

BOOK REVIEW

Herodotus in the Long Nineteenth Century. Edited by THOMAS HARRISON AND JOSEPH SKINNER. Cambridge, UK and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. xvi + 336. Hardback, £75.00/\$99.99/€79.00. ISBN: 9781108472753.

ToC: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/herodotus-in-the-long-nineteenth-century/SE03DEA4F08A1FB2C07FA33DC73F57E0>

According to the publisher's blurb, "*Herodotus in the Long Nineteenth Century* traces the impact of Herodotus' *Histories* during a momentous period in world history - an era of heightened social mobility, religious controversy, scientific discovery and colonial expansion. Contributions by an international team of specialists in Greek historiography, classical archaeology, receptions, and nineteenth-century intellectual history ... reveal not only how engagement with Herodotus' work permeated nationalist discourses of the period, but also the extent to which these national and disciplinary contexts helped shape the way both Herodotus and the ancient past have been understood and interpreted."

It is an ambitious statement and I am happy to state that the editors' goal, in my view, has been largely achieved with this excellently produced book, itself the result of a conference at Liverpool University's School of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology in September 2012. A point of criticism might be that the contributions predominantly focus on Western Europe and specifically on Britain (as the editors readily admit in their Introduction, 4). After the preliminary matter, Thomas Harrison and Joseph Skinner take off with their Introduction (1-19) to this volume. One of the elements in the Introduction that strikes the eye is the covert definition (only a passing remark between parentheses makes the definition clear) what the editors mean by the title "the *long* nineteenth century." The indicated period, sc. 1789-1922, however certainly does justice to the title.

Herodotus remains to the present day, one way or another, a conspicuous author in Greek history, both loathed and praised. Even though Arnaldo Momigliano (1958)¹ believes that Herodotus² position as a historian has been secured, developments like Orientalism (cf., e.g., Said 1978) or the works of Fehling (notably Fehling 1971)³ or, for that matter, Rollinger (e.g., Rollinger 1993)⁴ or Bichler (Bichler, R./R. Rollinger 2000: *Herodot*, Hildesheim) make clear that this position is still very much disputed. Rightly, therefore, Harrison and Skinner remark that the volume under scrutiny “seeks to demonstrate the complexity of engagement with Herodotus’s text ...” (2). Several contributions, moreover, show that Herodotus’ work (still) appeals to different audiences or readerships (3). Regrettably, I can here only highlight some of them, though all contributions are very much worth reading.

In Chapter 3 (71-99), Suzanne Marchand investigates the issue of “Herodotus as Anti-classical Toolbox.” Marchand starts her paper with a sweeping statement: “[i]t has become conventional among conservative ‘clash of civilization’ thinkers to assume that Greek victory in the Persian Wars constituted the founding act of western civilization, and that what Herodotus’s *Histories* are good for is to recount the origins of what Anthony Pagden calls the ‘perpetual enmity’ between East and West.”⁵ Such views, she holds, may have their origin in the era of the Enlightenment, but they were elaborated in the 19th century by people like J. S. Mill, who stated that “as an event in English history, the battle of Marathon outweighed that of Hastings.”⁶ Opposite such views stand both the rise of

¹ Momigliano, A.D. 1958: ‘The Place of Herodotus in the History of Historiography’, *History* 43, 1-13.

² Though the editors of this volume present the genitive form of Herodotus as “Herodotus’s,” I have chosen to follow the general rule, i.e. for classical or religious names: add ‘ (only the apostrophe). It is, therefore, feasible to see in this review both forms used.

³ Fehling, D. 1971: *Die Quellenangaben bei Herodot: Studien zur Erzählkunst Herodots*, Berlin.

⁴ Rollinger, R. 1993: *Herodots babylonischer Logos: eine kritische Untersuchung der Glaubwürdigkeitsdiskussion an Hand ausgewählter Beispiele: historische Parallelüberlieferung - Argumentationen - archäologischer Befund - Konsequenzen für eine Geschichte Babylons in persischer Zeit*, Innsbruck.

