

HERODOTUS BECOMES INTERESTED IN HISTORY*

At 3.60 Herodotus tells us that he has dwelt at length on the Samians because ‘they are responsible for three of the greatest buildings in the Greek world’:¹ the tunnel of Eupalinos,² the great temple,³ and the breakwater that protects their harbour.⁴ As successive commentators have pointed out, that is not the real reason for the length of his account. We hear about the tunnel for the first time in this chapter (60.1–3⁵); Maiandrios escapes down a secret channel at 146.2, which may or may not be Eupalinos’ tunnel;⁶ we hear about the temple of

* The suggestion made in this brief article occurred to me during the Oxford conference on Herodotus and Myth organized by Emily Baragwanath and Mathieu de Bakker in 2007 (now published as E. Baragwanath and M. de Bakker [eds.], *Myth, Truth, and Narrative in Herodotus* [Oxford, 2012]), but no-one present at that conference is to blame. I am very grateful to Prof. Christopher Pelling for sending me in advance of publication a copy of his paper ‘Herodotus and Samos’ (now published in *BICS* 54 [2011], 1–18), which I somehow missed when it was originally delivered as the Barron Memorial lecture and which presents a more nuanced picture than usual of Herodotus’ treatment of Samos; to Jessica Priestley, who kindly sent me a copy of the chapter ‘Biographical Traditions about Herodotus’ from her thesis *Herodotus and Hellenistic Culture: Studies in the Reception of the Historiae*, which treats the traditions about Herodotus’ years on Samos in a much more thorough and interesting manner than the present article does; to Nigel Wilson, the editor of the forthcoming Oxford Classical Text of Herodotus, for n. 3; and to my wife, Hazel, who carefully checked my text for typos and other idiocies.

¹ Translations are from A. de Sélincourt, *Herodotus. The Histories* (Harmondsworth, 1954; revised edition 1972), abbreviated.

² Familiar names such as Herodotus have been Latinized; less well-known ones such as Eupalinos and Maiandrios have not.

³ Nigel Wilson kindly informs me that Paul Maas reckoned that the reference to ‘the very large temple’ (νήος μέγιστος) at 60.4 should include the name of Hera, and that he is inclined to follow him.

⁴ Bibliography on these monuments is collected by David Asheri in D. Asheri *et al.*, *A Commentary on Herodotus Books I–IV* (Oxford, 2007), 457–8 (on 60) and 438 (on 39–60). The commentary on Book 3 in this multi-author work is by Asheri himself. Polycrates’ palace, the scene of some of the most memorable incidents in Herodotus’ account (e.g. 42), which Caligula intended to restore (Suet. *Calig.* 21; see D. G. J. Shipley, *A History of Samos* [Oxford, 1987], 76) is not on Herodotus’ list; it is a mysterious building (Shipley, 76) and presumably cannot have been very striking.

⁵ All references lacking an author’s name and a book number are to Herodotus, Book 3.

⁶ ὄρυγμα at 60.1, κρυπτή διώρυξ at 146.2. ‘Perhaps Eupalinus’ tunnel’, says Asheri (n. 4), 520, on 146.2, but Herodotus says that Maiandrios had had the channel made for himself (ἐπεποίητο οἱ); and could such a famous engineering feat as Eupalinus’ tunnel really be described as κρυπτή (‘secret’)?

Artemis, not of Hera, at Samos in 48; dedications in the temple of Hera are mentioned in passing at 1.70.3, 3.123.1, 4.88.1, and 4.152.4, but the temple itself cannot be said to play a major part in Herodotus' narrative; naval expeditions sail from Samos (e.g. 44.2, 59.4) but there is no emphasis on the harbour or its breakwater. What Herodotus should have said is 'I have dwelt at length on Samos, because I am interested in the island's history; and, by the way, they are responsible for three. . .'; but it is not our job to tell him what he 'should' have said. As David Asheri remarks, 'We can explain it [the length of the Samian *logos*] most simply by supposing that the *logos* already existed before the final draft of the book'.⁷

