

Cross Borders • 1

Cross Borders

Collana diretta da
Silvia Bigliazzi, Cristiano Ragni, Emanuel Stelzer

Comitato editoriale
Valeria Averoldi, Chiara Battisti, Francesco Dall'Olio, Davide Di Maio, Marco Duranti, Sidia Fiorato, Matteo Mancinelli, Francesco Morosi, Beatrice Righetti, Roberta Zanoni

Comitato redazionale
Vlado Jelcic, Silvia Silvestri, Martina Zamparo

Typesetting
Lorenza Baglieri, Cristiano Ragni

Comitato scientifico
Rosanna Camerlingo, Fernando Cioni, Rocco Coronato, Stefano Genetti, Alessandro Grilli, Chiara Lombardi, Eric Nicholson, Ruth Padel, Olga Taxidou, Susanne Wofford

Father of Wonders, Fathers of Lies

Wonder and Disbelief in the Early Modern Reception of Herodotus

Edited by
Francesco Dall'Olio, Marco Duranti



Edizioni ETS

© Copyright 2026
EDIZIONI ETS
Palazzo Roncioni - Lungarno Mediceo, 16, I-56127 Pisa
info@edizioniets.com
www.edizioniets.com

Distribuzione
Messaggerie Libri SPA
Sede legale: via G. Verdi 8 - 20090 Assago (MI)

Promozione
PDE PROMOZIONE SRL
via Zago 2/2 - 40128 Bologna

ISBN 978-884677365-4

Contents

Contributors 7

General Editors' Preface to the Series 11

Francesco Dall'Olio and Marco Duranti
Introduction 17

1. Riccardo Vattuone
Herodotus "pater historiae"? 37

2. Valentina Gritti
Cyrus the Elder in Boiardo's Translation of Herodotus. Rewriting a *speculum principis* 51

3. Jane Grogan
Herodotus in Action: from Early Modern English Scholars to Soldier-Poets 93

4. Maren Elisabeth Schwab
Early Modern Encounters with Herodotean Mummies (*Histories* 2.86) 123

5. Carlo M. Bajetta and Francesco Dall'Olio
Sir Walter Ralegh's Herodotus 147

6. Marco Duranti
Herodotus in Early Modern Travel Literature 173

Index 197

Contributors

Carlo M. Bajetta, PhD, FEA, is Professor of English at Università della Valle d'Aosta, Italy and the general Editor, together with Jonathan Gibson, of the new Oxford University Press edition of Sir Walter Ralegh's works. His publications include *Sir Walter Ralegh* (1998); *Whole volumes in folio* (2000); *Some notes on Printing and Publishing in Renaissance Venice* (2000), *Shakespearean Readings: Shakespeare, Keats, Shelley* (2004, with Luisa Camaiora) and, together with G. Coatalen and J. Gibson, *Elizabeth I's Foreign Correspondence: Letters, Rhetoric, and Politics* (2014). He has edited R.B. McKerrow's 1928 Sandars Lectures (*Studies in Bibliography*, 2000), Wordsworth's, Shelley's and Reynold's 1819 *Peter Bell* poems (2005), C.S. Lewis's *Letters to Children* (2009, Italian ed.) and Thomas More's English Poems (2010, bilingual ed.). His edition of the Italian letters of Elizabeth I was published in 2017 and was awarded the MLA 'approved edition' seal and the Italian Association of the Study of English Book Prize in the same year. He is currently working on a biography of Sir Walter Ralegh. An article documenting his discovery of new poems by Ralegh and other Renaissance courtiers appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 2022.

Francesco Dall'Olio, a member of the Skenè Research Centre at the University of Verona, holds a PhD in Philology, Literature and Linguistics from the University of Verona. He was twice a visiting research fellow at the Gallatin School for Individualized Studies (NYU) and a postdoc fellow at La Vallée D'Aoste University and Verona University within the 2017 PRIN Project "Classical Receptions in Early Modern English Drama". He has published

several articles on the reception of Greek literature in Renaissance England, focusing on Alexander Neville's translation of Seneca's *Oedipus* (2018), Thomas Preston's *Cambises* (2020), Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2021) and Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* (2022). He has recently published articles on the indebtedness of Shakespeare's *Othello* to Seneca and on William Cornwallis' *Praise of Richard III* (both 2023), as well as his first monograph *King Tyrannos. Pensiero greco e tirannide nell'Inghilterra rinascimentale* (2024). A book-length study on the 'Greek plays' on Shakespeare is currently in development.

