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カリス スティブン ジェームズ

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## Abstract:

The Histories of Herodotus, written over two thousand five hundred years ago, continues to fascinate and entertain the scholar and casual reader alike. This essay, after a brief overview of attitudes toward Herodotus and his work in antiquity, will conduct a comparative textual analysis of selected excerpts from Book VII of the Histories to ascertain the level of cultural interference of each generation of translator. The essay concludes with a summary of observations and caveats resulting from the analysis and suggestions as to how future translations of the Histories might look.

## 概要：

2500年以上前に編纂され、書かれたヘロドトスの歴史は、学者と一般の読者を同様に魅了し、楽しませ続けている。本稿では、ヘロドトスと古代における彼の仕事を簡単に概要した後、各世代の翻訳者による文化的干渉のレベルを確認するために、歴史の第7巻から抜粋したテキストの比較分析を行う。そして、分析と提案から得られた観察と警告の要約をもとに歴史の将来の翻訳がどのように見えるかについて結論づけている。

## Keywords:

Classical reception studies, textual analysis, Translation Studies, Ancient Greek, Herodotus

## Introduction

Herodotus of Halicarnassus (Dates 480? BCE-425? BCE) has come down to us as the ‘father of history’, being the first writer to separate myth and legends from actual events in the recent past of his time and craft a cohesive narrative arising from his method of inquiry (Greek: *historein*) into the ‘great deeds of the past’.<sup>1</sup>

The first editions of the Greek text of the *Histories*, a work in nine books written to describe the birth and development of the Persian Empire and how it came into contact and conflict with the Greek world, appeared in the Renaissance and are based upon two distinct branches of sigla or groups of manuscripts, A and B or the Roman and the Laurentine. It was normal practice for the

early editors to amalgamate the least corrupt version of manuscript (abbreviated as MSS henceforth), using selections from both sigla where appropriate. This has been a complicated process with Herodotus. As a native of Halicarnassus (modern Bodrum in Turkey), he would have grown up speaking Ionian Greek which differs significantly in orthography and lexis from Attic Greek, and all the MSS vary with different transcriptions of the Greek text.<sup>2</sup>

The problem is further exacerbated by subsequent editors correcting Attic spellings to Ionic and vice versa regardless of whether this was the intended reading of the original MSS or not. Whilst Herodotus was alive, working, and even performing parts of his work before audiences at Athens, it is highly likely that he would have used both dialects and it is therefore difficult to know when an Ionic dialect reading is correct or not. This aspect renders the various MSS translations of a kind in themselves. This is before any translations are made into modern languages. Translators in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century are most likely to have used Karl Hude's excellent 1906 edition of the Greek text where the scholarship and textual apparatus are generally accepted as the most reliable to date pace later scholars' useful comments together with the invaluable help provided by closer work on papyri fragments found at Oxyrhynchus. Earlier translators would have had to rely on critical texts and apparatus before the publication of Hude's work. This is particularly relevant to this study since, in the case of Macaulay, it would have been Heinrich Stein's critical edition of 1869-71. It would be fair to conclude that the would-be translator of Herodotus must be aware of such textual complexities before attempting their own translation. As far as reception goes, Herodotus has gone in and out of favor, initially looked upon poorly in the reflected light of his successor Thucydides, who himself is occasionally at pains to distinguish himself from the earlier historians a mere collector of outlandish stories.

However, in recent times, scholars and writers have done much to rehabilitate Herodotus and manage to reveal a hitherto unnoticed underlying complexity in the work than previous scholars were able or willing to see. John Marincola in his work on Herodotus, particularly the essay in *The Greek Historians* (Oxford University Press 2001) engages with the text to reveal a subtler interpretation of speeches and events, contrasting Herodotus' subtle balance with the more agenda driven efforts of Plutarch. The Polish writer Ryszard Kapuściński, (translated from the Polish by Klara Glowczeska for Alfred A. Knopf New York 2007) in his beautifully evocative homage *Travels with Herodotus* has inspired new and wider audiences of the subtle complexities and resonances contained within the Russian doll-like structure of the text.

Recent developments in the theory and practice of historiography have also helped, seeing in him the seeds of social and cultural history, genres more germane to a modern readership. This essay will look at the same excerpts of the histories, namely the visions of Xerxes through the lenses of three British translators in an attempt to find out what each brings to the text or takes away from it in terms of meaning or significance and is concluded with a speculative foray into what a future translation of Herodotus might look like as well as the possibility or even desirability of a zero translation with minimal cultural interference.<sup>3</sup>

## 1. Early translations and critiques of Herodotus

The ancient world had its most illustrious critic in Plutarch (46-120 AD), known for his partisan and *hominem* critique of Herodotus, 'The Malice of Herodotus' also known as the 'De Malignitate Herodoti' as part of a collection of his moral essays. Plutarch describes Herodotus as a *philobarbaros* – a lover of barbarians (non-Greeks), for painting the Persians, the main adversaries of the Greeks in the great wars of 480 BCE in a uncharacteristically positive light. The origin of the damning criticism 'Father of Lies' is also attributable to Plutarch from the same essay.

