

## REVIEW

## A READING APPROACH TO HERODOTUS

Philip S. Peek, *Herodotus, Histories, Book V. Text, Commentary, and Vocabulary*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019. Pp. viii + 273. Paperback, \$34.95. ISBN 978-0-8061-6103-7.

Book 5 marks a turning point in the narrative of the *Histories*—in some sense, a new beginning. It has thus long featured prominently in scholarly discussions over the composition and subdivision of Herodotus' work.<sup>1</sup> Peek's commentary is the latest addition to the existing literature on this pivotal book, though the choice of both author (Herodotus) and text (Book 5) is in this case more a function of the aim of the commentary than its main driving force. Owing its existence to Peek's passion for 'helping students learn to read ancient Greek', this text seeks to assist them in developing skills 'that make the process of reading this ancient language as natural ... as reading English' (vii). In Peek's view, Herodotus' qualities as a 'natural storyteller', and the 'insight into Greek and Persian customs, rivalry, and intrigue' (3) that Book 5 has to offer make this narrative most suitable for the purpose.

After an opening note to students that restates the objectives of the commentary as outlined in the preface, the introduction falls into three main sections. The first, 'Herodotus and Book V', concisely provides information on Herodotus' life, method, reliability, style, and work (both the *Histories* in general, and Book 5 in particular). Indeed, Peek's stance on these matters overall reflects scholarly consensus: hence Herodotus is said to have 'traveled throughout the Mediterranean and the surrounding lands, interviewing sources and looking over data', or claimed to be 'shown by modern historiography and archaeology to be systematic and consistently rational' (4). However, extremely limited references to primary and secondary evidence in support of these claims are offered to the reader. When provided, they tend to lack exactitude or clarity in formulation: the *Suda* is mentioned without any entry reference (4, n. 1), and the sources the reader is directed to concerning Herodotus' reliability and rationality amount to Simon Hornblower's remarks on the historian's use of onomastics in Book 5, and (unspecified) epigraphical evidence. Perhaps the

<sup>1</sup> See S. Hornblower, *Herodotus: Histories: Book V* (Cambridge, 2013) 1–13 for structural questions related to Books 5 and 6 of the *Histories*; G. Nenci, *Erodoto. Le Storie V: La rivolta della Ionia* (Milan, 1994) ix–xxiii for an excellent and concise discussion of scholarly stances on the matter.

beginning students whom the book is intended for would develop a better sense of the nature of the extant evidence and the scholarly context if directed to both. On one occasion the information provided in this section is mistaken, most likely as a result of an unfortunate typo: as the author surely knows, the battles of Marathon and Thermopylae are not narrated in Books 8 and 9 of the *Histories* (5), but in Books 6 and 7 respectively.

The ensuing, much longer section of the introduction, ‘Herodotus and his Many Readers’, surveys several important issues in Herodotean criticism, including the historian’s use of sources (6 and 9–11), the role of the divine and the sacred in the *Histories* (7–8, 12, 17), perceptions of warfare (8–9), historiographical patterning (12–13), inflated numbers in historiography (15), and speeches (15–16). Though this section to some extent overlaps with the preceding one, here topics are addressed in greater detail, references to the broader scholarly context increase significantly, and statements are given more qualification. For example, in contrast to the previous presentation of Herodotus’ travelling activity as an ‘established truth’, readers are here made aware that the truthfulness of his claims to direct autopsy has in fact been a matter of scholarly debate (6), and they are able to follow up these claims independently through the references provided (nn. 4 and 5). The target audience of this book might also benefit from a clearer qualification of the evidence quoted, especially the writings of Herodotus’ contemporaries (6 and 10, nn. 23 and 24): their fragmentary nature is never mentioned, so that a less experienced reader might get the impression that these authors’ production is as extensively preserved as Herodotus’ own. Moreover, if Pindar, Archilochus, and Solon figure in the list of (somewhat elusively qualified) ‘writers’ among the ‘variety of sources’ consulted by Herodotus (10, n. 23), it is unclear why Sappho (Hdt. 2.135), Alcaeus (Hdt. 5.95), or Simonides (Hdt. 5.102, 7.228) do not. Overall, this is an informative section that raises different key issues in Herodotean criticism, but it could do with more accuracy, and also with better organisation: several repetitions could have been avoided by arranging the materials in distinct paragraphs, each one with its own heading.

