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The Reception of Herodotus in the Ferrarese Quattrocento

1. The seasons of *civiltà estense*, in the evocative phrase of Riccardo Brusagli¹, document an increasingly complex response to the work of the first great Greek historian, Herodotus, the man who invented history (in the title of a recent book)², whom Cicero called «the father of history», and whom many others following Plutarch referred to as «the father of lies». In this essay I consider the reception of Herodotus in Ferrara in the Quattrocento from the arrival of Guarino Veronese in 1429 to around 1490 when Matteo Maria Boiardo completed his version of Herodotus's *Histories* in the vernacular. A variety of authors, most of whom were associated in one way or another with Guarino, composed writings during this period that provide ample evidence of the extent to which Herodotus was becoming a familiar figure in the constellation of classical authorities given prominence by the humanist Guarino and his followers. The fusion of medieval and classical that characterizes the Ferrarese Renaissance from as early as Pier Andrea de' Bassi's *Le fatiche di Hercule* (probably composed in the 1430s) finds expression in the various ways in which Herodotus is brought into the culture. Indeed, Herodotus proves to be a classical authority easily adaptable to the vernacular idiosyncrasies of Ferrarese culture, a culture that will give birth to Boiardo's vernacular humanism and, in the next century, to Ariosto's. Herodotus, especially once he is given a vernacular voice, prepares readers for the sort of themes and tone that they will encounter in a poem like Ariosto's *Furioso*, which has its own curiously understated relationship with the work of Herodotus.

This study is the first part of a broader survey of the reception of Herodotus in the European Renaissance across the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and into the seventeenth. The survey opens with this examination of Guarino and the reading of Herodotus in and around his school; I will develop it further in subsequent publications that take into consideration later moments in Ferrarese literary culture that depend on developments that derive from Guarino's teaching and general introduction of the Greek historian. In later pieces I will consider Boiardo's adaptation of Herodotus; vernacular responses to Boiardo's version; Ariosto's suppressed encounter with Herodotus; and Tommaso Porcacchi's association of Herodotus with Ferrarese romance-epic. In additional subsequent work I will argue that this initial intense Ferrarese engagement with Herodotus lays the groundwork for that of later European readers such as Henri Estienne, Joseph

¹ BRUSCAGLI (1983).

² MAROZZI (2008).

Scaliger, and Issac Casaubon. I will also argue that it is an important step in the cultivation of the New World Herodotus encountered in the works of Joseph de Acosta and El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega.

2. I mentioned in passing Pier Andrea de' Bassi's *Le fatiche di Hercule*, which is an early example of the fusion of medieval and classical that becomes so typical of the Ferrarese Renaissance. His underappreciated prose romance – Antonia Tissoni Benvenuti calls it an «ignored masterpiece»³ – presents the figure of Hercules, important to Ferrarese identity and ideology long before the emergence of Ercole d'Este as a political leader, moving against a background of medieval pomp and decoration⁴. Written in honor of the Herculean presence of Nicolò III, the work, printed in 1475, was probably composed in the 1430s to celebrate the birth of Ercole (born 24 October 1431). But the preface makes it clear that there is another Herculean figure in the offing: Guarino Veronese. *Le fatiche di Hercule* is written at a transitional moment in Ferrarese culture that is caused by the arrival of Guarino whose impact is immediate and profound. The work looks back nostalgically to represent a chivalric Hercules dressed in medieval armor with a lion-skin cape, the sort of figure who would be familiar to readers of Boccaccio's *Genealogia deorum gentilium* and Salutati's *De laboribus Herculis*. Moreover, its mode of composition appeals to an audience familiar with extended romance narratives built around the technique of *entrelacement*⁵. But at the same time there is something new, at moments Herodotean, in the allusiveness of the writing that even at this relatively early date bears the imprint of the changes in Ferrarese culture with the ascendancy of Guarino's humanism⁶. Like Hercules in the famous myth associated with him, Ferrarese culture was at a crossroads.

3. In a letter to Leonello d'Este of 7 September 1431, around the probable time of the composition of *Le fatiche di Hercule*, Guarino adapts a Ciceronian commonplace, *vir strenuus ac fortis*, to praise Bassi, referring to him as a *vir strenuus ac liberalis in primis* (an energetic and honorable man beyond all others, 2, 127). But Guarino may be damning Bassi with faint praise in this unique reference to him in his extant letters. A creature of the previous generation, Bassi represents an earlier moment in Ferrarese culture that the new learning promoted at Guarino's school is on the verge of radically transforming.

³ «[I]gnorato capolavoro», TISSONI BENVENUTI (1991, vol. II, 68).