Let us look at what Herodotus tells us about Samos (readers who know Book 3 of Herodotus may skip the next four paragraphs).⁸ His account is divided into three sections (39–60, 120–8, and 139–49), but we may consider it as a single *logos*. While Cambyses, king of Persia, was invading Egypt, the Spartans led an expedition against Polycrates, tyrant of Samos (39).⁹ Polycrates was a man who experienced exceptionally good fortune in all that he undertook. Amasis, king of Egypt, warned him that he would eventually meet with disaster unless he put an end to his unbroken run of prosperity (40). He was unable to do so (41–2) and the king of Egypt therefore broke off his friendship and alliance with him (43). Next we read that Polycrates sent those citizens whom he suspected of plotting against him to join Cambyses' expedition against Egypt (44).¹⁰

There were two stories about what happened to these dissidents: Herodotus prefers the version that took them to Sparta (46). It was they who persuaded the Spartans to attack Samos (39), though the reasons for the expedition were in fact more complicated, involving among other things the theft by the Samians of a *krater* that the

⁷ Asheri (n. 4), 437, on 39–60.

⁸ These passages are discussed by E. Baragwanath, *Motivation and Narrative in Herodotus* (Oxford, 2008), 87–107. Herodotus of course gives no dates, but we are in the late 520s BC. On his lack of chronology here, see D. Lateiner, *The Historical Method of Herodotus* (Toronto, 1989), 122, and also R. Osborne, 'Archaic Greek History', in de E. J. de Bakker, I. J. F. de Jong and H. van Wees (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Herodotus* (Leiden, 2002), 502–3.

⁹ On Samos and Sparta see P. A. Cartledge, 'Sparta and Samos in the Archaic Period: A "Special Relationship"?', *CQ* n.s. 32 (1982), 243–65; S. Forsdyke, 'Greek History c.525–480 BC', in Bakker, de Jong and van Wees (n. 8), 524–8.

¹⁰ Herodotus says that they filled forty triremes (44.2); that is, on the conventional equation of 200 men to a trireme, there were 8,000 of them. W. W. How and J. Wells (1912), *A Commentary on Herodotus* (Oxford, 1912), i.268, correct this to pentekonteres – seeing it as an error of fact, that is, not as a textual corruption – which would reduce the figure to 2,000.

Spartans were sending to Croesus of Lydia (47).¹¹ The Corinthians took part in the expedition together with the Spartans, for a different reason: the Samians had hijacked three hundred Corcyrean boys whom Periander, tyrant of Corinth, had been sending to Sardis to be castrated (48–53).

Next we read about the Spartan siege of Samos (54–6), and then follow the adventures of the Samian exiles (57–9). In chapter 60 Herodotus brings the section to a close and apologizes, as we have seen, for having written so much about Samos.¹² That does not stop him from telling us more, in two sections that together are about as long as the previous one. The second ‘chapter’ of the story, 120–8, recounts the death of Polycrates (‘as Amasis of Egypt had foretold’; 126) at the hands of the Persian satrap Oroites, despite the warnings of Polycrates’ daughter (124). Oroites is then put to death in his turn on the orders of King Darius: another prosperous man (he commanded troops from Phrygia, Lydia, and Ionia; 127.1) laid low.

‘Chapter 3’ of the Samian *logos* (139–49) begins with the information that some time later Darius, king of Persia, captured Samos. Syloson, brother of Polycrates, had done Darius a favour (he had given him a flame-coloured [πυρρήν] cloak; 139); in return Darius promised to restore him to his native island and make him ruler of it (140). Polycrates had entrusted Samos during his absence to one Maiandrios, who, on hearing of the tyrant’s death, had pretended to hand over the government to the people but in fact had retained power himself and had imprisoned potential rivals; Lykaretos, his brother, then killed them (142–3). Not surprisingly, the Persians encountered no opposition when they arrived (144). However, another of Maiandrios’ brothers, the allegedly half-crazy¹³ Charilaos, upbraided Maiandrios for his passivity and attacked the Persians with a force of mercenaries (145–7). The Persians under Otanes took ruthless reprisals (147, 149), while Maiandrios escaped to Sparta, where he attempted to

¹¹ Luckily, the notorious chronological problems in this passage (on which see briefly How and Wells [n. 10], i.269, ad loc. and Asheri (n. 4), 446, ad loc., with further bibliography) do not concern us.

¹² His reason, or rather excuse, is the three remarkable monuments that he describes (see above). For a similar excuse, see 2.35.1: ‘About Egypt I shall have a great deal more to relate because of the number of remarkable things which the country contains.’

¹³ ὑπομαργότερος, the word that Herodotus uses of Cambyses (29.1) and Kleomenes (6.75.1). In all three cases it sounds like political propaganda (here ‘He must have been mad to think of attacking the Persian forces’).

bribe Cleomenes, presumably to persuade him to restore him as tyrant of Samos (148).

