

E. BARAGWANATH: *Motivation and Narrative in Herodotus*
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Herodotus' *logoi* come in numerous forms. As opposed to a literature of facts they are digressional treatises on ethnography, tangential mini-narratives, folklorish tales of a character verging sometimes on the bizarre, and detailed geographical descriptions of the region in which the next instalment of his narrative will take place. In short, they are stories communicated to the audience. Carolyn Dewald has said (and it seems her opinion has been influential or at any rate in tune with the tone of current scholarship) that *logoi* 'matter' to Herodotus. They are in Dewald's appraisal "one of the best tools we have been given for understanding the world of *ta anthrōpeia prēgmata*" - the affairs of mankind. "And despite the charm," Dewald continues, "the spontaneity and apparent delightfulness of much of the content of the *Histories*, the ultimate objective of its author ... is serious: to understand the human world, in all its dimensions." (2002, p. 288). It has become quite popular to argue that it is not necessarily *despite* his employment of stories but *because* of it that Herodotus' 'serious' desire to understand the world is so successful (see Munson, 2001; Thomas, 2000; Dewald, 1999, 2002; de Jong, 1999; Gray, 2001). The *Histories* have been said to have two planes of interaction with its audience, woven tightly together. (For the purpose of explanation and in the interests of clarity I will separate them from one another artificially.) On the one hand, there is the historical narrative of the *Histories*: events placed along the diachronous axis, which propel the *logos* as a whole. On the other hand, the synchronous axis is the metanarrative. Here we find those digressional, supplementary but nonetheless significant *logoi*. It is on this axis that we notice Herodotus often presenting alternate and conflicting accounts of the same event.

A fundamental assertion of Emily Baragwanath's *Motivation and Narrative in Herodotus* is that "[e]xplanation on the human level is crucial to Herodotus' aim of making his *Histories* intelligible to his readers..." (3). She conceives of this ancient author as inviting "interpretations that potentially differ from his own." (1). She also contends that "creating *kleos* [renown] is not all that the *Histories*, from the outset, lays claim to be doing", but that the opening manifesto of Herodotus' project focuses also upon *ta genomēna ex anthrōpōn* - 'what has come about as the result of human agency' (14-

15). Thus a driving concern must be what motivates human action, and an understanding of this is significant both to Herodotus and to our interpretation of the goals of his project.

Baragwanath sets out to demonstrate that much of the indeterminacy present in the *Histories* between possible causes of events, reasoning behind individuals' actions and their strategies arises not through Herodotus' lack of concern for what *really* happened, but as the result of the *histōr*'s awareness of a principal tenet of modern historiography: "Herodotus recognized that those targeted by his oral research at times held differing, or irreconcilable, opinions about the way past events unfolded ... The thoughts and motives that inspired a particular course of action were doubly concealed: in the past and within the minds of those involved." (3). Implicitly, it is methodological caution which is the root cause of Herodotus' ascription of multiple possible motivations to his historical actors.

The product of Baragwanath's inquiry is a characterization of the different kinds of motivation responsible for some of the *Histories*' more notorious decisions and outcomes. Whether it be a moral question of the Ionians desiring to hold onto their liberty at all costs (a motivation problematized by Baragwanath) or of the medizing Thessalians pragmatically choosing the lesser evil or of Themistocles looking keenly into the future with a view either to hegemony or self-preservation (a too simplistic interpretation in the author's view), Baragwanath aims at an understanding of *why* these groups and individuals acted as they did. In deconstructing the outcomes and decisions made by Herodotus' historical actors Baragwanath implies something about the motivations that underpin the *histōr*'s project itself.

To maintain that Herodotus engenders a part of himself in his characters' psyches, and thus their motivations, would be naïve and fraught with unfalsifiable speculation. By comparison this book attempts to interpret Herodotus' intentions by considering a huge amount of narrative detail from across the entire spectrum of the *Histories*, weighing up prevalent themes and patterns and testing episodes against one another to find a line of best fit.

The contradiction that emerges, however, is that Herodotus, as Rosaria Munson (2001, 78-9) put it, "is both a lover of symmetry ... and contemptuous of it." Many of his thematic patterns do not hold firm across the whole text and Baragwanath is aware of this. This book presents the significance of the *gaps* in Herodotus' explanation for the decisions made and outcomes produced by historical actors in the *Histories* and the implications of the emphasis of this indeterminacy for the intention of the work as a whole; an intention with a didactic flavour.

In her first chapter Baragwanath explicitly identifies a number of outcomes she hopes to reach. On the one hand, she intends to examine the tension between Herodotus' desire to ascribe motivation to historical *personae* in order to make the narrative and thematic threads of his work clearer and, on the other, her aim is to examine his desire to expose readers to the qualified and provisional character of such ascriptions. One of the interpretational mainstays of this book is that the *Histories* complicate rather than simplify: "Herodotus the inquirer into human motivation is never reductionist ... he sets forth ... uncertainty itself." (4). For Baragwanath, "Herodotus' ascriptions [of motivation] may hint at variant readings or may foreground irony." (8). Baragwanath suggests a reading of the *Histories* that endorses the *preservation* of this ambiguity between alternatives instead of seeking to establish which alternative represents Herodotus' true opinion (see, to the contrary, Badian, in Hornblower 1994, 117-121 and Blösel, 2001, 180).

