

Török, L. 2014. *Herodotus in Nubia. Mnemosyne Supplements, History and Archaeology of Classical Antiquity* 368. Leiden and Boston: Brill. Pp. xiv +163. ISBN 978-9-004-26913-2. US\$136.00.

László Török's *Herodotus in Nubia* represents a notable and highly welcome addition to the steadily-burgeoning field of Herodotean studies. Classicists and historians working on Herodotus will have ample cause to thank Török for providing such a thorough introduction to a topic largely beyond their ken, namely the history and archaeology of ancient Kush. The latter forms the backdrop for the two ancient Ethiopias which Török identifies within the *Histories* in Books 2 and 3 respectively: the first a historical kingdom situated in the Middle Nile Region which encompassed Egypt under Nubia's Twenty-Fifth Dynasty and the second the semi-mythical utopia already familiar to Homeric audiences and thus firmly entrenched in the Greeks' ethnographic imagination by the time Herodotus embarked on his enquiries. As a leading light in Nubian studies Török is ideally placed to comment on the largely overlooked sections of Herodotus' *Histories* relating to ancient Ethiopia – Török follows Herodotus by referring to the latter throughout as 'Aithiopia'. Whilst staunchly traditional in terms of its overarching preoccupation with source-criticism (*Quellenforschung*), Török's book also displays a sensitivity towards the narrative artistry, interests, and agendas of both the historian and his informants that is very much in line with recent work stressing the plurality of a text into which the 'stories of others' were intricately woven, offering tantalising glimpses not only of 'other histories' submerged within the *Histories* but also the cultural contexts from which they emerged.

In the first of five chapters (of which by far the largest is Chapter 4, 'Fiction and Reality', pp. 54-117) Török begins by highlighting the extent to which classical scholarship's understanding of ancient Nubia has remained tied to clunky and outdated narratives of colonisation and/or Egyptianisation, despite the significant advances which have occurred in Nubian studies as a result of the UNESCO-funded initiative to record heritage sites threatened by the construction of the Aswan High Dam. Török's critique of the way in which relations between Nubia and Egypt have traditionally been conceived by Egyptologists paves the way for a historical overview of the Kingdom of Kush from the eighth to the fifth centuries BC. In Chapter Two ('The Aithiopian Passages in English Translation', pp. 28-39), the reader is presented with English translations of the passages from Herodotus relating to ancient Ethiopia. These are based primarily upon those supplied by Tormod Eide in *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum*, with supplementary material from John Marincola's reworking of the de Sélincourt text and another translation by Stanley Burstein. Chapter Three addresses 'The Problem of the "Aithiopian Logos"' (pp. 40-53), namely whether the passages identified in Chapter Two, 'The Aithiopian Passages in English Translation' (pp. 28-39), should be considered evidence for the existence of a free-standing prose description of Kush and its inhabitants. Török argues (persuasively) against such a conclusion on the grounds that not only did Herodotus lack the material necessary to write such an account but that when brief and fragmentary notices relating to ancient Ethiopia do occur they play only an ancillary role within the narrative. The paradigmatic quality of the famous encounter between spies dispatched by the mad Persian king Cambyses and the king of the long-lived Ethiopians is attributed more to culturally-embedded notions derived from Homer (although arguably the Hippocratic corpus also) than to any ancient reality. Chapter Four, 'Fiction and Reality' (pp. 54-117), begins with a discussion of how Herodotus' *akoē* or 'hearsay' statements should best be interpreted before critiquing the prevailing tendency to underestimate the quality and extent of Egyptian knowledge about the past. Instead, Török rightly points out that this knowledge about the past and history in general would have been formulated in terms specific to its (Egyptian) cultural context as opposed to those that we might deem historical (p. 58). In what is undoubtedly the core of the book, Török then embarks on a systematic attempt to identify 'realistic' material in Herodotus by examining his account of both the ethnographic information appended to the account of the meeting between the Fish-Eaters and the king of the Ethiopians, and discourses and ideologies which might be attributed to the historical population inhabiting the lands south of Egypt. After discussing both