‘Why do you not rather tell me that which I do not already know?’, the impatient reader will exclaim.¹⁴ We have rehearsed this well-known narrative in order to emphasize the striking concentration of central Herodotean themes that is to be found in them:¹⁵ tyranny¹⁶ (and its opposite, democracy) in the persons of Polycrates, Periander, and Maiandrios; dramatic reversals of fortune (most explicitly Polycrates, but also Oroites and maybe Maiandrios¹⁷); the wise adviser (Polycrates’ daughter, as well as Amasis); reciprocity and retribution; Sparta, Egypt, Lydia and Croesus, Corinth, and the Persians – their kings and their conquests (Egypt as well as Samos). Admittedly, there is nothing here about Athens, another central theme, but why should there be?

The Suda (s.v. Ἡρόδοτος) tells us that Herodotus was exiled from Halicarnassos and spent his early years on Samos.¹⁸ Of course we should not believe everything we read in the Suda, and we can only guess what source(s) its compiler used.¹⁹ But it makes a very plausible story: Herodotus is certainly well informed about the island,²⁰ and the information is generally accepted.²¹ We cannot date his stay on the

¹⁴ The quotation is from Plautus or Terence. Unfortunately I have been unable to trace it; fortunately that does not matter.

¹⁵ The journal’s reader agrees, but comments that ‘that could be true also of certain other Herodotean narratives’. But none of them (he cites the Libyan *logos* in particular) fits so neatly with the biographical tradition.

¹⁶ Recent bibliography on Herodotus and tyranny is conveniently collected in Osborne (n. 8), 516, n. 27.

¹⁷ We hear no more of him after he is banished from Sparta (148.2). His brother Lykaretos surprisingly ended up as governor (ὑπάρχων) of Lemnos (5.27.1, a passage which equally surprisingly says that Maiandrios had been king [βασιλεύσαντος] of Samos).

¹⁸ Information from the Suda (s.v. Ἡρόδοτος and elsewhere) and other late sources is usefully set out in F. Jacoby, ‘Herodotos,’ in *RE* suppl. II (1913), 216, reprinted with identical pagination in his *Griechische Historiker* (Stuttgart, 1956). It is translated in T. S. Brown, ‘Early life of Herodotus,’ *Ancient World* 17 (1988), 15, and discussed in J. Priestley, ‘Biographical Traditions about Herodotus’ (forthcoming).

¹⁹ Jacoby (n. 18), 220 suggests Duris of Samos.

²⁰ For details, see *ibid.*, 205–520.

²¹ E.g. by How and Wells (n. 10), who list it among ‘Facts that are fairly certain’ (i.2–3); Jacoby (n. 18), 220–3; and B. M. Mitchell, ‘Herodotus and Samos,’ *JHS* 95 (1975), 75 (‘There can be no doubt that Herodotus’ Samian material was obtained at first hand on a visit or visits to Samos which lasted for a considerable time’). J. Hart, *Herodotus and Greek History* (Oxford, 1982), describes it as ‘generally agreed’ (57) and ‘a fact’ (161). There are no doubts either in H. R. Immerwahr, ‘The Samian stories in Herodotus,’ *CJ* 52 (1956–7), 312 (‘Herodotus had spent some time on the island’), but see also 320 (‘the biographical explanation does not account for their special relevance’, i.e. that of the Samian *logoi*). Nor are there doubts in K. H. Waters, *Herodotus the Historian* (London, 1985), 19; Brown (n. 18), 6 (‘probably took refuge in

island, but we will probably not be far out if we put it in the 470s or 460s or both. He would certainly have been a young man, probably in his teens or his twenties. What I would like to suggest is that, when this young man arrived in Samos from Halicarnassos, he found a great deal to interest him; and that the change of environment might²² have stimulated him to make enquiries about his new home, and that this kindled his interest in themes upon which he was to expand as his book grew in later years.²³ Whether he wrote up the results of his enquiries as a *logos*, as Asheri suggests, is another question; it is certainly a very attractive idea, but we simply do not know whether he wrote a consecutive narrative, or made notes of some kind, or just stored it all in his memory; and we have no way of finding out.