⁴ There is little scholarship on Pier Andrea de' Bassi, who does not even merit an entry in the *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*. COSENZA (1962, vol. I, 464) gives him one lonely card.

⁵ TISSONI BENVENUTI (1993, vol. I, 781f., 787f.).

⁶ MATARRESE (1998, 196f.).

If there is something vaguely Herodotean about Pier Andrea de' Bassi's depiction of Hercules and the wondrous monsters the hero overcomes, things change once Herodotus makes his actual entry into Ferrarese culture in the person of Guarino. Because of Guarino's growing reputation as a teacher, Nicolò d'Este invited him to Ferrara in 1429 to open a school for the children of the Estense aristocracy and their close associates. The master began teaching there the following year from a canon of authors that included Herodotus. Guarino's letters document his growing interest in Herodotus over the first decades of the fifteenth century before he arrived in Ferrara. At some point during his early years there, he translates a substantial fragment of Herodotus for didactic use and works diligently to locate a complete copy of the *Histories*. A letter of uncertain date (internal evidence leads Sabbadini to propose 1415) from Gasparino Barzizza to Guarino refers to the latter's project to translate an unspecified Greek historian, *sed dum in transferenda historia greca occupatus es* (*Epistolario*, Sabbadini 1915, vol. I, 101), whom Sabbadini reasonably assumes must be Herodotus («qui non si può intendere che la traduzione di Erodoto», vol. III, 45). Guarino may have begun this translation project before 1415, perhaps as early as 1414 when he was teaching Greek and Latin in Venice from 1414 to 1419. In an initial attempt at rendering Herodotus, Guarino adapted sections from the first seventy-one paragraphs of Book 1 of the *Histories* in an abbreviated Latin version probably intended for the classroom. In 1902, Riccardo Truffi identified this work as part of *ms. 203*, Biblioteca Classense, Ravenna. The manuscript contains a variety of fifteenth-century Latin writings, poetry and prose, including two signatures in poor condition that contain the actual translation with this heading, the first two words of which are in Greek: *Kleio Herodotou e greco latine conversum per clarum virum Guarinum Veronensem* («Clio of Herodotus translated from Greek into Latin by the famous man, Guarino Veronese»). Given that the copy is in an early fifteenth-century hand, and not that of Guarino, and given similarities between the language of the translation and certain passages in Francesco Barbaro's *De re uxoria* (1416), Truffi proposed that it might be a text assembled by Barbaro from scholastic exercises. The translation is a relatively faithful rendering into Latin of portions of the Greek text from I 1-71, but there are many passages omitted, due perhaps to its origins in the classroom⁷.

To focus briefly on the Venetian Francesco Barbaro may appear to take us away from Ferrara but we remain closer than it seems. In *De re uxoria*, a treatise on marriage composed in 1416 as a

⁷ TRUFFI (1902, 76f.) points out that Guarino omits the following chapters: 18-22, 49-52, 54, 57-58, 66, 70, and portions of chapters 9-17, 32, 41-42, 46, 53, 60, 62-62, 67.

wedding present for Lorenzo di Giovanni de' Medici, younger brother of Cosimo⁸, Barbaro refers to Herodotus's *Histories* I 193 in the opening paragraph, *ut scribit Herodotus pater historiae*, giving him pride of place in a long list of classical authorities, Greek and Latin, major and minor (*a.F.2.59*, c. 4)⁹. In the section *De coitus ratione*, Barbaro refers to the Gyges story in I 8 (*a.F.2.59*, c. 67) and in *De uxoris ducenda divitiis* he refers to I 138 (*a.F.2.59*, cc. 29v-30)¹⁰. Truffi proposes further that a passage from the section *De liberorum educatione* alludes to Herodotus I 153¹¹. Barbaro had been one of Guarino's students while he was teaching Greek in Venice¹². Although three of the four allusions to Herodotus in *De re uxoria* are from sections in the first book that Guarino did not translate and may not have had when he was teaching Barbaro, it is still reasonable to attribute to his teaching Barbaro's enthusiasm for and familiarity with the Greek historian. Furthermore, presumably due to Guarino's relocation to and prominence in Ferrara, Barbaro's text on marriage received an eager reading there as well as in Florence. It circulated in manuscript among the readers passing through Guarino's house in Ferrara in 1428¹³. The work is copied on cc. 3v to 84 of BE *a.F.2.59*, an Estense manuscript that also contains Plutarch's *De liberis educandis* in Guarino's Latin translation, Vergerius's *De ingenuis moribus*, and Basil's *De studiis* in Leonardo Bruni's Latin version. The handsome vellum codex with decorated initial letters in an strikingly clear humanistic hand was probably copied and put together sometime in the middle decades of the fifteenth century by Biagio Bosoni, active in the courts of Nicolò III, Leonello, and Borso, first as a scribe and later as the librarian responsible for books owned by the Estense rulers¹⁴.