Although the historians after Herodotus (480?-425? BC) were heavily indebted (some openly, others less so) to his pioneering work, there was a considerable amount of polemic aimed at the man himself and his historical method. Vitriol seems an inappropriate reward for a historian who had practically lit the fuse of the literary genre of history as we have come to recognize it today.

Ctesias of Cnidus (5<sup>th</sup> Century BC) in his work *Persica* claimed to base his work on local native records and constantly contradicted Herodotus, calling him a 'peddler of myths'. In the Hellenistic era, both Hecataeus of Abdera (4<sup>th</sup> Century BCE) and Manetho (3<sup>rd</sup> Century BCE) wrote histories as a counter to what they considered as false or misleading history concocted by their predecessor.

The critical pot shots (with the notable exceptions of the later Republic era figures of Dionysius of Halicarnassus 60BC-7CE, Cicero 106-43BCE and Quintilian 35-100CE) were to greater or lesser degrees constant throughout antiquity with Plutarch as one of the more prominent detractors and it wasn't until later in the Renaissance that the father of history started to receive some remedial attention culminating in his rehabilitation as a historian of value today. Evidently, he is still subject to and worthy of further dissection and investigation, but for modern thinkers thankfully, no longer subjected to moral castigation like that of Plutarch.

Plutarch's essay, addressed to Alexander (It is unclear whether he is referring to *the* Alexander, as in Alexander the Great, in a mock rhetorical exercise or Alexander of Cotyaeion (d.150 CE) the philologist roughly contemporary with Plutarch), is a *tour de force* of attacks upon Herodotus' style, his faults as a historian and some *ad hominem* remarks arising from Plutarch's fury at his history for displaying an anti-Corinthian, anti-Athenian and generally anti-Greek bias. Plutarch is not new to this kind of polemical essay as evidenced by his other works '*Adversus Colotem*' and '*De Stoicorum Rupugnantiiis*'. It has been suggested that the form of the essay mimics the genre of judicial rhetoric, and indeed legal terms do make their appearance (Greek: *diabole*, *kategoreo*, *martureo* etc.), but this approach is common as an example of forensic language when ancient historians and commentators want to deal with their theme and make a case either for or against. But rather than a mere exercise in rhetoric, there is an impression that the moral essayist means it in this instance - he would have been too emotionally involved and in the case of Corinth too partisan not to have been.

The 'De Malignitate Herodoti' is aware of Herodotus' work as a unified and linear narrative and in structure follows Herodotus' book in the same order. It starts with notes on Book I (The

Abduction of Io 865E-857A Hdt.1.1-5) through to the episode of the absence of the traitorous soldiers from some of the Hellenic allies at the battle of Plataea in Book IX (872F, Hdt.9.85). Strangely, there are no comments on Book IV.

He starts off, as many professional hatchet jobs often do, with apparent praise of his target. Herodotus' *Histories* are described as being, '*simple, free and easily suiting itself to its subject*' and the author as '*an acute writer, his style is pleasant, there is a certain, force, and elegance in his narrations*'. But this is only to build the target in order to intensify the sting of the negative criticisms: Herodotus '*pretends to simplicity*' or is '*really most malicious*' and we are told by Plutarch that '*his other lies and fictions would have need of many books*'.

Plutarch's attitude to historians has a strong moral dimension informed by Plato's ideas on education. His comment on the writing of history in his life of Cimon is noteworthy:

'Since it is difficult, or rather perhaps impossible to display a man's life as pure and blameless, we should fill out the truth to give a likeness where the good points lie, but regard the errors and follies with which emotion or political necessity sullies a career as deficiencies in some virtue rather than displays of viciousness, and therefore not make any special effort to draw attention to them in record. Our attitude should be one of modest shame on behalf of human nature, which never produces unmixed good or a character of undisputed excellence' (Translation: Russell)

All this moral outrage reaches a crescendo around the midpoint of the essay and we can easily envisage the consummate essayist and Greek arch-patriot starting to foam at the mouth when he comes to the infamous episode of the three hundred would-be castration victims of the tyrant of Corinth, Periander, the city which, Plutarch tells us, Herodotus has '*bespattered ... with a most filthy crime and most shameful calumny*'.

To give a brief synopsis of the event, the Corinthian tyrant Periander had sent three hundred boys, sons of the leading men of Corcyra, to King Alyattes to be castrated. The boys luckily ended up sailing first to the island Samos where the Samians gave them sanctuary and saved their skins. This intervention on the behalf of the youths infuriated the Corinthians who, in an act of revenge, decided to aid the Spartans in their later attack on the Samians. Plutarch takes any accusatory rumour involving a Greek city state as a personal slight. He was a well-known patriot who took treacherous double-dealings very seriously. Unfortunately for Herodotus, this is just this kind of sordid micro-tale that he loves to pepper his *Histories* with. These salacious stories are the dirty diesel fuel that throbs deep down in the boiler room of Herodotus's text, motoring the macro-level story along of how the East and West came to grips and how a bunch of disparate and paranoid Greek statelets put their differences aside and managed to pull off one of the greatest victories in world history, literally saving the 5th Century Greek world as a result.

