More often than not, the editions of the *Histories* in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and even eighteenth centuries included fragments of Ctesias, and very often these volumes would close with Estienne’s *Apologia*. Whether through an irony of fate or the “malice” of a publisher, a single volume would thus bring together the author who defended Herodotus against the charge of lying, the one who—a confirmed liar himself—denounced him as a liar, and Herodotus himself, the father of history and of lies. In the silence and stagnation of many a library, the three of them must surely be regaling each other with a host of whispered liar’s tales.¹

With these memorable words François Hartog concluded his account of Herodotus’ truthfulness. As Hartog shows, Herodotus’ veracity came under almost continual attack from the moment Thucydides picked up his pen until the 16th century. The turning point is 1566 when Henri Estienne published his *Apologia Pro Herodoto*, Defence of Herodotus.² In this paper I will build upon Hartog’s formulation to study different ideas of Herodotus’ truthfulness in 16th-century France. I will argue in the latter half of the century there was a vigorous debate over the truthfulness of various sections of the Histories. Often this debate displayed an awareness of the difference between antiquity and modernity, that is to say, the vast distance in time that separated Herodotus from 16th-century France.

In the 15th century Cicero’s famous pronouncement that Herodotus was the “Father of History” was taken by Juan Luis Vives, a Spanish humanist, and turned into the “Father of Lies”.³ While many literary critics and historical theorists conceded that his style and artistry was excellent, it was also often felt that many tall tales within the *Histories* raised unanswerable questions over Herodotus’ accuracy and even his truthfulness in the faithful recounting of

³ *De legibus* 1.5: “Father of History” (*Herodotum patrem historiae*); “Father of Lies” (*mendaciorum patrem*) was first applied to Herodotus by Juan Luis Vives. See Boudou (2000) 497 n. 90.
historical facts and information. In Momigliano’s estimation, once Thucydides had introduced the idea that historiography must be factual, exclude fables, and focus on contemporary political events, Herodotus’ fate was sealed. Although Thucydidean historiography found its detractors in figures such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the various suspicions of Herodotus’ historiography in antiquity set the pattern for his reception in the modern world. For Momigliano, the reception of Herodotus in the modern world is the story of an initial rejection based on ancient criticism, which is slowly challenged by reassessments of his truthfulness in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries. However, these challenges never completely rehabilitated Herodotus’ reputation, which still suffered in comparisons with Thucydides into the 20th century.

Momigliano’s views, while compelling, are in urgent need of reassessment. Early modern historiography was a messy business and it is too simplistic to assume that the reception of Herodotus was defined entirely by the tensions between his ancient reputation and efforts to rehabilitate his truthfulness. Already in the 16th century, scholars were becoming keenly aware of the vast distances in time and social and cultural circumstance that separated contemporary Europe from ancient Greece and Rome. The awareness of this distance directly affected the way in which ancient texts were read. Similarly, there was a growing awareness of the richness of Herodotus’ text; that is to say, of the difference between the historical sections of the text, the description of myth, and the reported geographical and social information. Scholars often approached ancient texts as storehouses of exemplars, political treatises of relevance to modern problems, and even as part of a profane continuation of biblical history. The various ideas of historical time that arose necessitated a re-evaluation of the techniques of the ancient historians and opened the door to the rehabilitation of Herodotus’ reputation. Momigliano viewed 16th-century France as the key turning point in Herodotus’ rehabilitation because it was in 1566 that Henri Estienne first published the Apologia pro Herodoto, a “confident and aggressive . . . defense of Herodotus”, which aimed to use a collection of modern marvels to prove the veracity of the Histories’ unlikely tales, and to make them appear less archaic. Estienne’s work claimed that one need only to look at the extraordinary events of medieval and contemporary history to see that the fabulous tales of Herodotus might just be true.

---
5 Momigliano (1966a).
6 See Morley in this volume.
7 Baron (1959) 3–22; Kelley (1964a).