Marco Duranti is currently a member of the Skenè Research Centre at the University of Verona. He holds a PhD in Ancient Greek Literature from the universities of Verona and Freiburg i. Br. He has been postdoctoral researcher for two years within the 2017 PRIN project on the reception of Greek literature in early modern England. He has published articles and book chapters on Euripides, Aristophanes and Old Greek Comedy, Greek theatre in general, and the reception of Greek literature, Herodotus included, in early modern Europe. He has also published a monograph entitled *Ecclesiae et Rei Publicae: Greek Drama and the Education of the Ruling Class in Elizabethan England* (Skenè Texts and Studies, 2022).

Valentina Gritti is Associate Professor on Philology of Italian Literature at the University of Ferrara (B.A. in Classical Literature from the University of Padua, 1993 and Ph.D. in Italianistics from McGill University, 1998). She is a former contributor to the Tesoro della Lingua Italiana delle Origini (TLIO: CNR - Accademia della Crusca) and the National Edition of Carlo Goldoni. She studies the Este literature between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and she has published critical and annotated editions of: the anonymous chivalric poem La Spagna in rima ferrarese, the Italian translations from Xenophon and Herodotus (in preparation) by Boiardo and from Plutarch by Sandeo, Ariosto's La cassaria in verse and the Five cantos. She works on textual criticism and variant philology and she is now preparing a new critical edition with commentary of the 1532 *Orlando Furioso* for the National Edition of Ariosto's works.

Jane Grogan is a professor in Renaissance Literature at University College Dublin, and a former Chair of the Society for Renaissance Studies (UK and Ireland). She has written or edited books on Edmund Spenser (Ashgate, 2009; Manchester UP, 2010), on Persia in the early modern English imagination (Palgrave, 2014), on the ancient near east in early modern Europe (Oxford UP, 2020), and produced a scholarly edition of the first English translation of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* (MHRA, 2020). Among her current projects is a co-edited volume of essays on *Archipelagic Italian Encounters* (with Iolanda Plescia), a Cambridge 'Element' on contemporary Irish poetic responses to Spenser and a co-edited special issue of *ELR* (with Anthony Welch) on early modern epic in a global frame.

Maren Elisabeth Schwab teaches Medieval and Neo-Latin with a focus on the History of Knowledge at Kiel University, Germany. She is the author of *Antike Begreifen. Antiquarische Texte und Praktiken von Francesco Petrarca bis Bartolomeo Marliano* (Stuttgart 2019) and, together with Anthony Grafton, *The Art of Discovery. Digging into the Past in Renaissance Europe* (Princeton/Oxford 2022). Before coming to Kiel, she studied Classics, especially Latin and Greek Philology, Roman Studies and Art History at the Universities of Trier and Heidelberg. She spent time abroad at the Bibliotheca Hertziana in Rome, the History Department at Princeton Universtity (NJ), and the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Toronto. After completing her doctoral thesis in Göttingen at the Ph.D. program "Cultures of Expertise, from the 12th to the 18th century", she then moved on to do her postdoctoral research at the Cologne research training group "Dynamics of Conventionality (400-1550)", then to the department of Greek and Latin Philology at Bonn University and the Department of European History in the Early Modern Period at Hamburg University. Her research focuses on forms and practices of knowledge production on the past from the Middle Ages to modern times.

Riccardo Vattuone is a retired professor at the University of Bologna. He graduated in Classical Literature in Bologna in 1972 and was a researcher (from 1981), associate professor (from 1987) and then full professor of Greek History (from 2001) at the same

university. During his long academic career in teaching and research, he has dealt with important topics in classical Greek political history, both in the motherland and in the colonies, focusing his attention on essential topics in historiography (Thucydides, Timaeus, Western historians), social history and ethics (Greek eroticism and politics). In his book on Pericles (2017), he focused on the most relevant topics, always discussed in dialogue with undergraduate and master's degree students.