The moral essayist ends with his famous caveat which has come to stand as his signal red flag to those in danger of being seduced by Herodotus' smooth style. '*But as in roses we must be aware of the venomous insects called cantharides; so, must we take heed of the calumnies and envy lying*

*hidden under smooth and well couched phrases and expressions, lest we imprudently entertain absurd and false opinions of the most excellent and greatest cities and men of Greece.'*

By way of antidote to this venomous attack on Herodotus let us recall a quote from the *Histories* itself, Book VII, Ch.152

*'I am bound to tell what I am told, but not in every case to believe it.'*

## 2. The Visions of Xerxes: The Translations from Book VII

Looking at the three different translations of Herodotus, a lot about the translators approaches to the original text is revealed.<sup>5</sup> The first two translators, George Campbell Macaulay (1852-1915) and Aubrey De Sélincourt (1894-1962), are products of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, respectively. The third contemporary translation by Tom Holland (1968-) is from the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It struck me that these men might have put something of their own eras into the vision of Herodotus they created through their work. The Greek texts used throughout this comparison are taken from Godley (1925) who bases his text on that created by Hude and Stein two manuscripts, one from each sigla, both being considered by the majority of scholars to be the most reliable and consistent while relatively free of incorrectly added Ionicisms.<sup>4</sup>

Macaulay was a Classical scholar and Fellow of Trinity College Cambridge in the 1880s and went on to be Assistant Master at Rugby School and after that an academic post at the University of Wales. In sum then, apart from a short sojourn on the continent, Macaulay passed an uneventful life in England as a scholar and schoolmaster. Although his translation was published in 1914, it is very much a product of Victorian scholarship and so can be treated as a late 19<sup>th</sup> Century translation.

De Sélincourt was also a noted Classicist, winning a Classics scholarship to University College, Oxford in 1913. But De Sélincourt, born in an era of political upheaval and conflict as well as incredible social and economic change, seems to have led a much more colourful and eventful life, serving in WW1 as a pilot and spending a period of the conflict as a POW. He retired in 1947 to focus on his writing and managed to publish a number of well received books on the Classics theme, most notably his *The World of Herodotus*. Here was a man who had experienced war firsthand and tasted much of the conflicts and turbulence of his times at remarkably close quarters.

Tom Holland is a well-known British author of several best-selling books about ancient and medieval history. After starting his writing career with works of fiction, Holland turned his

attention to writing history after reading a work on ancient history by the renowned historian Peter Green. He published a new translation of the *Histories of Herodotus* in 2013 which was very well received by critics at the time.<sup>5</sup>

I have taken three short extracts from Book VII, first the Greek then Macaulay's translation of the section followed by De Sélincourt and finally Holland follows by some comparative notes. I will look at one set per extract.

Here, we have the beginning of Book VII (Polymnia), 7.1.1, which tells of Darius' anger and increased desire to punish Greece for its crimes against his realm.

‘ἐπεὶ δὲ ἀγγελίη ἀπίκετο περὶ τῆς μάχης τῆς ἐν Μαραθῶνι γενομένης παρὰ βασιλέα Δαρεῖον τὸν Ὑστάσπεος, καὶ πρὶν μεγάλως κεχαραγμένον τοῖσι Ἀθηναίοισι διὰ τὴν ἐς Σάρδις ἐσβολήν, καὶ δὴ καὶ τότε πολλῶ τε δεινότερα ἐποίηε καὶ μᾶλλον ὄρητο στρατεῦεσθαι ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα.’ (Hdt.7.1.1)

Macaulay (1890):

‘Now when the report came to Dareios the son of Hystapes of the battle which was fought at Marathon, the king, who even before this had been greatly exasperated with the Athenians on account of the attack made upon Sardis, then far more than before displayed indignation, and was far more desirous of making a march against Hellas.’

De Sélincourt (1954):

‘When the news of the battle of Marathon reached Darius, son of Hystaspes and king of Persia, his anger against Athens, already great enough on account of the assault on Sardis, burst out still more violently, and he was more than ever determined to make war on Greece.’

Holland (2013):

‘When news of the battle at Marathon fought at Marathon reached King Darius, the son of Hystaspes, his exasperation with the Athenians – already considerable because of their attack on Sardis – was raised to a terrible pitch and left him even more determined to launch an expedition against Greece.’

It is immediately apparent here that the Macaulay version comes off as slightly too formal to the modern ear and that De Sélincourt has managed to tighten the prose up, losing nothing of the original but managing to give the section pace and impact.