Reputable scholarly articles set out to prove or disprove a proposition or an interpretation, or to survey a topic; this one does not. Rather, I simply make a suggestion that I wish to ‘run up the flagpole and see if anyone salutes’.²⁴ It is of course a suggestion that cannot be proved. On the other hand, the hypothesis is to some extent falsifiable – if, for

Samos’), 12 (‘Samos which became his temporary home’), and 14 (Herodotus ‘came to Samos’ but ‘did not remain indefinitely’); or D. Gondicas and J. Boëldieu-Trévet, *Lire Hérodote* (Rosny-sous-Bois, 2005), 12, 15. Hart (this note), 57, writes that Herodotus’ ‘store of high-grade information [about Samos] is generally agreed to be the result of a prolonged stay on the island in the earlier part of his life’, and calls the stay a ‘fact’ (161). O. Murray, ‘Herodotus and Oral History’, in N. Luraghi (ed.), *The Historian’s Craft in the Age of Herodotus* (Oxford, 2001), 21, likewise says that ‘Herodotus had spent much of his youth on Samos’. It would be easy but pointless to go on multiplying examples of such judgements. We find reservations in J. Romm, *Herodotus* (New Haven, CT, 1998), 49–50. The name Herodotus is later attested on the island (thirteen instances in the *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names I. The Aegean Islands etc.* (Oxford, 1987), i.205–6; see also Shipley (n. 4), 105, n. 130, and 311 (four individuals). However, since Hera was the tutelary deity of the island, these men were probably named after her and we should not assume that any of them was a descendant of the historian. On Herodotus and Samos, see Mitchell (this note); Cartledge (n. 9) and Pelling (acknowledgement note); on his Samian *logos*, see Immerwahr (this note) and Baragwanath (n. 8), 87–107; further bibliography in Asheri (n. 4), 437–8.

²² My late tutor P. A. Brunt once quoted his colleague the philosopher Richard Robinson as having pointed out that in such statements ‘might’ always entails ‘might not’.

²³ This contradicts the assertion of R. Lattimore, ‘The Composition of the History of Herodotus,’ *CPh* 53 (1958), 9, who believes that ‘the text of Herodotus as we have it is a continuous piece of writing which Herodotus set down in the *order* in which we now have it’ (emphasis in original). A different and no doubt better approach to the question of how Herodotus turned into a historian is K. A. Raaflaub, ‘Philosophy, Science, Politics: Herodotus and the Intellectual Trends of his Time’, in de Bakker, de Jong and van Wees, (n. 8), 177–81.

²⁴ Wikipedia informs me (via Google, that indispensable scholarly aid) that this phrase became popular in the late 1950s (I first heard it myself in the film *Twelve Angry Men* [1957]); it adds that it is now a cliché, hackneyed, and outdated.

example, a reader can find anything in the Samian *logos* that is demonstrably late – which at least gives it some degree of respectability.²⁵

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there was a lengthy debate about whether Herodotus started as an ethnographer and later developed into a historian of the Persian invasions, or whether he set out to write a history of the wars from the start and only later turned ethnographic.²⁶ The present note does not presume to pronounce on that question, though it is relevant to it; rather, with due tentativity, it suggests an alternative approach.

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²⁵ It thus qualifies as a scientific hypothesis according to the criterion of Karl Popper as laid out in *The Poverty of Historicism* (2nd edn, London, 1960), 132–5; and *Objective Knowledge. An Evolutionary Approach* (Oxford, 1972), 377–5 and index s.v. refutation, refutability, falsification, etc. The reader is invited to tear down the flag from the flagpole. And it is, after all, very close to a criterion used by Herodotus himself: οὐκ ἔχει ἔλεγχον (2.23)

²⁶ A full bibliography of the question would be tedious: I single out R. W. Macan (ed.), *Herodotus. The Seventh, Eighth & Ninth Books* (London, 1908) i.xlv–lxi, and How and Wells (n. 10), i.10–15 for nineteenth-century views; F. Jacoby (n. 18), 220–3; C. W. Fornara, *Herodotus. An Interpretative Essay* (Oxford, 1971), ch. 1; J. Marincola, *Greek Historians, Greece and Rome New Surveys in the Classics* 31 (2001), 22–3; E. J. Bakker, ‘The Making of History: Herodotus’ *Historiēs Apodexis*’, in Bakker, de Jong and van Wees (n. 8), 4–5, with bibliography; and Raaflaub (n. 23), 177–81, with bibliography in 177, n. 90, and 181, n. 101.