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Emily Baragwanath, *Motivation and Narrative in Herodotus*.
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. xii + 374.

THIS BOOK, a revised version of the author's 2005 Oxford dissertation, examines the construction of motivation in Herodotus' *Histories*. Despite the importance of motivation in Greek historiography, scholarly attention has mainly focused on Thucydides,¹ leaving the rich and complex illustration of motives in Herodotus to a considerable extent unscrutinized. Emily Baragwanath's (hereafter B. or the author) study fills this gap. Based on a close reading of Herodotus' work, it offers an analysis of the motives that underlie individual and/or collective action in Herodotus' *Histories* and, more importantly, illuminates Herodotus' method and historiographical patterns.

The book is divided into nine chapters and contains two indexes (a general index and an index of citations). The first two chapters introduce the reader into B.'s methodological premises and broader background. In the first chapter, "The *Histories*, Plutarch and the reader response" (pp. 1-34), B. explains her use of Wolfgang Iser's theory of reader response which favors many potential readings of a text against one exclusive reading. This theory can fruitfully be applied in Herodotus' *Histories*, since they elicit a variety of responses. Plutarch is used as an example of a reader's response and his judgments are evaluated or reevaluated throughout B.'s book. The author then takes Herodotus' judgment of the Alcmeonids as a case-study for her argument: although Herodotus states that Alcmeonid involvement with the tyrants is a *thoma* (marvel) for him (6.121.1), his previous narrative provides

¹ The standard work on motivation in Thucydides is Schneider 1974. Cf. also, Thompson 1969; Westlake 1989; Lang 1995. These studies mainly examine if Thucydides' ascription of motives derives from conjecture or from specific information. From this perspective, a study similar to Baragwanath's, that would examine the importance of motives in combination with Thucydides' narrative techniques, is a desideratum.

evidence of the fact that this involvement may not be so surprising. In this way, B. argues, Herodotus guides his readers towards a more critical evaluation of his work and renders them more attentive to the complexities inherent in writing history. The second chapter, “The Homeric background” (pp. 35-54), considers why Homer is the most important predecessor of Herodotus. The reasons seem to lie in the responses that Homer’s text elicits from its readers and in his emphasis on the psychological background of his heroes. In this chapter, which could have profited from German scholarship on the topic,² the author assumes that Homer is a model for Herodotus, the latter borrowing his techniques from the former (p. 49: “Herodotus follows the model of the human narrators of Homer’s poems”; 51: “in imitation rather of Homer’s human narrators”; 53: “Herodotus appropriates and develops Homeric techniques”), a view that seems, however, somewhat reductionist, given the emphasis that tragedy also attributes on the psychological background of its heroes.

The third chapter, “Constructions of motives and the historian’s persona” (pp. 55-81), tests Plutarch’s accusation of Herodotus that he slides from the category of the “historian”, whose task is to tell the truth, to that of the “sophist”, whose aim is to persuade (Plut. *De Malign.* 855e). B. examines Herodotus’ presentation of motives in the light of this double persona. She argues that Herodotus’ interest in psychology parallels the interest of his heroes in exploring underlying factors and motives and observes that there is “a tension in the historian’s purposes between his desire to confer *kleos* upon *erga apodechthenta* [...] and [...] his intense interest in exploring the underlying human factors at work” (p. 64). The Thermopylae narrative is taken as a case-study to strengthen this line of argumentation. Through careful examination of Herodotean passages, B. shows that Herodotus on the one hand underlines the heroic aspect of Leonidas’ character, but on the other he highlights his weaknesses, for example, when the Spartan king treats the Thebans “as hostages”, forcing them to remain at his side (7.222). B. concludes that “the dualism surrounding Leonidas’ character mirrors the twofold nature of the broader rival explanations the *Histories* offer for why Thermopylae happened as it did: whether it is more to be explained in terms of Leonidas’ personal heroism...or whether it was the upshot rather of the Greeks’ divided council and impulse to leave” (p. 72). As parallels for this dualism of interpretation, B. considers the poem’s dual paradigms of how things happened, as well as the idealizing versus pragmatic alternatives in the Gyges’ narrative.