In particular, compare ‘the battle which was fought at Marathon’, which is closer to the original Greek ‘tes maches en Marathoni genomenes’, with ‘the battle of Marathon’ of De Sélincourt. De Sélincourt's translation is already simpler, leaner, tighter and losing that late Victorian archness. De Sélincourt introduces the more politically loaded term ‘assault’ for mere ‘attack.’ The former word smacks of the trenches and one can almost sense a whiff of modernity entering the text. Note too how De Sélincourt has structured the phrases and put them together, with the assault on Sardis, the primary and original cause of the Persian's king's ire, right in the middle of the long sentence, chopped up and segued neatly into each other. The phrasing itself has

the lean verve of a disciplined military manoeuvre.

With Macaulay's initial opening of 'Now', as well as such ornate terminology as 'exasperated' and 'desirous', surely, we are in a pre-modern age where the theatre of world war has not yet imposed its urgency on words. It is as if the 1954 version is bringing us the immediacy of a war council – sounding remarkably familiar to us moderns. Whereas Macaulay's treatment makes the passage seem like a noble and flowery legend, where battles were fought at a gentler pace with a certain delicacy. De Sélincourt prose seems to cut through all the ornamentation and bring Herodotus into sharper focus and give it a modernist immediacy – surely an impossible feat to pull off before 1915.

On the other hand, the Macaulay still manages to retain a sense of what Herodotus must really have sounded like to his audience/readership. I have mentioned before the fact that Herodotus wrote in (and most probably spoke in) Ionic Greek which has a certain archaism to it – not as 'Elizabethan' as Lucian would have it, but at least the effect that say, a lecture on the Iraq Conflict in the style of Edward Gibbon might have on us today.

In the Holland translation, as if a further 'turn of the screw'<sup>6</sup> has occurred, the phrases are pulled into a greater extent, giving them a very contemporary edge, particularly with 'raised to a terrible pitch' and 'launch an expedition against Greece'. Holland, in doing so with the latter translation seems to have strayed furthest away from the original Greek. The verb (*στρατεῦσθα*), which he is rendering as 'launch an expedition', with its overtones of an air or seaborne attack, has been more closely and accurately rendered by Macaulay as 'march against Hellas'. The Liddell-Scott Greek Lexicon<sup>7</sup> entry for the verb is 'to advance with an army' and suggests a more land-based strategy. The Persians were not seafarers, unlike many of the Greeks, and the Macaulay translation of the verb is further borne out given the later account of the plan to cross the Hellespont and march into Greece from the north.

### 3. The Visions of Xerxes: Anger at Artabanus

To continue, here follows an excerpt from Book VII Polymnia (7.11.1) where Xerxes reacts in fury to the advice of his father's brother Artabanus, who has just prior to this passage advised in an eloquent speech against such an ill-starred enterprise as the invasion of Greece.

Ἀρτάβανος μὲν ταῦτα ἔλεξε, Ξέρξης δὲ θυμωθεὶς ἀμείβεται τοῖσιδε. 'Ἀρτάβανε, πατὴρ εἰς τοῦ ἐμοῦ ἀδελφεός: τοῦτό σε ῥύσεται μηδένα ἄξιον μισθὸν λαβεῖν ἐπέων ματαίων. καὶ τοι αὐτήν τὴν ἀτιμίην προστίθημι ἐόντι κακῷ καὶ ἀθύμῳ, μήτε συστρατεύεσθαι ἔμοιγε ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα αὐτοῦ τε μένειν ἅμα τῆσι γυναιξί: ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ ἄνευ σέο ὅσα περ εἶπα ἐπιτελέα ποιήσω.' (Hdt 7.11.1)

Macaulay (1890):

'Artabanos thus spoke; and Xerxes enraged by it made answer as follows: " Artabanos, thou art



my father's brother, and this shall save thee from receiving any recompense such as thy foolish words deserve. Yet, I attach to thee this dishonour, seeing that thou art a coward and spiritless, namely that thou do not march with me against Hellas, but remain here together with the women; and I, even without thy help, will accomplish all the things which I said.'

De Sélincourt (1954):

'Xerxes was exceedingly angry. 'Artabanus, 'he replied, 'you are my father's brother, and that alone saves you from paying the price your empty and ridiculous speech deserves. But your cowardice and lack of spirit shall not escape disgrace: I forbid you to accompany me on my march to Greece – you shall stay at home with the women, and everything I spoke of I shall accomplish without help from you.'

Tom Holland (2013):

'This speech by Artabanus threw Xerxes into a rage. 'Artabanus,' he retorted, 'the only thing that spares you a punishment appropriate to the idiocy of your comments is the fact that you are my uncle. Spineless coward that you are, I hereby sentence you to the humiliation of staying behind with the women, and not accompanying me on the expedition to Greece. I can perfectly well bring my deeds to match my words even without your assistance'

De Sélincourt, as I noted in the previous section is characteristically lean and taut, and here even lops off the framing device of 'Artabanos men tauta elexe' getting straight to the essence of the text, leaving nothing important out but skillfully trimming the excess ornamentation Macaulay clearly comes from an age when frills were not only left in; they were enjoyed for their own sake as part of the poetry and grandeur that was no doubt felt to pervade the texts of the revered ancients.