⁵ See Pagden, A. 2008: *Worlds at War: The 2,500 Year Struggle between East and West*, New York, NY: 3-40. See also the remarks on similar views (issuing from the Athenian victory at Marathon in 490 BCE) I made in Stronk, J.P. 2019: ‘From Sardis to Marathon. Greco-Persian Relations 499-490 BC: A Review’. Part two: ‘The Battle of Marathon and Its Implications’, *Talanta* 51, 77-226: 205-8.

⁶ J. S. Mill made this statement in an 1846 review of Grote’s *History of Greece*, vols. I-II, in the *Edinburgh Review* 84: 343.

Orientalism (see Said 1978)⁷ and more critical studies of Greek “othering” (cf. 72-3 for examples). These, though, are emphatically modern *scholarly* views [my emphasis, JPS], not that of Western European “liberal” views that originated between 1780 and 1970. Marchand’s goal of her paper is “not to seek the Graecophile usages of Herodotus -a project worth doing, to be sure- but to investigate an almost completely unmapped, longer and stranger river system of Herodotean reception, one that ... ends up ... in forms of at least mildly ‘philobarbaric’ world history” (76). Her “expedition” makes Marchand’s -for me, at least, and not at all detracting from the value of the other ones- one of the most appealing papers in the collection.

Chapter 5 (117-153) is one of the largest contributions to this book. It is by Joseph Skinner and is dedicated to “Imagining Empire through Herodotus.” The empire to be imagined in this respect is the British empire, and to do so successfully Skinner first has to elucidate nature and extent of British engagement with Herodotus’ work between the late 18th to early 20th centuries. He does so through a “series of cultural soundings” (119 *sqq.*). These show a fairly deep penetration of Herodotus and his work in English society. Thus, “receptions of the *Histories* helped to both constitute and sustain a wider culture (or cultures) of imperialism during the long nineteenth century” (141-2). In its turn, this affected ways in which the *Histories* were read as well, because “knowledge (and respect) of foreign customs were prerequisites for the successful wielding of imperial power” (147), a concept in which, e.g., the early Persian Empire served as a positive example. Though (much of) Skinner’s paper may be familiar, at least to some extent, to an English audience, it is for foreigners an elementary tool to an understanding of late 19th and early 20th century English scholarly literature on Herodotus.

Chapter 10, finally (244-273), is by Thomas Harrison and deals with “Herodotus’s Travels in Britain and Beyond. Prose Composition and Pseudo Ethnography.” Essentially, this chapter links up closely to Skinner’s contribution. To be true, as Harrison concedes, “[t]he topic of this chapter is ... only indirectly Herodotus himself. The “fragments” that are its subject are, in fact, a series of prose compositions written in late 19th- and early 20th-century Britain and Ireland”

⁷ Said, E.W. 1978: *Orientalism. Western Conceptions of the Orient*, New York, NY.

(245). As such, the texts reveal at the one hand a deep understanding of Herodotus' works on various levels and simultaneously on the other hand a (specific) elite culture in Britain and Ireland. Nevertheless, these works "also reflect many of the themes of recent works on the representation of foreign peoples" (260). As a whole, Harrison's contribution makes clear how obsessively some British scholars engaged with the *Histories*, meanwhile one way or another more often than not maintaining an elitist outlook to the world beyond Great Britain, or rather beyond a privileged part of England.

Personally, I find it a lucky choice of either the editors or the publisher to use footnotes throughout the entire volume, ensuring the unity between text proper and the notes, in my view making it an example how such volumes should be produced. This impressive contribution to the reception-history of Herodotus' *Histories* is concluded with a "Bibliography" (274-321) in which the material of all papers has been included, an Index of passages of Herodotus Cited (322-323), and a General Index (324-336). The volume is well edited, with a very low number of typos in the text and notes. Only in the bibliography one may notice several faults in the hyphenation of non-Anglophonic titles, perhaps underlining the Anglophonic emphasis of the entire volume. Nevertheless, for every serious student of Herodotus' work -obviously especially those interested in the history of its reception- this volume is a must have. I think, though, that for a more general audience this work may well prove to be too specialistic.

JAN P. STRONK

Independent researcher, jpstronk@planet.nl