

BOOK REVIEWS

Herodotus, *The Histories*, translated by Aubrey de Sélincourt, revised with an introduction and notes by John M. Marincola (Penguin Classics.) Pp. liv + 622. Harmondsworth, 1996. Paper. £7.99/\$10.95. ISBN 0 14 044638 9

‘An old, blind, possibly senile man, several centuries out of place.’ So wrote A. R. Burn in a letter to Penguin Books, commenting on the choice of cover illustration for the then new edition of Herodotus’ *Histories*, and adding the suggestion that Snark International, who provided the photograph, must be a Boojum. Now, twenty-four years later, the ‘Greek sculpture of a seated philosopher in the Louvre’ has suddenly and silently vanished away, to be replaced on the current new edition by ‘an oinochoe depicting a Greek fighting a Persian, c. 500 BC, in the Louvre, Paris’. Gone too is Burn’s introduction to the volume, which was serviceable, and in its place there is a more extensive collection of material by J. M. Marincola. Two other features of the new edition deserve immediate comment, since they, probably more than anything else, turn this into a valuable edition for teaching. Chapter numbers have been added to the outside margins of the text (this was done in the Penguin Thucydides in 1972, the year that Burn’s edition of Herodotus appeared), and the translation has been revised (by an act of ‘de-translation’) so that the following words are now to be found in the text, and explained in a glossary at the beginning: archon, barbarian, colony, deme, ephor, guest-friend(ship), helot, hero, hoplite, mother-city, ostracism, penteconter, perioeci, trireme and tyrant. Is there any significance in the fact that the vast majority of these terms relate to politics and war?

Marincola claims not to have made many significant changes to de Sélincourt’s translation, but the opening paragraph has been completely rewritten. Here is de Sélincourt: ‘Herodotus of Halicarnassus, his *Researches* are here set down to preserve the memory of the past by putting on record the astonishing achievements both of our own and of other peoples; and more particularly, to show how they came into conflict.’ And here is Marincola: ‘Herodotus of Halicarnassus here displays his inquiry, so that human achievements may not become forgotten in time, and great and marvellous deeds - some displayed by Greeks, some by barbarians - may not be without their glory; and especially to show why the two peoples fought each other.’ The new version is much closer to the Greek, and it further benefits from a long note explaining the significance of the words.

Marincola’s main contribution is his introduction and notes. Herodotean scholarship has been very active in the last quarter of a century, and

the introduction shows familiarity with recent work. He discusses the structure of the work, its 'conceptual mapping' and 'thematic patterning' lucidly and concisely; the stress on the literary subtlety of the text is an important development since Burn's time. On Herodotus' sources and methods Marincola rightly dismisses Detlev Fehling and the 'liar school', and emphasises the role of the oral tradition. On at least one historical issue however he is wrong: the Delphic oracle was not 'pro-Persian' (p. 550 n. 39). This is a modern myth which depends on a fundamental misapprehension of how the oracle worked, and there is not a single scrap of evidence from the ancient world to show that anyone ever believed that the oracle supported Persia. Delphi was the main recipient of dedications after Salamis and Plataea (Hdt. 8.121, 9.81), which hardly suggests suspicion of the oracle. The 'structural outline' of the work (pp. xxxi-xxxviii) is considerably more detailed than in the earlier edition, although its major divisions, especially the grouping together of everything from 3.89 to 7.3 as 'reign and campaigns of Darius' obscure some structuring elements that were spotted by those who divided the work into its nine books in antiquity; nonetheless for those who are using Herodotus primarily as a source for historical investigation it is very useful. Useful too are the chronological tables, which tabulate the reigns of the kings of Lydia, Media, Persia, Egypt and Sparta, and also give a run-down of events mentioned in Herodotus from 650-479/8 BC. The four maps are very clear and helpful. As well as this introductory material there is a bibliography and fifty pages of notes.

The only other paperback edition of Herodotus available in Britain is Rawlinson's translation in the Everyman series, for which this reviewer wrote the (short) introduction. Rawlinson's prose is elegant and pretty accurate, but in keeping with Victorian sensibilities it is occasionally somewhat reticent. In the course of his account of Indian customs Herodotus mentions the camel, and reveals that in its hind legs it 'has four thighs and four knees, and its genitals point backwards towards its tail' (3.103). Rawlinson's translation passes over the genitalia in silence; Marincola adds a note vouchsafing the truth of Herodotus' observation.

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