Holland's translation, while beating a more modern drum has lost the symmetry of antithesis evident in the Greek syntax of 'μήτε συστρατεύεσθαι **ἔμοιγε** ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα **αὐτοῦ τε** μένειν ἅμα τῆσι γυναιξί: **ἐγὼ δὲ** καὶ **ἄνευ σέο** ὅσα περ εἶπα ἐπιτελέα ποιήσω.' and skillfully rendered by both earlier translators, especially where the Greek (indicated in **bold**) positionally contrasts the 'I' (of Xerxes) and the 'you' of Artabanus. The Holland version is also uncharacteristically loose and word heavy resulting in a vague and indistinct rendering of the taut and economical original as a result.

#### 4. The Visions of Xerxes. The Dream

We move to the scene from Book VII (Polymnia) during the night following that day's council of war in which Xerxes has rebuked the advice of Artabanus and boldly announced his intention to invade Hellas. Xerxes has a troubled night as he mulls over the day's debates on the expedition against the Greeks. During his fitful bouts of sleeping and waking he is visited by a supernatural

being who warns him to change his course of action.

ταῦτα μὲν ἐπὶ τοσοῦτο ἐλέγετο. μετὰ δὲ εὐφρόνη τε ἐγένετο καὶ Ξέρξην ἔκνιζε ἡ Ἀρταβάνου γνώμη· νυκτι δὲ βουλὴν διδοὺς πάγχυ εὕρισκέ οἱ οὐ πρῆγμα εἶναι στρατεύεσθαι ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα. δεδομένων δέ οἱ αὐτὶς τούτων κατύπνωσε, καὶ δὴ κου ἐν τῇ νυκτι εἶδε ὄψιν τοιήνδε, ὡς λέγεται ὑπὸ Περσέων: ἐδόκεε ὁ Ξέρξης ἄνδρα οἱ ἐπιστάντα μέγαν τε καὶ εὐειδέα εἰπεῖν

‘μετὰ δὴ βουλευέαι, ὦ Πέρσα, στρατεύμα μὴ ἄγειν ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα, προείπας ἀλίζειν Πέρσας στρατόν; οὔτε ὧν μεταβουλευόμενος ποιέεις εὔ οὔτε ὁ συγγνωσόμενός τοι πάρα: ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ τῆς ἡμέρης ἐβουλευέσαι ποιέειν, ταύτην ἴθι τῶν ὁδῶν.’ (Hdt.7.12.1-2)

Macaulay (1890):

‘Thus far was it spoken then; but afterwards when darkness came on, the opinion of Artabanos tormented Xerxes continually; and making night his counselor he found that it was by no means to his advantage to make the march against Hellas. So when he had thus made a new resolve, he fell asleep, and in the night he saw, as is reported by the Persians, a vision as follows:-Xerxes thought that a man tall and comely of shape came and stood by him and said: ‘Art thou indeed changing thy counsel, O Persian, of leading an expedition against Hellas, now that thou hast made proclamation that the Persians shall collect an army? Thou dost not well in changing thy counsel, nor will he who is here present with thee excuse thee for it; but as thou didst take counsel in the day to do, by that way go.’

De Sélincourt (1954):

‘So ended the speeches at the conference. Later on, that evening Xerxes began to be worried by what Artabanus had said, and during the night, as he turned it over in his mind, he came to the conclusion that the invasion of Greece would not, after all, be a good thing. Having reached this decision he fell asleep; and the Persians say that before the night was over he dreamed that the figure of a man, tall and of noble aspect, stood by his bed. ‘Lord of Persia’, the phantom said, ‘have you changed your mind and decided not to lead an army against Greece, in spite of your proclamation to your subjects that troops should be raised? You are wrong to change; and there is one here who will not forgive you for doing so. Continue to tread the path which you chose yesterday.’

Holland (2013):

Later, however, once the speeches were done, and darkness was closing in, Xerxes found himself unsettled by the views of Artabanus. That night, as he turned the issue over, he came to the conclusion that it was not, after all, in his best interests to invade Greece. Then, in the wake of this about-face, he fell asleep; and that same night, so the Persians report, he had a vision. It seemed to

Xerxes that a tall, well-built man was standing over him and saying, 'Why the change of mind, Persian? Did you not just tell the Persians to muster an army, which you were going to lead against Greece? This reversal of policy will benefit you not at all – nor will the one here before you now forgive you for it. Stick to the course of action that you settled upon yesterday.'

Again, De Sélincourt's translation seems to flow very well but in the same passage Macaulay, in staying close to the Greek has managed to leave in more of the detail that matters. In the first comparison, we have the verb *eknizde* rendered as merely *worried* in De Sélincourt, where it is more accurately translated in context as *tortured*. It can also be taken in some contexts to mean troubled - its literal meaning is to purge or wash out so the aorist here would imply going through the mill as opposed to being a bit concerned and therefore Macaulay has rendered it more accurately. This is where Macaulay has the occasional edge and that while De Sélincourt is better paced, the accuracy is sacrificed, and this example is a meaningful case in point.