2 E.g. from the fundamental study of B. Snell concerning Homeric psychology (Snell 1975: 13-29, “Die Auffassung des Menschen bei Homer”). Cf. also Kullmann 2001.

The fourth chapter, “Problematized motivation in the Samian and Persian *logoi* (Book III)” (pp. 82-121) analyzes a major difference between Herodotus and Thucydides in the construction of motives. Whereas Thucydides seems to infer motives from ensuing action, Herodotus’ narrative, B. argues, aims on the contrary at showing the disjunction between the two and at highlighting the difficulty of working from generalizations to predictions. This argument is further developed by close examination of Herodotus’ Samian and Persian *logoi* of the third book of his *Histories*. The episodes of the Samian history examined are the Spartan campaign against Samos (3.39-60), Oroites’ murder of Polycrates (3.120-126) and the Persian campaign against Samos (3.139-149). B. shows how Herodotus, in these episodes, guides readers to shifting perspectives concerning motivation, thus alerting them to the difficulty of reconstructing mental process. The same applies also in the Persian episodes examined: Cambyses’ Egyptian campaign (3.1-15), the Ethiopian campaign (3.17-25), and Cambyses’ madness versus Persian kingly custom (3.15-16, 27-30, 65-66). Motives are here again complex, ranging from military efforts at conquest or a concern about abiding by the Persian custom, to personal impulse or even illogical reasoning.

The fifth chapter, “For better, for worse...: motivation in the Athenian *logoi* (Books I, V, and VI)” (pp. 122-159) examines Herodotus’ ascriptions of motives in terms of better or worse alternatives. B. distinguishes the following categories: alternatives in form only, such as for example in the proem, where “the Persian and Phoenician accounts *agree* in assuming that this is to be explained in rational and human (not divine) terms” (p. 125); genuine alternatives, such as the three possible motives ascribed to Cyrus for placing Croesus on the pyre; morally weighted alternatives, which highlight the polarity between other-benefiting versus exclusively self-benefiting motives. B. then explores Herodotus’ tendency to “go for the worst interpretation”, thus privileging self-seeking versus idealistic motives. The argument is further developed by the examination of two case-studies: the digression about Athenians and Pelasgians (6.137-139) and the story of the Athenians and tyranny (books I and V). In both these narratives, B. shows very convincingly, the readers’ assumptions are constantly challenged and reevaluated: in the first case, Herodotus cites two versions, that of Hecateus and that of the Athenians, both of which find confirmation in the narrative; while at the same time, by citing these accounts in indirect speech, he underlines their subjective nature. In the second narrative, concerning the Athenians and tyranny, B. again shows that Herodotus’ narrative is complex, since, on the one hand, it acknowledges some merits in Peisistratus’ tyranny and, on the other hand, it does not show Athenians as absolutely committed to the idea of freedom.

The next two chapters focus on the idea of freedom as a motive of action during the Persian Wars. In the sixth chapter, “For freedom’s sake...motivation and narrative in the Ionian revolt (Books V-VI)” (p. 160-202), B. shows that the motives of the Ionian Revolt are far from idealistic, but rather derive from a desire for personal power. The idea of Greek unity is also put into question by Herodotus’ narrative, since it presents the conflicts of whole Greek communities. Finally, Herodotus’ narrative assumes that states and individuals are more driven by their desire for power than by their desire for freedom. This is further proven by the examination of the motives of various agents: of the tyrants during the Ionian Revolt, of the Ionian themselves, of the Samians during the Ionian Revolt, and of the Athenians as a *polis tyrannos*. The seventh chapter, “To medize or not to medize...: compulsion and negative motives (Books VII-XI)” (pp. 203-239), “considers how Herodotus’ depiction of a range of Greek responses to the Persian threat draws attention to certain aspects of the Athenians’ decision” (pp. 203-204). B. examines the motives of those who chose to medize (such as the Thessalians and the Thebans), or to remain neutral (such as the Argives and the Corcyreans), as well as the motives of those who refused to support the Greek cause, such as Gelon, or supported it with some hesitation, such as the Spartans. In these cases, B. argues, Herodotus’ ascription of motives lays emphasis on necessity and compulsion; the historian thus helps readers to understand and perhaps even justify the behavior of these states, while at the same time he stresses the importance of the Athenians’ decision to defend the Greek cause.