This is in fact how the following and concluding portion of the introduction, ‘Using the Text’, is organised. In ten titled subsections, Peek clarifies the means whereby the ensuing commentary implements his aim to encourage readers ‘to take each word in the order it comes and to strive to read the language instead of picking and choosing its parts’ (vii). In the service of this reading approach, Peek offers a variety of tools: the ‘running vocabulary that corresponds to each page of the text’ (18), downloadable from the publisher’s website (together with ‘a generalized list of the principal parts of verbs’), indeed amounts to a valuable resource for students, for it allows them to invest the time and energy they would normally spend looking up words into actually understanding and appreciating the text. It might also prove useful for teachers in preparing assessment. The explanation of basic narratological tenets (19–

20) and the concise notes on ‘Herodotus and the Ionic Dialect’ (28–9) are also of service to the reader, in as much as they provide a framework for understanding the text and commentary that follow. Peek’s ‘Tips on Translating’ (21–3) encourage readers to develop a familiarity with the word order, establish expectations on its grounds and then let it guide them ‘to an accurate understanding of the sentence’ (21). Though this approach has its merits, the amount of information and percentages presented here, and even more so in the following subsection ‘Frequencies and Expectations’ (23–7), is overwhelming (as Peek himself seems to acknowledge, cf. 23), and perhaps not likely to be of much assistance to readers as they actually approach the text.

The text follows the third edition (1927) of Carl Hude’s OCT, with additional commas and periods ‘to encourage the reading of Greek’ (27). No explanation is offered for the preference of this edition over Nigel Wilson’s more recent OCT (2015), quoted among the further readings (31). The commentary on the text combines helpful notes on syntax and morphology (including Attic counterparts to Ionic forms), suggestions for translations with examples from the English idiom, and narratological remarks. Variant readings are generally noted and textual problems flagged, though they are not engaged with in much depth. Since the commentary’s professed aim is to facilitate the reading of the Greek, it is not surprising that the notes, to a large extent, lack historical detail. There is also some inconsistency in referring to other relevant sections of the *Histories*: sometimes readers are directed to relevant passages, sometimes they are not. Equally inconsistent are the references to other sources (e.g. Thucydides) and to the scholarly landscape: while some scholars are repeatedly named and acknowledged (above all, Simon Hornblower), the paternity of other scholarly stances is often left unspecified (e.g. 65 ‘historians question Herodotus’ account’; 89 ‘most scholars are unhappy with the meaning’; 102 ‘commentators think’; etc.). With few exceptions, the commentary also lacks a system of internal cross-references, and is therefore repetitive. Peek justifies this repetitiveness in pedagogical terms (18–19), expressing the hope that ‘repetition will facilitate language acquisition’. But repetitions feature quite extensively in the introduction too, and, in both contexts, they hinder enjoyment more than they ease learning.

Five appendices, whose guiding principle is ‘more-with-less’ (18), close the book. They provide helpful resources on syntax (A–C), parsing terms (D), and vocabulary (E), and are followed by a glossary and an index.

This book has the merit of promoting a reading approach to Herodotus, facilitating the understanding of the original text through helpful grammatical notes and appendices, accessible narratological remarks, and valuable vocabulary resources. It also has its problems, in terms of accuracy, comprehensiveness, and presentation. If these will not trouble experts, less seasoned students of Herodotus might want to consider combining this reading with other introductory works to Greek historiography. Nevertheless, they will often find

Peek's text useful: beyond assisting beginning students in improving reading and translation skills, this book will undoubtedly inspire them to develop a deeper interest and fascination in the Father of History and his masterpiece.

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