The text of Macaulay is in other places a touch too Biblical to the modern ear with its 'thees' and 'dosts' but does manage to give a more vivid impression of the troubled night Xerxes has and the appearance of the mysterious figure (His ancestor's or father's spirit? A God? His conscience? Or the embodiment of Fate herself?). De Sélincourt manages to conjure up the setting of being in bed in his version even though there is no mention of this in the original. Macaulay's translation is again more accurate and straightforward rather than a gloss for the sake of 'continuity'.

Holland's translation follows on from De Sélincourt but raises the bar in tightening the prose but almost casualizing it in the process; the speeches are 'done' rather than paused where Macaulay has preserved the sense of the original Greek phrase 'ἐπὶ τοσοῦτο ἐλέγετο', translated as 'they spoke thus far', implying that night interrupted the proceedings rather than the speeches themselves being completely finished. The parataxis of 'τε ...καὶ' (in bold in the Greek) 'εὐφρόνη **τε** ἐγίνετο **καὶ**' further emphasizes the sudden cut-scene style of interruption often used in rhetorical speech of the period.<sup>8</sup> Holland's translation is closer to the latter section of the text with his interpretation of 'ἄνδρα οἱ ἐπιστάντα μέγαν τε καὶ **εὐειδέα**' as a 'tall and well-built man'. The adjective (in bold) *eueidea* is an epic ionic adjective, conveying the image of a Homeric hero towering above Xerxes in the vision.

The last sentence also demonstrates a certain poetic license that De Sélincourt displays with the original Greek and even though it is less clunky perhaps than our Victorian scholar, there is a certain loss of accuracy.

## 5. The Visions of Xerxes. The Final Vision

In the final vision, Xerxes, intent on preparing the expedition against the Greeks, imagines himself to be wearing an olive crown spreading its shoots over the whole of the earth and interpreted by the Magians, his attendant wisemen, as a sign that he will rule over all men as his

slaves. Herodotus telegraphs Xerxes true eventual fate with the image of the olive crown suddenly disappearing from his head, something which the Magians fail to interpret or judiciously overlook. Let us look at the text and then see how the various translation deal with this section.

ὀρμημένῳ δὲ Ξέρξῃ στρατηλατέειν μετὰ ταῦτα τρίτη ὄψις ἐν τῷ ὕπνῳ ἐγένετο, τὴν οἱ Μάγοι ἔκριναν ἀκούσαντες φέρειν τε ἐπὶ πᾶσαν γῆν δουλεύσειν τέ οἱ πάντας ἀνθρώπους. ἡ δὲ ὄψις ἦν ἡδε: ἐδόκεε ὁ Ξέρξης ἐστεφανῶσθαι ἐλαίης θαλλῷ, ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς ἐλαίης τοὺς κλάδους γῆν πᾶσαν ἐπισχεῖν, μετὰ δὲ ἀφανισθῆναι περὶ τῆ κεφαλῆ κείμενον τὸν στέφανον. [2] κρινάντων δὲ ταῦτα τῶν Μάγων, Περσέων τε τῶν συλληχθέντων αὐτίκα πᾶς ἀνὴρ ἐς τὴν ἀρχὴν ἑωυτοῦ ἀπελάσας εἶχε προθυμίην πᾶσαν ἐπὶ τοῖσι εἰρημένοισι, θέλων αὐτὸς ἕκαστος τὰ προκείμενα δῶρα λαβεῖν, καὶ Ξέρξης τοῦ στρατοῦ οὕτω ἐπάγερσιν ποιέεται, χῶρον πάντα ἐρευνῶν τῆς ἡπείρου. (Hdt.7.19.)

Macaulay

‘Xerxes being thus desirous to make the expedition, there came to him after this a third vision in his sleep, which the Magians, when they heard it, explained to have reference to the dominion of the whole Earth and to mean that all men should be subject to him; and the vision was this:—Xerxes thought that he had been crowned with a wreath of an olive-branch and that the shoots growing from the olive-tree covered the whole Earth; and after that, the wreath, placed as it was about his head, disappeared. When the Magians had thus interpreted the vision, forthwith every man of the Persians who had been assembled together departed to his own province and was zealous by all means to perform the commands, desiring each one to receive for himself the gifts which had been proposed: and thus Xerxes was gathering his army together, searching every region of the continent.’

Aubrey de Séincourt

‘After Xerxes had made his decision to fight, he had a third dream. The Magi were consulted about its significance and expressed the opinion that it portended the conquest of the world and its total subjection to Persia. In the dream, Xerxes had imagined himself crowned with olive, of which the branches spread all over the earth; then the crown had suddenly vanished from his head. After the Magi’s favorable interpretation, all the Persian nobles who had attended the conference hurried home to their respective provinces ; and as every one of the hoped to win the reward which Xerxes had offered, no pains were spared in the subsequent preparations, and Xerxes, in the process of assembling his armies, had every corner of the continent ransacked.’

