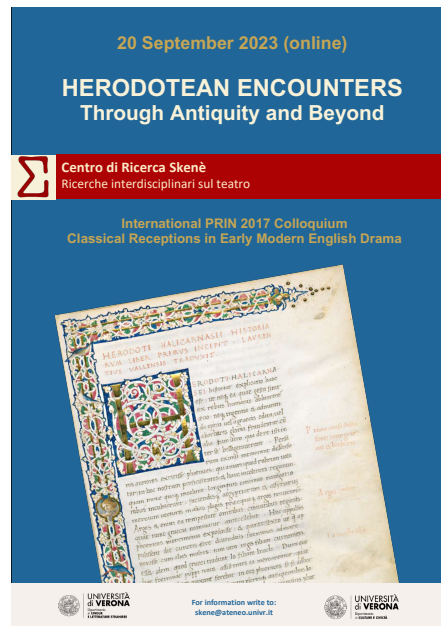


HERODOTEAN ENCOUNTERS Through Antiquity and Beyond

**International PRIN 2017 Colloquium
“Classical Receptions in Early Modern English Drama”
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Abstracts

**Carlo M. Bajetta (University of La Vallée d’Aoste) and Francesco Dall’Olio (University of Verona)
“Sir Walter Raleigh’s Herodotus: an ancient historian in *The History of the World*”**

Sir Walter Raleigh’s *The History of the World*, printed unfinished in 1614, represents the best-known attempt in Renaissance English literature to write a universal history, by combining material from every source known at the time, including ancient authors. Among these, Herodotus is one of the most present and cited. This is hardly surprising: since his first recovery during the Italian Renaissance, in the mid-15th century, Herodotus was recognised as one of the most important sources concerning ancient Persia, Egypt and Asia Minor. In the second half of the 16th century, some well-known Protestant historians such as David Chytraeus even considered Herodotus almost as a kind of ‘continuation’ of the Bible. At the same time, Herodotus’ ambiguous reputation as a ‘father of lies’ generated a long debate, not yet concluded in Raleigh’s time, about how reliable his account was. This paper studies the relationship between the history of Herodotus’ reception and the historian’s presence in the *History of the World*. After offering an overview of Herodotus’ presence in Renaissance England (in terms of both editions of the *Histories* and reprisal of characters, ideas or subjects from his work in other literary texts), we will present our observations regarding the edition of Herodotus used by Raleigh, before moving on to the analysis of the passages in the *History* where Herodotus is cited as a source (which, in a couple of cases, include direct quotations). Our analysis will highlight the importance of both Herodotus himself and the discussion around his work to Raleigh’s ideas about the writing of history and the scope and purposes of his work.

Jordan Bayley (Newcastle University)

“The impact of the Aldine Herodotus from the Renaissance onwards”

The first known printed edition of Herodotus in Greek was published in Venice by Aldus Manutius in 1502. It was issued alongside the Aldine Thucydides, an irony that would serve to further entwine the reputation of the two historians. The resultant effect of Aldus' efforts was an opening up of access to the Greek text of the *Histories*, previously only available in print in the Latin translation of Lorenzo Valla, which coincided with the expansion of Greek learning in Italy and beyond. These first editions published by Aldus were purchased by some of the Renaissance's most prominent scholars, including by Erasmus, whose copy survives in the collections of Columbia University. Yet little scholarly attention has been given to how these early printed editions influenced the early reception of Herodotus and how this has shaped subsequent readings of the *Histories*. I will explore how the development of early Greek type allowed for a far wider engagement with Herodotus' original Greek rather than via Latin translation. These encounters with Herodotus' own text changed how the *Histories* were read and interpreted and led to a renewed interest in the historian that would shape readership patterns for the following four centuries.

Marco Duranti (University of Verona)

“Herodotus in early modern travel literature”

In my paper, I will explore how Herodotus was read and employed in a crucial moment of transition in early modern European history, when the reference to the ancient authors as primary sources for the understanding of the world was challenged by the new geographical explorations and discoveries. Therefore, I will focus on travel relations as well as on other works that refer to the European explorations in two directions: towards east, especially to Persia; towards west, to the 'New World'. I shall briefly discuss a wide number of texts in order to show the range of possible implications which the new findings had on the European classics-oriented culture. The categories inherited from the ancient authors could be used to classify the newly-explored or re-explored geographical areas and their inhabitants, without questioning their reliability and often without taking into consideration the historical changes that had occurred. Some explorers were instead aware that classical sources had to be used with caution as a guide to the modern world. Some others defied the authority of the classics and proclaimed their unreliability. Interestingly enough, ancient and modern ethnographical works could legitimise each other: the marvels contained in modern travel reports could be declared true because they were analogous to those described in the classical authors; but conversely the *mirabilia* which were found in classical texts could be accepted because similar marvellous things were reported by the modern explorers.

