception: Herodotus' sense of authority, which is reflected in different authors' self-presentation as authorities on Herodotus' writing; Herodotus' reputation for 'charm and accessibility' but also the reality of his 'elusiveness, irony, and ambiguity' (31); Herodotus' presentation of Greek vs Other, in sometimes ambivalent terms; and Herodotus' attitude towards the world as a place of wonder, even of the sublime. Kirkland also uses two further concepts to navigate the relationship between Herodotus and the imperial texts in question, related to what he calls 'imitative creativity': 'kinetic reception' ('in which conventional reputation and idiosyncratic appropriation interact', 261) and 'hypotextual activation' – Gérard Genette's expression for unmarked allusions to imitated texts (hypotexts) found in imitating texts (hypertexts). Another recurrent theme is the way in which imperial Greek literature may point to ambiguities that are latent in Herodotus' work, which opens up intriguing new possibilities for reading Herodotus himself.

While these themes and theoretical concepts are invoked consistently throughout the book, Kirkland's arguments become rather more esoteric (if still graspable) the further they drift from the tangibly Herodotean (that is, Dionysius' and Plutarch's direct allusions to Herodotus and the clearly Herodotus-inspired/motivated works of Dio and Lucian) into the world of unmarked Herodotean allusion in Pausanias. Perhaps inevitably, the chapters on Dionysius and Plutarch are the most accessible, as they are grounded in what these authors directly say about Herodotus. Kirkland demonstrates that Dionysius' praise of Herodotus (the primary source for which is his *Letter to Gnaeus Pompey*) is a moral judgement: with his charming style, the historian shows kindness to his audience; Thucydides' style, in contrast, shows hostility. By contrast, the Herodotus of Plutarch's *On the Malice of Herodotus* is a deceiver whose methods must be elucidated by Plutarch himself, employing his moral and intellectual authority.

Kirkland emphasizes the self-reflexivity involved in both praise and critique of Herodotus, and the clever ways in which Dionysius and Plutarch imitate Herodotean style *while* providing praise and critique.<sup>1</sup> It is here that we see the

<sup>1</sup> It is possible to read Plutarch's *On the Malice of Herodotus* as satire of criticism such as Lucian's in *How to Write History*, as Charles Oughton has done in a recent article (2022). In this case, the reader will take Plutarch's Herodotean moments as knowingly hypocritical – in this piece, he is doing exactly what he criticizes Herodotus for. This does not really affect Kirkland's point, though it is worth noting, as Oughton does, that Plutarch elsewhere praises Herodotus.

strongest evidence for the first of Kirkland's markers of Herodotean sensibility: they are establishing their own authority over the man who 'initiated a distinct turn in ancient Greek literature, and is a robust and strongly felt presence in his work' (31). Kirkland's discussion of the authority of authors also includes excellent observations on how Dionysius' and Plutarch's rhetorical praise/critique of Herodotus sit within their larger historical/biographical projects (*Roman Antiquities* and *Parallel Lives*, respectively). It is interesting to consider the fact that both authors use stand-alone rhetorical works to do the kind of critiquing that Polybius did within his history, for example in his well-known full-length assault on Timaeus in Book 12 of his *Histories*. This is yet more evidence that the boundaries between historiography and rhetoric could be quite thin indeed. That said, self-reflexivity is, as Kirkland himself notes, more or less the status quo for any ancient writer writing about another writer; furthermore, given the prevalence of philosophy in imperial Greek literature (whether Platonic, Cynic-Stoic, Pythagorean or, as so often, a combination of the above), a writer's authorial positioning above his peers can more often than not be described as 'ethical'.<sup>2</sup> So I am not completely sure we can, by the time of Dionysius, think of this as specifically Herodotean (although it is obviously Herodotean in the context of praising and critiquing Herodotus).

Really it is the third of Kirkland's Herodotean sensibilities that stood out most for me – that is, his presentation of Greek vs Other in sometimes ambivalent terms – and prompted in me questions about Rome in particular. Why is Herodotus' *Histories* useful for imperial Greek writers who *deliberately* look back, away from the present, precisely because the present is Roman? I very much appreciated, for example, Kirkland's discussion in Chapter 2 of how Dionysius' praise of Herodotus could be connected to his vision of Rome's 'ethnographic cosmopolitanism' in the *Roman Antiquities*. But Rome seems to fade even by the time we get to Plutarch (arguably the most Rome-forward of our Greek imperial writers before the Severan period, when we have Cassius Dio and Herodian writing pure Roman history in Attic Greek). In Chapter 3, Kirkland argues convincingly that, by the moral standards Plutarch sets out in his *Parallel Lives*, Herodotus ends up looking like a semi-barbarous figure. This left me to wonder: does Plutarch's concern over Herodotus' philobarbarism connect in any larger way to his *Parallel Lives*, in which he judges Romans by standards that he stamps as specifically 'Greek'?