Tom Holland

‘So Xerxes was set on war; and in due course there came to him in his sleep a third vision, which the Magi, when they heard it, interpreted to mean that the entire earth, and all the people within it, would be his slaves. This was Xerxes’ vision’ his head was crowned by a wreath made from the bough of an olive tree, the shoots of which enveloped the whole earth, but then vanished. Immediately, once the Magi had given their interpretation of the dream, every last man among the Persians who had assembled for the meeting set off for his own province and devoted himself with

total enthusiasm to fulfilling the orders of the King, whose promise of a reward everyone was keen to win for himself. So it was, by ransacking every corner of the continent, that Xerxes mustered his army.'

Of all the translations, the Macaulay comes across as the most faithful grammatically but paradoxically the least accurate or as we might say faithful to the spirit of Herodotus text. This is particularly evident in the section detailing the olive wreath and its spreading branches or shoots. The addition of the term tree rather than bough or branch tends to confuse rather than elucidate the imagery. More importantly is the misunderstanding that Macaulay exhibits with the term 'meta de', deciding to weaken the sudden impact of its disappearance. He commits this error by rendering it as 'after that,' which although literally correct as an absolute adverbial interpretation, crucially misses the Delphic nuance of the portent of Xerxes' actual future downfall, his victory snatched away suddenly as a result of the devastating defeats at Salamis and elsewhere at the hands of the Greeks.

De Sélincourt's version gets the nuance of the adverbial construction meta de right and overcomes the tricky section involving trees, branches, and shoots by glossing it over with the catch all single term of olive. Reading him, one gets the sense that he has cut through the confusion to create a neat and tidy rendering, a little lean but still faithful to the sense of the original. He also renders the term 'opsis' as dream where it is clearly intended to mean vision, something which Macaulay and Holland get right. In the context of portents and divine messengers, surely the experiences of Xerxes and Artabanus are of an order quite different from mere dreaming. They are divine visitations from another plane and as such vision is a much better rendition of 'opsis.'

Holland's version is an intriguing mixture since in places he is channeling Macaulay with his slightly ornate phrasing of 'and in due course there came to him in his sleep a third vision,' distinctly echoing the Victorian translator. On the other hand, his brisk modern styling, is a refreshing update on both earlier versions. A good example of this is his neat structuring of the last sentence of his translation, where he places the last section of the Greek sentence between the split elements of the first, i.e., 'kai', and the genitive form of army 'tou stratou' followed by 'outo'. The result is very modern yet elegant rendering which simultaneously manages to preserve something of the Ionic grandeur of Herodotus' style.

Translation has this constant tightrope trick to pull off, stage management versus dry accuracy, content and form, pace and flow and which elements of the architecture that need to be sacrificed to achieve that pace. Hopefully, because of these textual comparisons, a little insight has resulted into how Herodotus is approached in translation by different scholars and the decisions that they have made to render the best possible vision of the Greek historian for the audience of their own time.

## Conclusion

We have become a bit less precious as each decade ‘ups the ante’ and adapts Herodotus for the modern reader, but are we not in danger of losing something when we trim and sharpen up the resolution for a modern palate, rewriting, even erasing the past record in the process? Could there be an argument for leaving some of the Victorian/Edwardian stylings in? Where might the endpoint of translations be? – if there can be such a place- is there a point where like an elastic band the ancient text can be stretched until it risks breaking any link of resemblance to the original? Of course, to a certain extent a translation can be regarded as a separate work but there should remain some link, however tenuous, to the original. I do not think that by any means with the translators presented here that we are anywhere near that point, but with, say, the War Music of Christopher Logue, one could start to make the argument that it is no longer a version of an ancient text. For the non-Greek or Latin reader does it or should it really matter anyway? This is particularly true with the translation of the so-called ‘dead’ languages, dead in that they are no longer a moveable feast and are in many ways static points in cultural history. With modern translations, the translator is still able to interrogate the source text via access to living agencies of its still breathing culture. With the Greek and Latin classics, we are sailing in more mysterious waters and should be more careful since we are to a certain extent conversing with ghosts or at least entities, voices, which are no longer able to speak for themselves. How much of the past can truly be made to speak through the filter of the ever-changing voice of modernity? That is the perennial Sisyphean task of the translator of ancient languages.

To be sure, each successive epoch possesses its especially peculiar textual/literary foibles of which its embedded inhabitants can never be fully cognizant. That this is both a curse and a blessing can be in no doubt. The Macaulay text, paradoxically (due to its usual faithfulness and accuracy) often partially redacts or bowdlerizes passages that offended the moral sensitivities of his day (something we are not entirely free of today).<sup>9</sup> The notorious fart of the Egyptian rebel Amasis in Book II (162.3) (as a reply to the summons of Apries his erstwhile master), perfunctorily dealt with in De Sélincourt, is glossed over by our Victorian scholar as an unmentionable act, ‘When this Patarbemis came and summoned Amasis, the latter, who happened to be sitting on horseback, lifted up his leg and behaved in an unseemly manner.’