General Editors' Preface to the Series

Francesco Dall'Olio and Marco Duranti[1]

1.

This is the first of a series of volumes that we plan to publish with the aim of covering the widest possible range of fields and problems related to the encounter of the early modern world with Herodotus. The objective of our project is not simply to collect scattered testimonies of Herodotus' receptions; on the contrary, we aim to collect different forms of reception by bringing to the fore the generic cross-pollination, that is, the analogies and contaminations between different genres. Herodotus' stories were all too fascinating to be confined to historiography and entered several other genres: from political writings to novellas, from theatre to opera. After all, it is reductive to refer to Herodotus as merely a historian – if we agree with Vattuone in this volume, this is not even the most accurate definition: sophos or scholar would be more accurate (15). If Herodotus knew about modern professions, he would certainly claim to be a geographer and ethnographer, too. This should make us aware of the provisional and changing nature of the labels that we usually employ in order to classify polyhedral author like Herodotus, and encourage us to consider the peculiarities of each genre, including its classifications, connections and distinctions. Having explored one genre, it becomes possible to detect how genres interact and influence one another. Our aim is to systematically adopt a cross-genre perspective and develop an approach that will enable us to trace the often unexpected ways in which Herodotus reached the

1 Section 1 is by Marco Duranti, while section 2 is by Francesco Dall'Olio.

early moderns through numerous detours, contaminations, and reworkings. By means of this research, we aim to provide scholars of classical reception in the early modern age with a model that can be applied to the reception of other authors too; one that will enable scholars to better understand how the encounter with the ancients shaped the modern understanding of the world.

In addition to the cross-generic approach, the second, yet no less important, focal point of our research is the problem of truth and falsehood. Building on the issue of Herodotus' reliability, as summarised above, we will engage with the contrast but also coalition between tradition and autopsy, ancient and modern sources, reliance on intellectual authority and scepticism. We will compare the strategies used by the authors of mirabilia in order to persuade their readers of the veracity of their accounts. In a famous aphorism, the sophist Gorgias argued that truth does not exist. If it did, it would be impossible to understand it, and if it were possible to understand it, it would be impossible to communicate it to others (DK 82 B1-4). We could argue that the early modern ethnographic and travel literature, like Herodotus, faced the challenge of persuading readers to accept quite the opposite statement: I, the author, have had access to at least a fragment of truth, I was able to understand it by means of my intellectual capacities and my experience, and I am now communicating it to you faithfully and impartially. The frustrating problem of gaining the trust of those who had not witnessed the incredible things and events that the traveller had seen was a common issue for both and the early modern explorers or historiographers writing about distant lands. The ways in which Herodotus 'helped' the early moderns to strengthen their arguments, or the early moderns 'helped' Herodotus to be cleared of the accusations of being a liar, are the focus of our research, starting with Bajetta-Dall'Olio's and Duranti's chapters in this volume.

2.

Within this theoretical framework, our project comprises five volumes. Following this introductory volume, the second one will

be devoted to the early modern translations of Herodotus into Latin and the vernacular languages. Furthermore, it will address other possible mediations between Herodotus and the early moderns, for example ancient authors quoting Herodotus, as well as early modern dictionaries and encyclopaedias. The role of other ancient authors in shaping the reception of Herodotus cannot be underestimated: Plutarch, Lucian, Cicero, and Quintilian, among others, influenced the early modern approach to the various aspects of Herodotus' work, including its content, historical method, language, and style. As for secondary sources, their importance in the early modern reception of ancient authors is often underestimated in critical studies. In fact, they were widely read and made the content of ancient books accessible also to those who would not read them directly, due to linguistic barriers, lack of accessibility, or length of the text. They also often influenced how the way tales derived from Herodotus were read, by presenting them in connection to political or ethical issues, which also made them useful exempla to be re-proposed in different contexts. Therefore, our volume will reconstruct the network of secondary texts based on Herodotus, in an attempt to identify the ways in which his narratives and characters reached early modern readers.

