

## REVIEWS OF BOOKS

DEWALD (C.) and MUNSON (R.V.) **Herodotus: *Histories* Book I** (Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics). Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. xix + 536, maps, plan. £99.99. 9780521871730.  
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Book 1 of Herodotus' *Histories* covers a wide array of topics, including the rise of the Lydian empire, the reign of Croesus, Croesus' subsequent defeat by Cyrus of Persia, the rise of the Persian empire, Persia's conquest of the Ionian Greek city-states, Assyria and Babylon and finally the death of Cyrus the Great at the hands of Tomyris, Queen of the Massagetae. Along the way there are lengthy digressions on Athenian and Spartan history, the customs of the Lydians, Persians, Babylonians and Massagetae, and a variety of intriguing excursions, whose relevance to the main thread of discourse is not always clear. Carolyn Dewald and Rosaria Vignolo Munson do a remarkable job of making sense of this unwieldy and confusing subject matter, beginning with their Preface, in which they explain that Book 1 'introduces both the world in which the Persian imperial war machine began to operate and then expanded, and also H's own procedures in undertaking the ambitious task he has set himself' (ix). Dewald and Munson continue to clarify and contextualize the varied aspects of Herodotus' *Histories* throughout their commentary, making it both pleasurable and edifying to read.

Because Book 1 introduces both Herodotus' chief subject (the reasons why the Persians wanted to conquer the Greeks and the reasons why they failed, 13) and his historiographical methods, Dewald and Munson's Introduction is more comprehensive than others in this series, including valuable sections on Herodotus' life, his historiography and ethnographies on all the major nationalities discussed in Book 1, as well as sections on Herodotus' dialect and the text and critical apparatus.

Dewald and Munson's discussion of Herodotus' life is thorough and judicious, guiding the reader through the complexities of the biographical tradition and Herodotus' own self-referential statements. They present the fraught topic of the publication date of his work in a thoughtful and balanced manner, expressing their support for the traditional dates (c. 430–424 BCE), but also explaining why later dates have been proposed and where to find those discussions (89, with footnotes 25–26).

The section on Herodotus' historiography, titled 'Form and Thought in Herodotus' in homage to Henry Immerwahr's influential 1966 volume of that name, is particularly helpful. Herodotus' historical method is notoriously difficult because so much of it is implicit, rather than overtly stated, but the authors discuss it with clarity and completeness. For example, the authors explain the relationship of Book 1 to the rest of the work, showing that, while the overall structure of the *Histories* 'provides a chronologically organized account of Persian imperial aggression', Book 1 introduces the work's 'chronological format, its formal properties, and many of its major themes' (14). The authors briefly discuss several of these themes, including 'the fundamental uncertainty of human life', the 'inscrutable will of the gods' and the fact that a hardy, simple, warrior culture can often conquer a complex and more sophisticated one (15).

In the commentary (which, at over 300 pages, makes up the largest portion of the book), the authors provide clear and straightforward explanations to challenging topics without oversimplifying them. Their discussion of Herodotus' puzzling 'Persian version' of the cause of the Persian Wars is a case in point. Herodotus represents the Persian chroniclers

as using traditional Greek myths to explain the Persian War as the result of a series of reciprocal abductions. On this view, the Persian War was simply a (just) retaliation for the Trojan War (1.1–5). Dewald and Munson point out that while Herodotus presents the Persians as sophisticatedly using the Greeks' own legends 'to construct an elaborate pro-Persian apologia', he also introduces several important themes that will be programmatic for the *Histories* as a whole, including 'retribution as a motive or pretext for action', and the 'fundamental Herodotean principle' that 'no-one's story ... will prove to be a disinterested, impartial account' (182).

Throughout the volume, the authors keep their narrative relatively straightforward while sketching out important scholarly debates in the footnotes, with ample citations for those who wish to pursue the issues further. This approach makes for a satisfying reading experience and is appropriate for a series intended for intermediate and advanced students as well as for scholars (as noted on the back cover).

I noticed only one typographical error: in the Abbreviations section (xi), A. M. Bowie's commentary in this series is incorrectly identified as being on Herodotus' *Histories* Book 7 (rather than Book 8). It is listed correctly in the Bibliography.

As Dewald and Munson note in their preface, this commentary has been many years in the making. The extraordinary care and thoroughness with which they have researched and written it ensures that this will be the standard commentary of Herodotus' Book 1 for many years to come.

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