4. In addition to this testament to Guarino's teaching of Herodotus there are several passages from Guarino's letters where he mentions Herodotus outright or refers to historical or mythological figures from the text. In a letter to John Chrysoloras composed in 1415, Guarino mentions the myth of Cleobis and Biton, which he might have known from Herodotus I 31¹⁵. In a letter of 1416,

⁸ The text of *De re uxoria* in GARIN (1952), follows GNESOTTO (1915a); GARIN (1952) uses the late Renaissance translation of Alberto Lollo Ferrarese. I take Lollo's translation to be another, albeit peripheral, witness to the Ferrarese reception of Herodotus. Published by Giolito in 1548, Lollo's translation circulated widely (GARIN 1952, 1128).

⁹ I have consulted *ms a.F.2.59* in the Biblioteca Estense, Modena, for reasons I explain in what follows.

¹⁰ Both these passages are excised from GARIN (1952), the first presumably for prudish reasons.

¹¹ 153 (for the text see *a.F.2.59*, c. 81v, and GNESOTTO (1915a, 97); GNESOTTO (1915a, 97 n. 2), proposes Aulus Gellius XI 11; Garin 1952, 133-5)

¹² GUALDO (1964, 101-3).

¹³ FRICK (2004, 202f.).

¹⁴ On the manuscript, see KRISTELLER (1963-1997, vol. I, 372); also see the reference to Bosoni as scribe in FAVA (1932, 112, entry 240). For the fullest discussion of Bosoni, see BERTONI (1918a); also see EVERSON (2001, 146 n. 36). BERTONI (1918a, 98f.), collects several documents connected with the production of a book by Bosoni in 1435 containing *De re uxoria* and «uno libro Basilio», which most likely is *a.F.2.59*, Biblioteca Estense, Modena.

¹⁵ SABBADINI (1915, vol. I, 69). As Sabbadini points out, this reference is filtered through Plutarch, SABBADINI (1915, vol. III, 33). Guarino would have also known of Cicero's discussion of the myth in *Tusc.* I 47.

Guarino writes from Venice to the Ferrarese lawyer, Nicolò Perondolo, and refers to a passage from Herodotus II 129, on the burial of the Egyptian Pharaoh Mycerinus (Sabbadini 1915, vol. II, 98f.).

While it is impossible to measure exactly how much such a reference might already be percolating among the members of an elite literary culture like the one extending between Venice and Ferrara, I take this sort of comment to be part of the pre-history of the reception I am investigating. A later reader of Boiardo's vernacular version of Herodotus, Zoanne Pencaro, will similarly comment on the tomb of this specific Egyptian Pharaoh in a gloss on the copy in the Biblioteca Estena, Modena, *α.H.3.22*, c. 69¹⁶.

Another letter of 1416 to Poggio Bracciolini, refers to Xerxes's first failed attempt to bridge the Hellespont when he famously whips the waters to punish them for washing away one of his prized horses (VII 33-6)¹⁷.

In a letter of 3 March 1426 to Giovanni Aurispa, Guarino expresses a strong desire to locate a copy of Herodotus¹⁸. And just over a year later on 5 March 1427, Guarino effused with sheer delight about a complete copy of Herodotus he had received from Panormita¹⁹. Antonio Rollo proposes that this is the manuscript in the Biblioteca Marciana, *Marc. gr. 366*, which contains marginalia in Guarino's hand throughout its first half²⁰.

Wherever Guarino's copy is now, Herodotus's *Histories* was in the scholar's library when he came to Ferrara in 1429. He not only began to use it as a text in the classroom but he also drew from it as a source for information of all sorts. For example, in a letter of 1430 to the medical doctor Filippo di Giovanni Pellizzone of Milan, he refers to II 86-90, where Herodotus reports in some detail on the practice of embalming, specifically on how certain spices can be used to preserve a cadaver (*Epistolario* 2, 89).

5. Neither Janus Pannonius in his *Panegyric* in praise of Guarino (1450s) nor Ludovico Carbone in his funeral oration for the master (1460) says anything direct about Guarino's promotion of Herodotus. But the arrangement of Pannonius's lengthy narrative may imply the presence of

¹⁶ For the full text of Pencaro's annotations, see LOONEY (2012; for this specific passage, see p. 77).