De Sélincourt, for the record, renders this as ‘Amasis however, in answer to Patarbemis’ summons, stood up in his stirrups (for he was on horseback at the time), broke wind and told him to take *that* back to his master.’

Finally, A.D. Godley in the 1922 Harvard Loeb Series translation has this as ‘When Patarbemis came up and summoned Amasis, Amasis (who was on horseback) rose up and farted, telling the messenger to take that back to Apries’. Holland goes one further and brings us squarely up to date (at least for British English readers) with, ‘Amasis, though, who was sitting on his horse at the time, rose from his saddle, let rip a fart and told his visitor to take that back to

Apries.’

On a final note, one can certainly observe many admirable aspects in all three translations and as such remain useful to both casual readers and scholars alike. Macaulay is marginally more useful when working with the original Greek. His prose is much more faithful to the original word order, grammatical constructions (he often seeks out and provides exact equivalents) and the style despite (or possibly because of) its slight arch quality plays with a certain and not altogether unpleasant cadence upon the ear. Macaulay reads very well aloud, as was the original intention of many if not most ancient works, for the same aesthetic reasons that the King James English version of the Bible is preferred for public reading with its majestic cadences and evocative imagery<sup>10</sup>. This fact should be remembered when reading the various translations of Herodotus, who may well have delivered parts of his work to a public audience in Athens. At such moments, one should always ask of the text; Has the sense of oratory been preserved or balanced with the other elements of translation? Holland’s remarkably agile translation is extremely well-paced with a contemporary feel and yet still manages convey much of the excitement and wonder of the original and could engage a younger audience of would-be future historians or classical scholars.

It may also matter depending on how the reader initially experienced Herodotus – As a student one could have read parts of the Greek first, then the De Sélincourt translation (When reading at speed for Ancient History essays) and then much later the Macaulay when looking at the texts comparatively. De Sélincourt could be more appropriate to a modern readership, even above that of Holland, which can at times be a little *too* casual and steers away from the original. Despite the excellent work of the two near contemporaries, the admiration for Macaulay’s articulate if ornate rendering is not entirely unfounded.

Thanks to current technological advances, all of the above texts can now be perused and compared at the touch of a screen – if this is any presentiment of the future then later translations will perhaps be able to simultaneously layer all extant printings, translations and commentaries of Herodotus including the Greek text and critical apparatus with access as deep as the Laurentinian and Roman sigla branches once they are fully digitized. What is certain is that the debate regarding the validity and usefulness of every attempt, ancient and modern, to translate Herodotus will continue for all time.

## Notes

1. See Herodotus famous proem at the beginning of the Histories:

‘Herodotus, from Halicarnassus, here displays his enquiries, that human achievement may be spared the ravages of time, and that everything great and astounding, and all the glory of those exploits which served to display Greeks and barbarians alike to such effect, be kept alive – and additionally, and most importantly, to give the reason they went to war.’ Trans. Holland (2013) with

kind permission from the author.

2. For a fuller discussion of the two branches of Herodotean sigla and issues related to them and the MSS tradition in general see Herbert Weir Smyths 'Sounds and Inflections of the Greek Dialects: Ionic' at the Clarendon Press 1894 and more recently McNeal R.A., 'On Editing Herodotus. In L'antiquité Classique, Tome 52, 1983. Pp.110-129.

3. For more detail on this term with regards to textual analysis of translations, see König, F. 'Translation and Cultural Interference' 1985. In *Annuario de Estudios Filologicos* 8, pp 157-165.

4. See the General Introduction p xvii to Godley's translation of Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, Loeb Classical Library Vol.117.

5. The Classical scholar Edith Hall noted in her 2013 *Times Literary Supplement* review of Holland translation of the *Histories* that it was 'unquestionably the best English translation of Herodotus to have appeared in the past half century, and there have been quite a few...I am in awe of Tom Holland's achievement.' In 'Herodotus the Homer of European Prose' *TLS*, 13th Nov.2013.

6. from Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* (*Collier's Weekly* 1898), "I quite agree—in regard to Griffin's ghost, or whatever it was—that it's appearing first to the little boy, at so tender an age, adds a particular touch. But it's not the first occurrence of its charming kind that I know to have involved a child. If the child gives the effect another turn of the screw, what do you say to two children—?"

7. See *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Henry George Liddell D.D. and Robert Scott D.D. 9th Edition, Oxford at the Clarendon Press (1940)

8. See Macan, Reginald Walter, 'Herodotus, the seventh, eighth, & ninth books p. 22 (notes), London, Macmillan and co., limited 1908.

9. See <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/jan/05/huckleberry-finn-edition-censors-n-word>

10. See <https://www.history.com/news/king-james-bible-most-popular>

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