Baragwanath's argument is divided into three thematic sections. The first three chapters introduce the theoretical background to her discussion. Chapter one introduces the relationship between narrator, characters, plot and the fictitious reader, setting up the notion of the audience's collaboration with the author as one to keep in mind for her later exploration of specific episodes in the *Histories*.

Chapter two is dedicated to drawing a comparison between the projects of Homer and Herodotus. It culminates in the observation that, while Homer constantly negotiates between "the omniscient narrator's sketching of his characters' psychology and his refraining from so doing ... Herodotus stages a similar negotiation ... but to epistemological / historiographical ends, and in imitation rather of Homer's human narrators. It comes to serve not only to enhance readerly engagement, but also to stage one of the key challenges in reconstructing the past." (51). This is an interesting link between Herodotus and the Homeric world and counterbalances the emphasis of Herodotus' groundedness in the critical inquiry of the fifth century B.C., as demonstrated by Thomas (2000) et al. The author of this book does not shy away from the image of Herodotus as an entertainer. She understands that the *histōr* is not merely either an historian or an artist: he is both. The notion that there are hard and fast boundaries between academic and artistic fields in the fifth century B.C. is inaccurate.

Chapter three, entitled 'Constructions of motives and the historian's *persona*', introduces just that pairing. It builds on the theoretical relationship between audience and author explored in the first chapter and makes it more specific to the *Histories*.

Chapters four through seven explore a number of case studies from the *Histories*. Each bundle of anecdotes approaches the concern of human motivation from a different angle. One of the strengths of this book is the way in which Baragwanath's narratologically focused excursus on motivation often engages with textual concerns that do not lie obviously in her argumentative path. For example: it is often pointed out that *nomos* [custom] has a profound and governing influence on the thematic trajectory of the *Histories*. Herodotus' extended *logos* surrounding Cambyses' rule of Persia – punctuated with unnecessary depravities and all sorts of shameful contraventions of *nomos* – and his characterization of Cambyses as a madman for disrespecting religion and custom, paired with Pindar's aphorism that 'custom is king of all' (Hdt. III.38), are often taken as an indicator that for Herodotus the preservation of *nomos* is closely linked with a maintenance of morality, virtue, and the good. Baragwanath makes a really interesting point in asserting that "Herodotus seems more interested in exploring the extent to which *nomoi* [customs] do *not* determine behaviour; he considers, for example, how, even where custom is strong, humans may have a determining role, choosing to transgress them." (119-120). This is in keeping with her understanding of Herodotus' anti-reductionist and provocative relationship with his audience.

Baragwanath's central points involve Herodotus' methodology and the way his narrative functions not merely as an ancient cultural artifact – a 'thing' we can excavate for information about how the Greeks lived and thought – but as a work that is dynamic and requires readers to engage and communicate with it in order to ascertain what it is capable of telling us. In her analysis of the *logos* of Syloson's relationship with Darius and his reconquest of the island of Samos, Baragwanath states that "as well as planting seeds of significant themes, the story provides another serious juxtaposition of fable-like, personal cause and the harsh reality of military invasion it precipitates, encouraging reflection once again upon *the dissonance between explanation and outcome* – a central theme in the subsequent narrative." (100-101, italics mine).

Baragwanath perceives Herodotus' task to entail the confounding of simplicity: "The leitmotiv of the third book [of the *Histories*] seems to be not so much [the metaphysical and moral conflict between falsehood and truth], as the deconstruction of that polarity through the revelation of its inadequacy." (121). In approaching the question of Herodotus' own motivations and how he intends us to read the *Histories*, Baragwanath maintains an ongoing focus on the relationship between the narrator's digressions – his *prosthēkas*

and *logoi* – and the implications for our understanding of the climate in which Herodotus is writing. Following her discussion of the Pisistratids, Baragwanath states, “[t]hus in his brief aside Herodotus has conjured up a wider network of family ties and influential women, and so underlined the fact that Athens is still very aristocratic in texture, and perhaps hinted at an explanatory principle [for Athenian motivations at this time]: this Athens does *not* seem yet ready for democracy.” (155).