¹⁷ SABBADINI (1915, vol. II, 632) where he refers to this same passage at VII 33-6 again in a letter written near the end of his life in 1458 to Giacomo Antonio Marcello.

¹⁸ SABBADINI (1915, vol. I, 512) *si tua ope atque opera Herodoti compos fieri possem, nihil gratius nihil iocundius afferre possem hoc tempore*. SABBADINI (1915, vol. III, 198) points out that Toscanella was also involved in trying to locate a copy of Herodotus for Guarino. SABBADINI (1903, 112), for a letter from Antonio Panormita to Giovanni Toscanella, where Panormita says of Guarino ... *postremo Herodotum infinita prece, paene eciam lacrimis petit...*

¹⁹ SABBADINI (1915, vol. I, 564) *Quam gratum quam amoenum quam iocundum mihi extiterit hoc officium tuum non satis explicare possem, quod tuo ductu atque auspicio huc volitavit Herodotus et musae, ut verius loquar, Herodoti. Tantum tamque benignum ad peragrandas orbis terrarum plagas et res gestas duces parasti, ut nihil praestari suavius mihi potuerit: eius sermone cupide fruar, eius per vestigia fluvios colles maria portus urbes visere datum, immo, quod mirabilis est, cum mortuis confabulari et 'vivas audire et reddere voces'.*

²⁰ ROLLO (2004, 335-7).

Herodotus in the teacher's curriculum. In what amounts to a chronological survey of Guarino's treatment of the classics, Pannonius first praises how Guarino illuminates Homer in his teaching, then he turns to comment at some length on the story of Arion and the dolphin (ll. 569-83), which he most likely knew from the episode as reported in Herodotus at I 23f.²¹. The first large omission in Classense 203 of Guarino's rendition of the historian occurs at chapters 18-22 and resumes with the Arion episode at 23. One can easily imagine students at the school enjoying the well-known episode of the lyre player dressed in the finest of his finery who outwits the pirates by leaping into the water before they kill him, only to be saved by the dolphin.

Girolamo Castello, like Pannonius and Carbone a devoted student of Guarino, brings Herodotus to life in a bilingual epistle in elegiac couplets (thirty verses in Latin followed by four concluding lines in Greek), which he sends to the master in 1442²². The original copy is preserved in *Vat. Gr. 1507*, a small codex that belonged to Guarino containing Hesiod's *Works and Days* (cc. 3-40v) and a life of the poet (cc. 1-2v), with the single sheet on which Castello's poem is written tipped into the opening page of the manuscript (c. II) and the folded sheet that served as envelope for the verse epistle tipped into the manuscript on the verso of that page (c. IIv)²³. Castello was a student in Guarino's school who left Ferrara to study natural philosophy at the University of Bologna between 1443 and 1445, returning to his hometown to take a degree in medicine in 1445, where he then became a professor of medicine in the *Studium* from 1446 to 1482 (Sabbadini 1915, vol. III, 382). The conceit of the poem announced in its descriptive title is that Castello has commissioned Herodotus and Hesiod to go to Guarino's house to pick up a copy of an unspecified work of Plato²⁴. «There is a house in the middle of town that can be seen from a distance: they call it the place where Apollo and the muses meet» (ll. 1f.). «Go there quickly, Herodotus, glory of the Halicarnassian people, the prince of ancient history» (ll. 5f.). Similar praise is directed at Hesiod. To fight the tedium of travel, the narrator recommends that the two take turns reading their works to each other as they make their very long way to Ferrara, which then prompts him to give brief

²¹ THOMPSON (1988, 162-5).

²² SABBADINI (1915, vol. II, 423f.).

²³ There is no way to tell who tipped in the letter and envelope, whether Guarino or some later compiler. The poem carries the descriptive title: *Ad Herodotum Alicarnasiensem historiographum et Hesiodum Ascraeum poetam celeberrimum ut Guarini Veronensis viri doctissimi ac eloquentissimi domum repetant et ab eo Platonis volumen nomine suo poscant*. The letter's address contains effusive praise for the master of the sort that one might want to preserve: *Ad clarissimum et eloquentissimum aetatis nostrae virum Guarinum Veronensem praeceptorem suum ac benefactorem observandissimum*. LUZI'S s.a. handwritten inventory of Greek manuscripts in the BAV, which I consulted in the Vatican Film Library microfilm, *Inv. Vat. 324*, has this description: *Chartaceus folior. 42 fuit Guarini Veronensis, ad quem latinis et graecis versibus mitti H. Aleander* followed by the Greek titles of the life and *Works and Days*. In the Greek lines added to the end of the poem Castello identifies himself with his first name in Greek and then at the bottom of the page signs off with *Hieronumos*. It is not clear to me why the Vatican cataloguer mistakenly attributes the poem to someone else.