According to the cross-genre perspective described above, the third volume will focus on the presence of Herodotus in literary genres. It will consider both direct adaptations of tales included in Herodotus' work and the influence of the historian on a determined imagery in various genres, ranging from novellas to romances, from epic poems to theatre. Such a study is particularly relevant because, although Herodotus' contribution to the development of early modern literary genres, such as romances or early modern English theatre, has already been a subject of research, the volume will offer new insights by considering the presence of the historian in lesser-studied genres. We know that tales from the *Histories* were often included in anthologies of short stories (e.g. William Painter's *The Palace of Pleasure*, 1575), sometimes with an exemplary meaning. However, this phenomenon has yet to inspire a dedicated study. Similarly, scholars have yet to consider the historian's influence on the

emerging musical theatre in Renaissance Italy and France, which developed around the same time as early modern English theatre. The studies in our third volume will aim to make the first attempt at breaking into these new fields of research. In doing so, the volume will present the widest possible view of not only the circulation of Herodotus' narratives, but also, and more importantly, of their place in the development of early modern imagery from a literary and artistic standpoints.

Next comes the fourth volume, which will address the epistemological issue of truth and falsehood, building on the work of Bajetta-Dall'Olio and Duranti in the present volume. As is well known, Herodotus' reputation as a historian in the Renaissance was somewhat marred by the widespread opinion that painted him as an unreliable narrator, who preferred to tell entertaining stories rather than the truth. Nevertheless, this did not stop Renaissance historiography from regarding Herodotus as their main source of information about ancient Eastern kingdoms like Persia or Egypt (if for no other reasons, for lack of a suitable alternatives); some, such as Philipp Melanchthon and David Cythraeus, even came to consider him a God-sent continuation of the universal history of mankind as begun in the Bible. This habit resulted in the rehabilitation of Herodotus as a reliable historian in the second half of the 16th century (Henri Estienne was his main champion in this regard). This occurred at a time of significant cultural change in critical thinking about historical writing, thanks to the work of intellectuals like François Bauduoin and Jean Bodin, who began to advocate the idea that historians should engage in the critical process of contextualization and evaluation of sources. At the same time, the growing knowledge of the Eastern world and the exploration of America put European culture at the forefront of discovering a new world full of wonders. The reality of these discoveries would have seemed unbelievable to those who had only read about them. The fourth volume will explore how the changing perception of Herodotus intertwined with the Renaissance's evolving critical attitude towards historical writing, as well as with Herodotus' relationship with the travel literature of the time. It will also consider Herodotus' role in the growing discussion about truth and falsehood in historiography

and travel literature, particularly with regard to questions such as: 'What does it mean to tell the truth? What if I tell the truth but I'm not believed? Why should the reader believe me?'. Given his long-lasting reputation as a liar (or at least as one that fancies a good story more than the strict truth), it could be argued that Herodotus was the more suitable amongst ancient historians for a debate of that kind.

Finally, our series concludes with a fifth volume dedicated specifically to the relationship between Herodotus and the East during the Renaissance. After all, it was his description of Persia and Egypt that made his work popular during that period, far more than his account of the Persian Wars. Despite this, to our knowledge, only a handful of studies have been devoted to the history of Herodotus' reception in relation to the way Renaissance culture saw the Eastern world of their own time. Although there is some evidence suggesting an early modern reading of the Persian Wars as an analogy for the religious wars between Christianity and Islam in the 16th century, no mention has been made of the potential use of Herodotus' work in relation to this particular issue. Such a study would be of great interest to current scholarship, as would a study of how information from Herodotus could be used to explain the origins of the Turks and the Persians, or simply to compare ancient and early modern Eastern worlds.

By the end of the project, readers will thus have access to a comprehensive study of the receptions of Herodotus in the Renaissance, encompassing all its major aspects and comprising both old and new research perspectives. This study could serve as a model for others of a similar nature focusing on different ancient authors.

Edizioni ETS
Palazzo Roncioni - Lungarno Mediceo, 16, I-56127 Pisa
info@edizioniets.com - www.edizioniets.com
Finito di stampare nel mese di luglio 2026