

DENNIS LOONEY

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).

SALETTI 2009

Beatrice Saletti (a cura di), *Don Domenico Messoro. Viaggio del Santo Sepolcro facto per lo illustro misere Milliaduse estense*, Roma, Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo.

SANTORO 1989a

Mario Santoro, *Polivalenza semantica dell'apologo della zucca nella satira VII dell'Ariosto*, in *Ariosto e il Rinascimento*, Napoli, Liguori, 350-64.

SANTORO 1989b

Mario Santoro, *La sequenza lunare nel Furioso: una società allo specchio*, in *Ariosto e il Rinascimento*, Napoli, Liguori, 237-62.

SEGRE 1966

Cesare Segre, *Leon Battista Alberti e Ludovico Ariosto*, in *Esperienze Ariostesche*, Pisa, Nistri-Lischi, 85-95.

STRASSLER 2007

Robert B. Strassler (ed.), *Landmark Herodotus: The Histories*, New York, Pantheon Books.

THOMPSON 1988

Ian Thompson (ed.), *Humanist pietas: the Panegyric of Ianus Pannonius on Guarinus Veronensis*, Bloomington, Indiana, Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies.

TISSONI BENVENUTI 1991

Antonia Tisconi Benvenuti, *Guarino, i suoi libri, e le letture della corte Estense*, in Alessandra Mottola Molfino-Mauro Natale (a cura di), *Le Muse e il Principe. Arte di Corte nel Rinascimento padano*, Modena, Panini, 2 voll.

TISSONI BENVENUTI 1993

Antonia Tisconi Benvenuti, *Il mito di Ercole. Aspetti della ricezione dell'antico alla corte estense nel primo Quattrocento*, in *Omaggio a Gianfranco Folena*, presentazione di Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, vol. I, Padova, Editoriale Programma, 773-92, 3 voll.

TRUFFI 1902

Riccardo Truffi, *Erodoto tradotto da Guarino Veronese*, in «Studi italiani di filologia classica» X 73-94.

WITTEN 2002

Norbert Witten (Hrsg.), *Angelo Camillo Decembrio. De politia litteraria*, Kritisch herausgegeben sowie mit einer Einleitung, mit Quellennachweisen und einem Registerteil versehen. BzA 169, München-Leipzig, K.G. Saur.

ZONTA 1905

Giuseppe Zonta, *Filippo Nuvolone e un suo dialogo d'amore*, Modena, Rossi.