²⁴ CAMPBELL (1997, 42) proposes that the volume in question is Guarino's life of Plato.

summaries of each writer's opus. «To that one [Hesiod] disclose what ruin the beginnings of great kings brought upon their own Asia; and what first led barbarian hosts into Europe and entangled different armed forces. And catalogue rivers and peoples and the characteristics of places. Let it be permitted that your companion [Hesiod] say that he is not able to believe many things» (ll. 13-8).

The summary of Herodotus's *Histories* is a good succinct recapitulation, first alluding to the latter half of his work that treats the wars between Greeks and Persians, and the opening ethnographic half with its discussion of the areas where Herodotus had traveled or about which he had received reports. The historian has plenty to say about rivers too. The final line alludes to the many wonders embedded in the Herodotean narrative in a way that is perhaps meant to call attention to Hesiod's own claims about fiction. For it is Hesiod who famously has his muses announce at the opening of the *Theogony* that they know how to tell lies that resemble truths (26-8), i.e., that they can inspire fiction when they like. Castello's attention to the apparent incredibility of the Herodotean narrative may reflect an important point of discussion in conversations led by Guarino concerning the text of Herodotus.

I take this poem, small though it is, to be emblematic of the successful degree to which Guarino's teaching had quickened the figure of Herodotus in the local imagination. And he had done so as early as 1442. A former student wants to borrow a book from the master's well-stocked library and makes the request via a poem in which he sends the Greek historian to knock on his teacher's door. This playful composition, which reflects Guarino's own delight in Herodotus and in Greek letters in general, is inconceivable even just a few years earlier. By mid-century Herodotus had come to life in Ferrara and he was even making house calls.

6. During the principate of Guarino's pupil and later patron, Leonello d'Este, who ruled Ferrara from 1441-1450, the new humanistic learning left its mark on the Estense court. Angelo Decembrio's *De politia litteraria*, completed sometime not long after the death of Leonello in 1450, paints a vivid picture of the intellectual life among the humanists under Leonello's patronage²⁵. The conversation that Decembrio reconstructs touches on Herodotus at several moments in the work.

²⁵ CURRAN (2007, 82) proposes 1462 as the date of composition since *Vat. Lat. 1794* concludes with a dedication to Pius II, pope from 1458 to 1464, presumably a time frame within which Decembrio might have finished the work (c. 221v). The single remaining manuscript (originally there were at least two from which derive different recensions of the text) in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Vat. Lat. 1794*, can be consulted on microfilm at the Vatican Film Library of St. Louis University. We await the edition and translation of Anthony Grafton and Christopher Celenza announced on the webpage of Princeton Firestone Library, accessed 20 July 2010, http://blogs.princeton.edu/rarebooks/2007/07/recently_acquired_angelo_decem.html. In the meantime one must turn to one of the two printed editions, 1540 or 1562, or a facsimile of the Vatican manuscript; another option is WITTEN (2002), which one assumes the work of Grafton and Celenza will supercede. I have been able to consult the Basil 1562 edition in a copy owned by the polymath Ulisse Aldovrandi, now housed in the Biblioteca Universitaria, Bologna. On

The opening book contains a reference to the Greek historian (along with Plutarch and Thucydides) as an excellent author worthy to be included in the idealized humanist library that the group is imagining: *Caeterum in historia opera Plutarchi Herodoti & Thucydidi excellentiora reputantur* (1562, 51). Lorenzo Valla's recent translation of Herodotus into Latin is mentioned in this context suggesting that the primary access to the original is through Valla's translation: *Sic in historia transferri nunc audio Herodotum atque Thucydidem a Laurentio* (1562, 51). In the context of a discussion on the obelisk in the Vatican (its provenance and the identity of the ashes in the ball at its top), Guarino refers to the Greek historian's discussion of how Darius set up pillars engraved with inscriptions that listed the peoples who had contributed to his army in *Histories* IV 87. The reader of *Vat. Lat. 1794* annotates the text at this point with the phrase, *Herodotus de pyramidibus*, which is not exactly what the specific passage is about although there has been mention of pyramids in the passage above (c. 138r). Decembrio's interlocutors link the Greek historian with a later Roman historical writer, Justinus (1562, 499). And there is an observation that refers to the powerful tyrant of sixth-century Samos, Polycrates, who figures prominently in an interconnected sequence of stories in Herodotus's original narrative: *Polycrates, multae potentiae, vel possessionis, vel valetudinis* (1562, 626f.).

