
REVIEW DISCUSSION

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The *Herodotus Encyclopedia*, three volumes edited by Christopher Baron and published in 2021 with Wiley-Blackwell, is dedicated to no less a figure than Herodotus himself: ‘To Herodotus: 2,500 years and still going strong.’ Is he really? And, one might ask, was he always? But the massive volumes, amounting to 1653 pages, speak for themselves: at least for now, Herodotean studies are thriving. There are good reasons to toast his birthday.

A total of 181 scholars have contributed thousands of entries to the *Encyclopedia* from universities all around the world, mostly Anglo-Saxon and European. It is particularly fortunate that scholars from institutions in Herodotus’ home countries, Turkey and Greece, are also among the contributors. Their aim — as ambitious as it is welcome to any future reader of the *Encyclopedia* — was to be as comprehensive as possible and at the same time up to date with today’s Herodotean studies.

The topics are wide-ranging: the history of the text; scholarship and reception; the historical, intellectual and social background of Herodotus’ world, including religion and warfare; Herodotus’ historical method and literary techniques; and prominent themes in the work. In addition, every single one of the 2,000 names that occur in the *Histories* is covered by an entry. Indeed, the very first article is the result of this decision: the letter ‘A’ starts with ‘Abae’, a sanctuary that rivalled Delphi during the Archaic period. The location of Herodotus’ Abae, and thus of one of the six oracles tested by Croesus (1.46.2), was only identified by the excavator Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier in 2010. The article further refers to the keywords ‘Dedications’, ‘Temples and Sanctuaries’ and ‘Warfare’. We already find ourselves zigzagging through Herodotean topics and worlds.

In fact, each article of the *Encyclopedia* is accompanied by an inspiring ‘see also’ section as well as an often admirably detailed bibliography, although the reader is warned in the introduction that bibliographical references will only extend to works published before 2016. This should not come as a surprise to anyone: as is usual with venerable ancient authors in general, Herodotus too has instigated a long torrent of scholarship that has stretched over the past 600 years. The average scholar of today only occasionally hits the tip of this enormous iceberg, but the contributors to the *Herodotus Encyclopedia* have clearly done their best to let this first collision lead to a far-reaching expedition into the beauties and furrows of the unknown continent below.

This whole new world has a map: the introduction to the *Encyclopedia* provides an interesting insight into its making by showing the template or synopsis that served as a finely meshed net to identify the topics of the entries. It reveals three main headings: ‘Text’, ‘Context’ and ‘Histories’. For me, as a scholar fascinated by the history of reception, it was most interesting to see that the heading ‘Text’ not only includes the obvious sections on transmission and editions, but also

translations as well as scholarship on Herodotus of all ages (except medieval): antiquity, renaissance, early modern, modern 1 and 2 (fittingly using the end of the Second World War to mark a divide: 1750–1945, 1945–2018). This is separated from a second section in the same chronological order that is dedicated explicitly to ‘Reception’, thus making sure any engagement with Herodotus and his work is considered — that every little bit of plankton that has ever emanated from the enormous iceberg to float around the ocean is captured by the mesh. What is before us is clearly one of the boldest undertakings in Herodotean scholarship that has ever seen the light of day.

In the fifteenth century Herodotus met Hesiod and strolled through Ferrara with him. Or rather, this is what Girolamo Castelli, later the medical doctor of the Este family in Ferrara, envisioned in a poem that he wrote for his teacher of ancient Greek, Guarino da Verona.¹ In the poem, Herodotus told Hesiod about his work: the beginnings of great kingdoms, the damage they caused in his Asia, and what first led the barbarian hosts to Europe and involved the various forces in battles. Finally, he listed the rivers, peoples and places that he described in the *Histories*. Indeed, most recipients did not read Herodotus for his battle accounts or his judgement on the Persian war. They read him for his astounding stories about travels to unknown countries that reached the ends of the world. Just like Hesiod in Castelli’s poem, most readers found it hard to believe what Herodotus had to say about them. From Cicero onwards, he had the ambiguous reputation of being both the father of history and the father of lies. Accordingly, the term ‘Liar School’ has earned itself its own entry in the *Encyclopedia*. In modern times, as the author Melina Tamiolaki informs us, it was first coined by W. Kendrick Pritchett in 1993, who then defended Herodotus against this unfavourable image (*Encyclopedia*, p. 804). Its main advocate had been Detlev Fehling who, in the 1970s and 1980s, argued that Herodotus deceived his audience through fictitious testimonies and witnesses. Still, the issues of ‘Source Citations’ as well as ‘Deception’ and ‘Reliability’ receive their own entries in the *Encyclopedia* — hence we may excuse the fact that we can only find the entry ‘Father of History’ (Cic. *Leg.* 1.5), while the term ‘father of lies’, which was added later by Jean Luis Vives,² is omitted. It still seems like a legitimate approach to follow one’s curiosity and fascination for the other, the foreign and the barbarian. What is it, then, that our storyteller Herodotus said about peoples and their customs on the periphery? And what can we find out about it when consulting the *Encyclopedia*, even though this information earned Herodotus the reputation of being a notorious liar?

Browsing the *Encyclopedia*, we quickly learn some astonishing details, such as that the Ethiopians owed their longevity (on average, 120 years) to a diet of boiled meat and milk, while the Persians were forced to eat themselves during their failed attempt to conquer the Ethiopians — just look up ‘Anthropophagy’ and follow the threads. It is also fun to look up one of the best-known and most debated passages in Herodotus’ *Histories*: the giant gold-digging ants from India (3.102–5). Since the story is very much worth reading in the Herodotean

¹ Sabbadini 1916: ii. 423, verses 11–18 (no 778A).