Far from perpetuating the idealized image of the Greek resistance of Persia as arising from deep wells of moral absolutism and an uncompromising love of liberty, Baragwanath puts forth a case for *phthonos* [envy / jealousy], malice and a preference for negative freedom rather than utter destruction as the more prevalent and practical motivations in the Persian Wars, observing that “patterns in Herodotus’ text work against the possibility that the idea of *to Hellēnikon* should prove a powerful motive.” (178). In her discussion of the Ionian revolt, we find again an argument in support of the view that Herodotus sought to depict the erosion or just plain lack of idealism in the face of tangible danger and self-interest. “[T]he debate amongst the tyrants that ensues showcases a rather different ranking of priorities. The dramatization of their change of mind makes clear that it is a question of ranked motivation rather than of cut-and-dried absolutes ... the ideal that seemed appealing in principle is overridden by a more immediate concern with hanging on to personal power.” (180). Baragwanath presents a view of motivation in the *Histories* that is not stylized but really human.

The fifth chapter widens the discussion of indeterminacy between motivations in the *Histories* to observe and consider the ‘politics’ of motivation. This is the chapter that solidifies the value of her line of inquiry. In her own words: “Herodotus’ emphasis is on demonstrating the inadequacy of simple slogans to do justice to the reality of a complex piece of history and complex motivations, and on engaging readers in thinking about these dilemmas and bringing together for themselves the contradictory strands.” (159). This trend Baragwanath perceives in Herodotus’ ongoing problematization of *aitiai* [causes / reasons] strongly challenges the models of seminal works like Hartog’s (1988), which seeks to convey simplification, and of Herodotus’ deliberate production of polarity as an integral part of his discourse.

In Chapter seven, ‘To medize or not to medize ... compulsion and negative motives’, Baragwanath puts the stereotypical views of Argive, Syracusan, Corcyrean, Thessalian, Athenian, and Spartan motivations to bed and replaces them with what seem like more substantiated justifications for the way Herodotus tells us they acted. In doing so she works both from her own

research into the period and from her deconstruction of Herodotus' text. Compulsion [*anankē*] and necessity are set up by the author as forcing the hand of many historical *personae* in key moments throughout the *Histories*. Baragwanath characterizes the eventuality of many Greek states submitting to Persia and indeed much of the decision-making in this period as originating not from positive choices but from reactionary concerns for self-preservation (217). She concludes: “[w]hile the ascription of ... *motives* to individuals and groups is widespread in the *Histories* ... leaving the impression that humans have the potential to exercise a substantial degree of self-determination, Herodotus' work is also sensitive to peoples' occasional powerlessness...” (238). According to Baragwanath there is a motif of ‘understanding not blame’, which accompanies Herodotus' presentation of motives in all quarters, not only in relation to medizing (217). This perspective flies in the face of the ‘praise and blame’ paradigm Plutarch believes to underpin the *Histories*, as expressed in his *On the Malice of Herodotus*. It is a complaint Baragwanath pays good attention to throughout as she builds her contrary view.

A feature of this text is Baragwanath's constant interaction with the assertions of other scholars and repeated checking of her model against Plutarch's observations and criticisms of the *Histories*. In this way she engages with the perspectives of an ancient milieu as well as the modern one. She has judged and rearticulates the modern scholarship in such a way that demonstrates a deft understanding of her contemporaries and a strong command of the *Histories* as a whole. Working from Plutarch's appraisal, her observations are oriented and arranged to come from the perspective of the *audience* rather than detaching from it and undertaking a purely theoretical deconstruction of the text. This concerted effort to interpret the *Histories* from the audience's perspective strengthens her project and sharpens the usefulness of her insights into the relationship between narrator and audience.

The intended audience for Baragwanath's book is one which has an existing knowledge of the debate (and its progression) surrounding interpretations of the aims of Herodotus' *Histories* and the historiographic concerns they bear with them. Baragwanath is conscious of not oversimplifying what motivates Herodotus' historical actors and involves herself in a constant dialogue with previous interpretations. In doing so she does not commit to a single and ongoing understanding of how Herodotus ‘works’. While this awareness of not positing a unifying interpretation is sound in the sense that Baragwanath is not compelled to make her observations fit in with that interpretation – thus lowering the risk of reductionism – it can at times be quite

a task for the reader to see where all this extreme detail is leading. Throughout her book, Baragwanath's line of argument is sometimes obscured by the great amount of contextual information and lacks incisive weight. The reader may experience difficulties in attempting to chart a lucid sense of thematic continuity across Baragwanath's chapters.

This is not a book which hammers home an interpretational model. Baragwanath's is a discussion concerned with "building upon and corroborating recent research" (323). Baragwanath discusses, characterizes and contextualizes Herodotus' narratological style and his work as a whole. She does not isolate each episode from the ones that surround it but uses the preceding and following anecdotes to inform her interpretation of the one they book-end. Baragwanath's contribution is to demonstrate, through a rigorous attention to and presentation of textual detail, that we as an audience are best placed to receive the *Histories*, if we preserve its overlapping causes and motivations, the multiplicity of alternatives Herodotus presents to us throughout his historical narrative. In a nutshell: we are encouraged to 'read' Herodotus' motivation as well as his text.

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