Much of the conversation in the latter books of *De politia* is characterized by this sort of exploration of the Greek roots of Latin culture, linguistic and otherwise, as in the passage at 203v: «Polycrates [whose name means] of much power or property or health». On one level this is merely an erudite disquisition on the meaning of Greek names as analyzed in Latin, but to see this kind of erudition in the context of Guarino's broader agenda, this sort of etymological play is based on the fundamental assumption that there is a continuity between the cultural traditions of Greece and Rome. Moreover, it assumes that Ferrara is now positioning itself as a new space within which to move between those two worlds. The list of interlocutors who engage in the discussion memorialized by Decembrio is long, including several intellectuals associated with the tastes and accomplishments of the previous generation such as Feltrino Boiardo, the grandfather of Matteo Maria Boiardo. There are also several young students of Guarino represented in the work, including Tito Vespasiano Strozzi, Alberto Pio, and Francesco Ariosto, fresh faces ready to carry the new learning forward.

7. Although Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1474) does not figure in *De politia*, he is there in spirit for as much as anyone else in the Estense circle after Guarino, he works to promote the revival of classical antiquity, Greek and Latin, including the renewed interest in Herodotus.

Segre, Grafton, and others, have documented Leon Battista Alberti's close ties to the culture of Ferrara²⁶. Alberti's Ferrarese connection will yield impressive dividends decades later when Ariosto uses him as a source. Ariosto's interest in Alberti's moral dialogues, the *Intercenales*, which have an impact on him as he composes the autobiographical *Satires* in the 1520s, is a decisive moment for the development of vernacular humanism in Italian in general. In fact, one could argue that vernacular humanism, typically associated with trends and texts of the sixteenth century, actually originates with Alberti's presence in Ferrara eighty years earlier. Not only in his *Satires* but also in the *Orlando Furioso*, Ariosto turns to Alberti for the main source of several key episodes, including the scene of Astolfo on the moon in *Furioso* 34f. As Cesare Segre has pointed out, and here I paraphrase, we shouldn't be surprised that after nearly a century Alberti's moral dialogues come back to life in Ferrara, for Alberti's links to the city and its culture run deep and set the stage for Ariosto's eventual rewriting of the Albertinian model²⁷. In the 1420s Alberti's time as a student in Bologna situated him in relative proximity to Ferrara and his friendship with a fellow student Meliaduse d'Este (1406-1452), son of Nicolò III, gave him access to the highest circles of the Ferrarese elite. As a member of the papal entourage, Alberti spent time in Ferrara in 1438 during the opening year of the council between the Greek and Roman branches of the Church. He would return in the 1440s under the patronage of Meliaduse's half-brother, Leonello, for whom Alberti designed the equestrian monument to Nicolò III and the cathedral's campanile around 1443. During his time in Ferrara during the late 1430s and 1440s, he wrote several literary works that bear the imprint of the city's new humanistic culture. At some point he completed a piece on applied mathematics, *Ex ludis rerum mathematicarum*, written in the Tuscan vernacular despite its Latin title, lavishly illustrated, which he dedicated to Meliaduse.²⁸ Three pieces from this period are addressed to Leonello: *Philodoxeos fabula* (composed in 1424 and dedicated to Leonello in 1437), *Theogenius* (1438-41), and *De equo animante* (1444-45). Rinaldo Rinaldi adds the *Momus* (1443-50) to this list of Leonelline works, arguing convincingly that Leonello is the «secret dedicatee» and may also be the subject of this unusual allegorical work on how to exercise and control princely power²⁹. An interesting collection of fables in an Aesopian vein, *Apologi centum* (1437), is dedicated to the Ferrarese Francesco Marescalchi, another one of Guarino's students who

²⁶ SEGRE (1966); GRAFTON (2001, 189-224) and CURRAN (2007, 82-5). See also SANTORO (1989a and 1989b).

²⁷ SEGRE (1966, 94f.).

²⁸ SALETTI (2008; 2009).

²⁹ RINALDI (2002, 122-5).

contributed to the heightened level of interest in the city's classical revival³⁰. The *De re aedificatoria* (1452), on which more below, probably owes its genesis to Leonello's urging and support.