It is not that I think discussions about imperial Greek literature must be 'about Rome' (although admittedly 'Greeks and Rome' is a major preoccupation of mine), but in fact so much of the material Kirkland discusses seems ripe for integration into the bigger picture – that is to say, an historicist bigger picture rather than the more generalized narratological one that seems to predominate in the book. Kirkland's primary directive, it appears, is to reveal the complexity of imperial texts – fair enough, but as I was perusing the chapters, I was reminded of the teasing question I am periodically asked by a Classicist friend of the very old guard (a prominent Ciceronian, if you can imagine anything more old-guard): 'What is it like to work on ... *inferior literature*?' 'Oh, ha ha', I say. Maybe I've been in the soup too long (since the 1990s), but I have long taken it for granted that

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of philosophy in imperial literature, see Trapp 2007.

imperial Greek writers are complex. In any case, that Kirkland is aware that the reader might be asking themselves about an historicist big picture is indicated towards the end of Chapter 7, which comes near the close of a fairly long book, when he asks: why should we care (in this case, about Pausanias' Herodoteanism)? Kirkland's first answer is that scholars have not taken seriously enough the kinetic reception of Herodotus found in Pausanias (which did not seem intuitive to me, although I am prepared to admit that I am blinkered as an imperial Greek literature die-hard, and that my old-guard friend's attitude is more common than I'd like to admit). But I would have really liked to see the second answer, which summarizes the chapter's (wonderful) main take-away – that Pausanias has subtly integrated Herodotus' view of divine retribution in human history and its unpredictability<sup>3</sup> – parlayed into a larger discussion about Pausanias and Rome.<sup>4</sup> Given that Pausanias' Rome is the great power most likely to face a great Herodotean downfall (Kirkland even devotes a section on Sulla as an example of a specific Roman downfall), how does the hypotextual activation of Herodotean religion complicate, for example, Pausanias' celebration of Hadrian's beneficence to Athens (e.g. 1.3.2, 1.5.5)? Can his religious beliefs be related to his unusually harsh words about the present state of imperial cult (8.2.5)?

I do not claim to have ready answers to these questions (which may not even be the best Rome questions we can ask) but Kirkland seems to me to have laid the groundwork for one significant answer to the question of why Herodotus continues to be popular in Imperial times outside of the Persian Wars discourse: his subtle subversions of Panhellenic sentiment *even within* the *Histories* – an ur-text of Panhellenic ideology – are as salient as ever in the new world of Greeks, barbarians and Romans. A common thread we find in Kirkland's chapters on Dio, Lucian and Pausanias, for example, is the theme of the 'outsider looking in' – but unlike Herodotus, our imperial authors are looking at what should be familiar as if they were strangers (e.g. Lucian's *True Histories* narrator looking at the earth from his position on the moon). How does the stranger-motif – if we call it Herodotean in some sense – relate to each author's self-positioning in relation to Rome and, in the case of Pausanias, Athens? Is Plutarch less inclined towards this aspect of Herodotus' work because he is from Chaeronea, which was not only in mainland Greece but also an important Roman site? Is it possible to talk of a deprioritization of Herodotus' Panhellenic narrative everywhere except in the most Atheno-centric authors, like Aelius Aristides in his *Panathenaic Oration*?

At any rate, I think Kirkland has perhaps inadvertently (but happily!) suggested that Herodotus is ultimately the reputational winner in the contest with Thucydides in the empire. As he points out, Herodotus' bad reputation is referenced at least as far back as Aristotle (1–2). He also rightly notes that Thucydides was a more popular author in school education than Herodotus (15), and that Herodotus' *Histories* were probably read less for historical reasons than for their rhetorical

<sup>3</sup> Another feature of Chapter 7 is that it begins with Herodotus, then moves on to Pausanias; I think I began to see Kirkland's perspective better when I understood it as originating from the canonical side (Herodotus) rather than the imperial Greek side.

<sup>4</sup> A subject addressed by Karim Arafat in a 1996 monograph.

and entertainment value.<sup>5</sup> But, in fact, Thucydides' primary literary use for most of Antiquity was in the construction of speeches, his actual history – the very unhappy story of Greek self-destruction – having been left behind by almost everyone except for his continuators, Cratippus and Xenophon, who seem keen to give the Peloponnesian War story a more harmonious outcome,<sup>6</sup> and imperial writers who tacitly reference Thucydides in order to complain about the (ongoing) Greek penchant for *interpoleis* strife.<sup>7</sup> Whether our Herodotus is Panhellenic or global, whether he is history or ideology, he provides more obviously constructive models than Thucydides for Greeks thinking through their positions as imperial subjects.

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<sup>5</sup> As per West 2011: 77; see Kirkland 15 and n. 53 for reference.

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. Gray 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Strife is a major theme in Pausanias (see e.g. Pretzler 2007: 28 and 162 n. 81 on Greek traitors); Dio Chrysostom, in his thirty-eighth oration, 'To the Nicomedians on Concord with the Nicaeans', urges two rivalrous cities not to attract the Romans' attention by fighting; Herodian's single major comment on the Greek past in his *Roman History* is a complaint about cities' constant desire to destroy their powerful rivals (3.2.7–8).