Because Herodotus had been accused of forging lies since antiquity, his reliability was an especially sensitive issue in early modern historiography. However, I will show that in the travel literature Herodotus was generally not considered as an especially unreliable author and the issue of reliability regarded all classical authors alike. This issue was connected to eyewitnessing and it was posed sometimes in a diachronic perspective. The full range of responses and attitudes towards Herodotus' text writes an important chapter of that fascinating interplay between antiquity and modernity that characterizes early modern culture.

Antony Ellis (University of Bern)

“Gemistos Pletho's Edition of Herodotus: Ancient History and Neo-Pagan Identity Politics at the Close of the Byzantine World”

Over the first half of the 15th century, the scholar, teacher, imperial-adviser, and philosopher Gemistos Pletho (ca. 1360 - 1452/4) produced a unique 'edition' of Herodotus' *Histories*. At many points he made substantial changes to the text. These range from brilliant philological conjectures (some of which have slunk anonymously into today's scholarly editions of Herodotus) to various forms of theological bowdlerization, implemented through wholesale deletion or creative rewriting – the latter using a close imitation of Herodotus' dialect and style. Several of Pletho's interventions, moreover, reflect the neo-pagan theology of Pletho's controversial philosophical masterpiece, the *Laws*, which were discovered, declared heretical, and performatively burnt after his death.

In this talk, I ask what Pletho's edition of Herodotus can tell us about Pletho's intellectual development and his approach to ancient Greek history. Pletho's work on Herodotus seems to have been part of a broader practice of

'editing' ancient Greek authors – including Plato and Homer. I ask why and how Herodotus earned a place in the neo-pagan textual canon which Pletho forged over his long and illustrious career in Byzantine Mistra. I also seek to place Pletho's eccentric activities in the cultural history of forgery. Pletho, I argue, did not understand his alterations as an act of falsification, secretly implemented to bolster his own positions. He seems, rather, to have been engaged in a self-confident act of correction, and to have operated with the knowledge of a small but prestigious community of scholars and pupils. Pletho, I suggest, like many ancient and medieval scholars, was deeply preoccupied by the spectre of hostile and polemical forgery in ancient manuscripts. In creating his new 'Greek' identity and ideology, I argue that Pletho came to the view that the pagan classics had suffered interpolation by hostile Christian scribes. His 'forgeries' are, I suggest, an attempt to emend the historical record and to produce the literary tradition required for the social and moral reform of the Greek world.

Valentina Gritti (University of Ferrara)

"Ciro il Grande dalla letteratura ferrarese all'Erodoto boiardesco: elaborazione e sviluppo di uno *speculum principis*"

L'interesse di Ercole d'Este per la storia, maturato fin dall'infanzia aragonese (l'Estense riceve nella Napoli di Alfonso il Magnanimo la sua prima educazione), si esplicita nella continua richiesta di volgarizzamenti di opere storiografiche antiche e moderne. Gli intellettuali che gravitano alla sua corte (1471-1505) pian piano gli costruiscono una vera e propria biblioteca di classici in volgare (Emilio Probo ossia Cornelio Nepote, Cesare, Sallustio, Tito Livio, Giuseppe Flavio, Plutarco, Arriano, Riccobaldo da Ferrara, ecc.). Tra tutti Boiardo, a lui più vicino per interessi e per la relativa propaganda culturale sul versante tanto latino quanto volgare, è il più prolifico (i già ricordati Emilio Probo, Senofonte, Riccobaldo e ancora Apuleio e in ultimo Erodoto). La traduzione italiana dell'Erodoto, che costituirà per secoli un punto di riferimento tra i letterati e i lettori italiani, è realizzata durante la vecchiaia e dunque nel periodo in cui la sua tecnica versoria aveva raggiunto piena maturazione stilistica e maggiore libertà di trasposizione rispetto al testo originario. Il primo libro delle *Storie* di Erodoto, che descrive la storia della Lidia e del Medio Oriente, dedica una particolare attenzione alla figura di Ciro II, creatore del primo impero dell'antichità. Ciro il grande era conosciuto a Ferrara ben prima dei volgarizzamenti boiardeschi sia per l'interesse di Guarino verso la storiografia antica (oltre a Plutarco, il Veronese insegnava anche Erodoto), sia grazie ad opere allegorico-didascaliche in volgare di metà secolo (l'*Odosophia* di Ludovico Sandeo e il *De virorum illustrium principibus ab origine mundi* di Antonio Cornazzano ne illustrano, per esempio, la figura nei loro capitoli ternari). Nel momento in cui prende in mano la traduzione latina del Valla per offrire il suo volgarizzamento erodoteo a Ercole I Boiardo è costretto fare i conti con la figura di Ciro, ormai divenuta *speculum principis* proprio grazie a Sandeo, a Cornazzano e alla sua *Pedia de Cyro* da Senofonte. L'intento del presente saggio è dunque quello di leggere il volgarizzamento del I libro delle *Storie* di Erodoto alla luce del contesto culturale in cui nasce e dello scopo per cui viene allestito e illustrare eventuali interferenze, più o meno marcate, con la letteratura latina, umanistica e volgare precedente.