The final two chapters examine the construction of motivation of two prominent individuals of Herodotus’ narrative, Xerxes and Themistocles. In the eighth chapter, “Xerxes: motivation and explanation (Books VII-XI)” (pp. 240-288), B. argues that Herodotus’ presentation of Xerxes’ motives is more complex than is often assumed, since Xerxes seems to be driven not exclusively by *hybris*, but also by Persian custom (such as in the case of his decision to invade Greece) or even by piety (such as in his sacrifice in the Acropolis). B. argues that the focus on *hybris* is a Greek interpretation and perspective, while there is at the same time a rival interpretation, on the basis of the Persian *megalophrosyne*, which means not only “pride”, but also “greatness”: this *megalophrosyne* is manifest in Xerxes’ actions, such as his building of the Athos Canal (7.24) and his decision not to punish the Athenian heralds (7.136). Here, the author’s argument may seem less convincing: her interpretation of *megalophrosyne* is questionable³ and, concerning Xerxes’ motives,

3 B. argues (p. 255) that the Herodotean *megalophrosyne* is similar to the Aristotelian *megalopsychia* (*Eth. Nic.* 1123a34–1125a35). The similarities are, however, superficial and seem to disregard a fundamental divergence: the Aristotelian virtue of *megalopsychia* is always

although there may indeed be rival interpretations, the cruelty manifested by Xerxes in certain important episodes of the *Histories* is so blatant (such as the Pythios episode or Xerxes' whipping of the Hellespont), that they rather tend to reveal Herodotus' privileging of the *hybris* interpretation.

In the final chapter, "Themistocles: constructions of motivation (Books VII-XI)" (pp. 289-322), B. argues for a two-sided construction of Themistocles' motives: he is at the same time the contriver of Greek unity, but also a cunning figure, who uses many persuasive strategies to convince his fellow Greeks of his plans. B. further argues that Herodotus' characterization of Themistocles as *sophos te kai euboulos* reflects the democratic texture of his time. The book ends with an expression of skepticism towards exclusive readings of Herodotus: "such approaches disregard the ways in which the *Histories* promotes an approach to the past that acknowledges the difficulty, even impossibility, of alighting upon such absolute truth" (p. 322).

Overall, B.'s book is very illuminating, well written⁴ and structured (despite perhaps too many cross-references), with many useful insights and nuanced interpretations of Herodotean passages. One may regret that B. does not provide a general framework of Herodotus' terminology concerning motivation. It is obvious from her treatment that she deals with every kind of motivation (be it a feeling, or a thought), but a categorization of these motives could have further illuminated Herodotus' techniques and methods.⁵ The author's arguments are in general convincing and do justice to Herodotus' complex thought. B.'s use of Iser's theory of reader response proves fruitful and alerts readers to the existence of many possible interpretations. One may wonder, however, whether the insistence on open readings runs the risk of being somewhat anachronistic, thus assimilating Herodotus with modern novelists and/or poets, whose texts are subject to multiple interpretations regardless of the authors' initial intentions. While this might be partly true for Herodotus too, it would not suffice to establish that indeterminacy was always his primary intention. In this perspective, readers of Herodotus should be alert to the distinction between "open" and "less open" readings, which are also obvious in Herodotus' work, a distinction which could per-

positive and should characterize only the virtuous man (*Eth. Nic.* 1123b29), while the Herodotean *megalophrosyne* can be compatible with (or even a part of) hybriistic behavior, such as that displayed by Xerxes.

4 I found only one error, in the spelling of a name (p. 75, n. 55: "Kavanou", instead of the correct "Kanavou").

5 The same neglect of terminology appears on other instances, too: for example, B. entitles one of her chapters "Motives of the *polis tyrannos* (5.65-78; 8.3)", pp. 192-202. Nowhere does she mention, however, that the term *polis tyrannos* does not figure in Herodotus, but is a specific Thucydidean usage.

haps prove a more trustworthy guide towards the discovery of Herodotus' intentions and methods. But these reservations are expressed for the sake of discussion and should not distract attention from the fact that B.'s book is a solid and stimulating contribution to Herodotean scholarship.



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