Alberti lards his writing with references to Herodotus but more to the point for Ferrarese humanism, those works of his that are created in the setting of Estense Ferrara demonstrate a rather detailed knowledge of the Greek historian³¹. None more so than the *Theogenius*, a moral dialogue on fortune presented to Leonello in consolation at the death of Nicolò III in 1441. The dialogue, composed in Tuscan, contains six key references to Herodotus that are points of departure for discussions of the marvelous, the idea of history, and the philosophy of fortune. In fact, Alberti's response to Herodotus is as much philosophical, natural and moral, as historical. The first allusion occurs just after the beginning of the second book where the main interlocutor, Teogenio, makes a very long speech (eleven pages in Grayson's modern edition, 1966, 85-96) on the connection between happiness and fortune. He introduces Polycrates³², a figure of interest for the interlocutors of Decembrio's *De politia*, as an example of the instability of personal fortune, emphasizing how the Samian tyrant passes from a state of happiness to a horrendous end.

Policrate, tiranno samio, a cui la fortuna sempre era stata propizia, quello el quale per sperimentare quanto in tutte le cose el fusse alla fortuna accetto, gittò in mare el suo anello e ritrovollo in corpo a un pesce statoli presentati, costui finì morendo con grandissima sua ignominia fitto sulla cima d'un monte in croce. E se bene essamineremo, forse troveremo vecchio niuno in quello stato in quale egli fu giovane. Anzi quasi ancora pare che insieme colla felicità sempre sia aggiunta summa miseria³³.

Alberti succeeds in reducing to a single sentence a passage that extends over a large arc of the narrative in the original. After his summary of the extended episode, the humanist passes from the particular to the general with the invitation to «examine well» the example of the tyrant: «pare che insieme colla felicità sempre sia aggiunta summa miseria».

Alberti returns to this same episode, expanding upon it in another vernacular work, *Profugiorum ad Aerumna*, in which he translates the entire letter that Amasis writes to Polycrates (one of the scenes that makes up the extended narrative in Herodotus) with its advice on how to

³⁰ FIORENZA (2001, 69-71), who reviews the circulation of various collections of fables, old and new, including Alberti's, in the Estense court.

³¹ For a list of the references in Alberti's works to Herodotus, see CARDINI (2005, 415f.). For a tantalizing picture of Alberti's impressive familiarity with some Greek authors and texts, but with little on his knowledge of Herodotus, see BERTOLINI (1998).

³² Alberti would also have known of Polycrates from the dialog of Lucian between Hermes and Charon (*Charon* 14) but the details of the allusion point more directly toward the Herodotean source.

³³ GRAYSON (1966, 86).

ward off bad fortune³⁴. Herodotus offers Alberti a body of material from antiquity from which he takes examples for his contemporary moral philosophy.

Alberti also uses the Greek historian as a source for natural philosophy. In another passage in the *Theogenius* this use of the Herodotean source emerges as the humanist describes how the natural world changes over time: «Erodoto storico affermava el mare già tempo essere stato sopra Memfi, sopra sino à monti di Etiopia, qual terra ora scoperta forse troppo rimase arrida» (ed. Grayson (1966, 88). Alberti identifies Herodotus as a historian but in this passage it is specifically his authority on natural history that is invoked. As Alberti reflects on the passage in the original, he teases out of it an interesting kind of chronological thinking with the suggestion that Herodotus is considering the deep geologic time of the natural world.

8. Around this same time in the late 1430s and early 1440s when Alberti was a frequent visitor to Ferrara, encouraged by Leonello he began working on his impressive *De re aedificatoria*, which would earn him the title of the «Florentine Vitruvius»³⁵. The work was not completed until around 1452 (*editio princeps*, 1485), after Leonello's death and after Alberti had moved to Rome to work for Pope Nicholas V who charged him with the restoration of various ancient monuments in the city. While the work is clearly a product of the general interest in renewing ancient Rome under papal patronage, it also bears the imprint of Alberti's time in Ferrara in the midst of the erudite circle around Leonello and Guarino. In Ferrara he functioned as a consultant for architectural projects, where he gives advice on the campanile of the Duomo and other monuments. But the real influence of Guarino and company is seen in the vast sweeping interweave of references to classical authorities, among them many allusions to Herodotus.

De re aedificatoria is as much a manual about how to construct edifices as it is a literary exploration of classical sources on the politics of the art of building. There are at least fifty references to Herodotus who writes (*scribit* I 29), reports (*refert* I 163), states (*inquit* I 267), mentions (*praedicat* I 273), and says (*ait* I 295) things that Alberti incorporates directly into his text. But not without questioning the ancient source. In fact, he wonders at one point «if we are to believe everything in Herodotus» (*si omnia credimus Herodoto* II 882), exhibiting the new humanist willingness to critique a classical authority, no matter how authoritative it may seem, and thereby inculcating in the reader a healthy skepticism about the possible limitations of the classics.