Jane Grogan (University of Dublin)

"Herodotus in Action: from Early Modern English Scholars to Soldier-Poets"

This paper studies the reception of Herodotus in mid-Tudor England, from the 1540s to the 1580s, focussing in particular on the active uses made of Herodotus by scholars, courtiers and would-be diplomats associated with the Cheke circle. The second part of this paper considers the common attribution of the first English translation of Herodotus by the soldier-poet Barnabe Rich (B.R. of the title-page) in light of this earlier tradition of purposeful, active readings of Herodotus. It will consider this external evidence of active uses of Herodotus in relation to the attribution of this translation to Rich.

Chloë Houston (University of Reading)

"Gods, Tyrants and Mad Men: Herodotean Kings in Early Modern English Plays of Persia"

Herodotus' *Histories* (c. 425 BCE) has long been established as one of the most important source texts for early modern English plays set in Achaemenid Persia. Herodotus' images of Persia and its kings were disseminated to English readers not only in translation from the Greek but also via English texts which included or adapted material

from the *Histories*. Early English plays of Persia which draw on Herodotus include Thomas Preston's *Cambyses* (1560/ 1569), which amply demonstrates the negative images of Achaemenid kingship presented to early modern audiences via Herodotus. Plays which drew on Herodotus' *Histories* often presented ancient Persian kings as given to despotism and tyranny, in contrast to the more idealised images available to English readers via Xenophon. This paper will examine early modern English encounters with Herodotus on the stage, and specifically in a series of plays about Persia written and performed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Beginning with the anonymous interlude *Godly Queene Hester* (1530) via *Cambyses* to Colley Cibber's *Xerxes* (1699), it will suggest the presence of a Herodotean tradition in such drama, characterised by images of kings as sometimes godlike, often tyrannous, and occasionally mad. Though some playwrights drew on more subtle and nuanced aspects of Persian kingship available in the *Histories*, others – Cibber included – took the worst of Persian kingship from Herodotus in a form of imitation which suggests an eristic desire to outdo even the worst that could be found in the Greek.

Elisabeth Schwab (University of Kiel)

“Early Modern Encounters with Herodotean Mummies “

In my paper I will explore how the vivid account on Egypt in book two of Herodotus's *Histories* inspired its early modern readers. As I will show, they used it as a reference tool both for their antiquarian research and to pepper their letter writing with learned imagery. I will focus especially on the early modern readings and interpretations of Herodotus's famous passage on mummification.

Joseph Skinner (Newcastle University)

“Encounters with Foreign Cultures in the Works of Jonathan Swift (1667-1745)”

One stark (but unsurprising) contrast between scholarship on Herodotus' *Histories* and Jonathan Swift's most famous work, *Gulliver's Travels*, is the absence of any debate surrounding whether Swift actually visited the lands of Lilliput, Brobdingnag, Laputa and the country of the Houyhnhnms, together with the overall truthfulness of his account of foreign cultures - since these are clearly fictitious. This paper examines the degrees to which exploration of the themes of cultural encounter and identity reflect a broader pattern of engagement with Herodotus both within *Gulliver's Travels* and Swift's so-called 'lesser writings'. That Swift's literary audience(s) possessed at least some knowledge of the *Histories* is clearly assumed, allowing the author to draw humorous parallels between contemporary medical discourse and Herodotus' philosophy of History. There are also wider questions of positioning in relation to so-called 'barbarian' peoples (namely the Scythians) which require further examination. Rather than emphasising the distance separating these horse-herding nomads from the civilised Greeks, Swift appears to challenge the rhetoric of 'Otherness' in a way that cannot be disassociated from contemporary experiences of inter-cultural contact and encounter in the so-called 'New World'. Can Swift's treatment of foreign cultures be characterised as 'Herodotean', in any meaningful sense, or was his narrative account conceived as an antitype to the descriptions of exotic lands and peoples which were by that point proliferating?

Riccardo Vattuone (University of Bologna)

“Come nascono le maldicenze: Erodoto e il veleno di Plutarco”

Il credito di cui Plutarco godette in epoca moderna favorì la diffusione di dubbi sulla veridicità delle Storie: il *de Herodoti malignitate* cercò di dimostrare come lo storico avesse distorto con subdola abilità la verità dei fatti relativi al suo capolavoro, cioè il racconto delle guerre persiane. La malizia di Plutarco non fu certo inferiore a quella che egli attribuì al predecessore: ma il veleno era stato ormai inoculato. Qui si tenta di dimostrare, oltre Plutarco, che una discussione su Erodoto e la sua 'storiografia', sulla sua attendibilità, ha origine già nel V secolo e attraversa poi tutta la classicità. Il limite della tradizione su Erodoto, che si manifesta in oscillazioni di gusto e di giudizio sulla sua opera, non è imputabile a Plutarco, ma ha radici antiche: il Tucidide 'scienziato' della filologia tedesca di XIX secolo, contrapposto al narratore di *logoi* e alle sue performances di letture pubbliche, il 'veridico' al 'bugiardo', è una falsificazione che permane nei nostri studi.