² Vives 1612: ii. 87: Herodotus, quem verius *mendaciorum patrem* dixeris, quàm quomodo illum vocant nonnulli, *parentem historiae* (emphasis mine).

original, Klaus Karttunen, the author of the entry 'Ants, Giant', wisely only gives a very short summary. What he provides is a survey of the attempts to explain the phenomenon described by Herodotus that has made many scholars scratch their heads. According to Karttunen, 'a number of theories have been proposed as explanation, but few seem convincing' (*Encyclopedia*, p. 92). We get to know that the most popular was proposed by the Dano-French geographer Conrad Malte-Brun (1775–1826) who suggested that we identify the ants with marmots. Apparently, he had already found himself in a similar situation as Karttunen: 'Si l'on nous demandoit de faire un choix entre ces diverses explications, nous serions fort embarrassés, car aucune d'elles n'est exempte d'objections le plus graves; nous sommes donc tentés d'en proposer une nouvelle dans laquelle on peut faire entrer ce que les autres offrent de plus plausible.'³ In the following, Malte-Brun carefully addressed the animals as certain 'quadrupèdes qui s'y creusaient des terriers'⁴ and referred to an article on the travels of William Moorcroft, who among those animals that he had seen described one as being 'de couleur fauve, deux fois gros comme un rat, ayant les oreilles plus longues, mais n'ayant pas de queue'. The question of whether these creatures should be identified with simple marmots is then discussed in a lengthy footnote.⁵ Karttunen does not seem convinced, as 'it is not clear how peaceful marmots were turned into ferocious ants'. He prefers the sober explanation that it was 'a story invented by traders bringing gold from Siberia or somewhere else in order to hide its real origin' (*Encyclopedia*, p. 92). Going through the original Herodotean text, we find a short remark at the end saying that 'this is how the Indians mine part of their gold, as the Persians say' (3.105.2). It was they who brought the difficult riddle into the world!

One famous passage that, from the Renaissance on, has often been cited to illustrate Herodotus' technique of telling remarkable tales through the voices of other people is the story of King Mycerinus and his twenty wooden figures of concubines (2.129–131). Ian Moyer, in his entry on 'Mycerinus', appreciates the passage in a striking way: 'In a moment of rational criticism, however, Herodotus points out that the hands of the statues lay on the ground nearby and had simply fallen off. The origin of these stories is uncertain, but they certainly show the extent to which Herodotus structured his account of Egypt around the monuments and material remains he saw' (*Encyclopedia*, p. 944). The tension between uncertainty and certainty, even though it is sometimes difficult to bear, is part of the beauty of Herodotus' writing.

Herodotus' first important defender against the critical voices who had damaged his reputation, from antiquity on, was Henricus Stephanus (or Henri Estienne), the renowned printer from Paris who published his *Apologia pro Herodoto* in 1566 together with the revised Latin translation of the *Histories* by

³ See Malte-Brun 1819: ii. 380 ('If we were asked to choose between these various explanations, we would be greatly embarrassed, for none of them is free of the most serious objections; we are therefore tempted to propose a new one in which we can include what the others offer that is more plausible').

⁴ Malte-Brun 1819: ii. 380 ('Quadrupeds that dig themselves burrows there').

⁵ See Malte-Brun 1819: i. 311–12 ('of fawn colour, twice as big as a rat, having longer ears, but not having a tail').

Lorenzo Valla. Lacking an article of his own, he is mentioned eight times in the *Encyclopedia*. He might surely have deserved more. A little more heart-warming is the treatment of the next big figure, who revived (or should we even say reinvented?) serious Herodotean scholarship in the twentieth century: Arnaldo Momigliano, who taught us to read the *Histories*. Not only can the scholar who coined the famous phrase ‘There was no Herodotus before Herodotus’ boast of his own two-page entry (written by John Marincola), but he can also be seen face to face in a portrait illustration, from which he fixes the reader with his stern gaze (*Encyclopedia*, p. 925). Wearing thick glasses and a large collection of pens in his jacket pocket, he presents a constant reminder that Herodotus’ practices and methods are neither entirely known to us nor outdated. This is one of fifty-four illustrations in the *Encyclopedia* that mostly show archaeological findings, such as inscriptions, reliefs or vase paintings.

Maybe it is a matter of good fortune, after all, that the *Encyclopedia*, spanning three volumes, is so expensive that it will only be bought by big university libraries. That way, more readers will hopefully access the slightly more affordable e-version of the book and thereby overlook the cover illustration. In the face of such a wealth of appropriate illustrations, we may wonder why it prominently shows the naked body of the unnamed wife of King Kandaules from a seventeenth century Dutch oil painting by Eglon van Neer. True, the story was told by Herodotus in the first book of the *Histories* (1.8–13) — but so are many more. The *Encyclopedia* does not need to introduce itself with any illustration at all, not to mention one like this, which immediately brings to the fore so many controversial topics that go far beyond Herodotus and his fascinating work. Herodotus was not a schoolboy eager to get a glimpse at a female body, as the picture suggests. Herodotus was the ‘Father of History’. His *Encyclopedia* is a milestone. It will be helpful to students and teachers, scholars and enthusiasts. May it have many readers in the future. And may it show its readers the way to the original: Herodotus’ *Histories*: ‘2,500 years and still going strong’.

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