There are also numerous indirect references to figures and topics Alberti probably knew through his reading of Herodotus, including, for example, Mycerinus (II 677), Samos (II 711 +

³⁴ GRAYSON (1966, 130).

³⁵ ORLANDI (1966).

882), Croesus (II 631), and Scythians (II 672). The vast majority of references (46 out of 50) are to passages in the first four books of Herodotus, suggesting again that it is the first half, more or less, of the historian's work, the ethnographical half, that catches the attention of the early humanists. In the *De re aedificatoria* Alberti turns to Herodotus for the following kinds of information: anthropological details on peoples living around the Mediterranean basin (I 29 and 267); information on how other cultures practice the art of building (I 163 on Budini in Samarcanda, I 273 on Ethiopians); details of engineering practice (I 295 on the walls of Ecbatana, II 471 on elephantine stone, II 475 on the construction of the pyramid at Cheops, II 699 on building watchtowers in Babylon); and on various projects connected with waterworks (II 883 on irrigating the desert for Cambyses and II 951 on Queen Nitocre's harnessing of the Euphrates by introducing channels in the river). He refers to the famous story of Gyges from the beginning of the *Historiae* but not to comment on the moral issues the passage raises or on the precariousness of fortune; rather, he notes the size of the gift that Gyges makes to Pythian Apollo in the wake of the events (II 631).

For one final example, there is an interesting reference near the end of the work to the city of Ferrara (II 975): *Qui agrum apud Aegyptias paludes colunt – inquit Herodotus –, quo vim culicum et muscarum vitent, altissimis pernoctant turribus. Ferrariae ad Padum intra urbem culices haud multo apparent, extra urbem insuetis execrabiles sunt; pelli ab urbe ignium et fumi copia arbitrantur.* («The people who dwell in the Egyptian marshes – Herodotus states – to avoid the attacks of mosquitoes and flies sleep in very high towers. In Ferrara on the banks of the Po within the city walls there are hardly any mosquitoes, outside the walls they are unbearable to those not used to them; it is thought that the abundance of fires and smoke chases them out of the city»)³⁶. Ferrara and Herodotus both leave their mark on Alberti's *De re aedificatoria*.

9. Given the unbridled curiosity of Alberti, we should not be surprised to find evidence in his various works of a sustained encounter with Herodotus. But there are many lesser figures in the extended circle of humanists around Guarino who also demonstrate an interest in the author. In 1468 a Mantuan humanist, Filippo Nuvolone (whose father, Carlo, is one of the interlocutors in Decembrio's *De politia*), who moved between the Gonzaga and Este courts, would write Ludovico Gonzaga on 8 October 1468 from Ferrara and request a copy of the historian's work: «[...] che essa [your lordship] se degni prestarmi alchuni libri greci, de li quali ne è *ut plurimum* charestia, perché

³⁶ That the Ferrarese read *De re aedificatoria* is witness a letter from Pellegrino Prisciani to Ercole d'Este on 19 November 1485 in which he notes of Alberti's work: «[...] de la qual più volte V. E. et mi havemo ragionato: et più fiato si è facto cercare: ho inteso et de certo esser ne le mane de uno Ant.o», cited in BERTONI (1903, 67).

questo inverno delibero dargli grandissima opera, che Baptista Guarino e il Charbone legieranno ogni giorno. Per tanto la Ill. S. V. se voglia dignarsi a questo et aiutarmi e prestarmi lo *Erodoto* e il *Suida*, e l'*Homero*, se gli è, che certo più singulare gratia per el presente non potria farmi la Ill. S. V. a la quale humilmente e devoto mi raccomando. Non altro»³⁷.

Members of the literary elite were eager to acquire copies of Herodotus, and it was becoming more common to seek out copies of the text in the original Greek. As Filippo says, over the winter he is really going to go to work on the authors mentioned and in his list Herodotus takes precedence, even over Homer. As of mid-century these readers also had the option of reading the Greek historian in Valla's recent Latin translation, as we hear advertised in Decembrio's dialogue. And before too long there would be a third possibility, a version available in the vernacular. How Matteo Maria Boiardo makes his Herodotus speak in Italian, or as he puts it grandly to his patron Ercole I d'Este, «così Herodoto padre della hystoria hora nella vostra presentia ragionera Italiano», is the subject of the next important moment in this history of reception³⁸.

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³⁷ Cited in BERTONI (1903, 117). See also ZONTA (1905, 34) and RHODES (1954), an addendum to Zonta's research that argues for the importance of the neglected Nuvolone.

³⁸ BOIARDO (1533, 8v).

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