the likely identity of Herodotus' informants and the manner in which his source attributions should best be interpreted, Török defends Herodotus from the charge of wilful duplicity alleged by Detlev Fehling¹ and more recent adherents to the Liar School. Török argues instead that since there is no evidence to suggest that Herodotus actually visited Nubia in person – and crucially no claim that he consulted Ethiopian informants – it is likely that his account of the region relies heavily upon hearsay gleaned from Egyptian interlocutors. The identity of at least one group of these interlocutors can be inferred from the statement that the priests of Ptah at Memphis read Herodotus the names of the 330 kings who succeeded Min, the first king of Egypt (Hdt. 2.100). Török argues that the temple archives of the Memphite Ptah sanctuary are likely to have contained documents dating back to the time when Memphis formed the capital of the double kingdom of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty pharaohs Shabako, Shebitko and Taharqa. Török argues that the various snippets of information relating to Kushite kingship take their cue from one or more texts containing an 'eulogistic discourse on the Nubian dynasty's myth of the state' (p. 121) assimilating Egypt's foreign rulers to the great kings of old (e.g. Senusret I and II (Sesostris)) (p. 123) in much the same way as the *Memphite Theology of Creation* draws parallels between the Nubian dynasty's bid to reunite Egypt and Horus' role in the creation story. Török argues that both the idealisation of the Nubian pharaohs and the idea that Nubia was the home of Amun of Napata, a deity linked to the Nile flood and fertility, can be attributed to not just theological literature alone but also a "'nationalist" trend' in Late Period Egypt (p. 125) at a time when Egypt was under first Assyrian and then Persian occupation. Török's achievement is therefore to historicize the encounter between Herodotus and priests keen to stress the piety of (Nubian) kings who were remembered as legitimate rulers of Egypt. The priests' willingness to divulge such views is attributed by Török both to a sense of grievance at the preferential treatment meted out to rival sanctuaries in Lower Egypt who had collaborated with the invaders and the fact that they saw in Herodotus a kindred spirit and 'determined critic of Persian expansion and despotism' (p. 125).

There is much else in this chapter that readers will find enlightening including 'A Note on Ancient Nubian Archives' (pp. 71-73) underlining the extent to which Nubian temple archives acted as important repositories of historical memory, and the argument that accounts describing the manner in which ancient Ethiopian kings are elected offered by both Herodotus and Agatharchides of Cnidus are indicative of some knowledge, however hazy, of Nubian court ceremonial, namely the use of oracles to confer royal legitimacy. Chapter Five, 'Herodotus in Nubia' (pp. 118-136) summarises Török's conclusions regarding Herodotus' sources on Kushite kingship before bringing the volume to a close with a thoughtful meditation on the nature of Herodotean enquiry evocatively titled 'Reflections in a Distant Mirror' (pp. 126-136). The volume is supported by a helpful map and serviceable indices.

Whilst it is this reviewer's opinion that Török's admirable book will become the standard work on this topic in years to come, future editions of *Herodotus in Nubia* will need to be revised in order to take account of recently published research revealing the extent to which Herodotus made use of Egyptian narrative traditions such as the Petese stories (e.g. the story of Pheros, Hdt. 2.111).² Earlier reviews of this book by Stanley Burstein³ and Ian Moyer⁴ have rightly drawn attention to important work by Kim Ryholt⁵ suggesting that Herodotus' colourful account of how the Egyptian 'Deserters' or 'Asmach' (literally 'Those who stand at the left side of the king') came to be settled on lands south of Meroe bears a striking resemblance to a narrative preserved in a fragmentary Demotic papyrus. Although necessary to bring this book up to date such additions would in no

¹ Fehling, D. 1971. *Die Quellenangaben bei Herodot. Studien zur Erzählkunst Herodots*. Berlin = 1989. *Herodotus and his 'Sources'. Citation, Invention and narrative Art*, trans. J.G. Howie. Leeds.

² Ryholt, K. 2006. *The Petese Stories II*. Copenhagen.

³ Burstein, S. 2015. 'Review of: Török, L., *Herodotus in Nubia*.' *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 2015.01.14.

⁴ Moyer, I. 2015. 'Review of: Török, L., *Herodotus in Nubia*.' *Ancient History Bulletin Online Reviews* 5:45–47.

⁵ Ryholt, K. 2012. 'A Demotic Narrative in Berlin and Brooklyn concerning the Assyrian Invasion of Egypt (Pap. Berlin P. 15682 + Pap. Brooklyn 47.218.21-B).' In V. M. Lepper (ed.) *Forschung in der Papyrussammlung: Eine Festgabe für das Neue Museum*, 337-353. Berlin.

way detract from Török's overarching thesis. Instead, they prompt further, tantalising questions as to how such stories were relayed to Herodotus in the first place and by whom, providing further proof of the essential pluralism and multivocality of the *Histories* – qualities which Török thinks modern historians should strive both to emulate and uphold.

Joseph Skinner
Newcastle University