De novis libris iudicia

Hornblower, S.


Book 5 of Herodotus’ _Histories_ is a pivotal book, in which the narrative swings definitively toward fighting between Greeks and Persians. It introduces Athenian democracy and Spartan kingship, looks back to the first book and forward to the last, and describes the origins and opening phases of the Ionian Revolt, the Athenian ships of which were ‘the beginning of evils for Greeks and barbarians’ (5.97.3).

Simon Hornblower’s commentary on Book 5 is the first in English in over 100 years. The bulk of Hornblower’s large and influential output has focused on Thucydides, so it is a great boon for readers of Herodotus to have the contribution of one of the pre-eminent scholars of Greek historical writing: he brings to bear his keen prosopographical eye, his narrative ear, and his deep knowledge of fifth-century Greek literature—especially Thucydides—and the Greek historiographical tradition as a whole. The volume entails the usual high quality of the Cambridge green-and-yellow series.

This volume is also designed as one half of a pair, as Hornblower explains in the preface, the other half being a soon-to-appear (we hope) commentary on Book 6 co-authored by Hornblower and Christopher Pelling. The plan makes sense, since “more than perhaps any other two books of [Herodotus], 5 and 6 together form a unit or block” (3). But it does mean that some discussions relevant to Book 5 have been put off until the later volume, including Herodotus’ notion of historical causation, his treatment of Cleomenes, and the influence of Homer. At the same time, the introduction and commentary in the current volume deal fully with passages from Book 6 when appropriate, more than just whetting the reader’s appetite for the second of the pair.

Although this is a single-authored volume, it is also in many ways a team effort, as Hornblower has benefited from (and noted his debt to) a number of other scholars, including as-yet unpublished work. Most importantly,
perhaps, the Greek text reflects Nigel Wilson’s revised OCT from 2015. Not all his emendations are marked in the apparatus criticus, but those not noted are mostly minor, and crucial textual questions receive detailed attention in the commentary (e.g. 5.28, 5.48). (Wilson appears to have taken a much less adventurous approach to changing the text than the most recent editors, Rosén and Nenci.) Hornblower was able to incorporate material from the volume of the *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names* covering Miletus before its publication (now available as Volume VB). The introduction contains a section on “Language and Dialect” written by Angus Bowie and reprinted from his Cambridge commentary on Book 8 (2007). Finally, Hornblower’s commentary includes numerous suggestions made to him by Alan Griffiths via personal communication.

The 47-page Introduction begins with a discussion of the structure of Books 5 and 6 internally and their place within the *Histories* (one apparent typographical error: the subsection titles on pages 4 and 10 should switch places). Hornblower emphasizes the ‘resumptive’ nature of these two books, marked by Herodotus’ varied techniques of referring back to Book 1. Only once does Herodotus use an explicit cross-reference (the treasures at Branchidae, 5.36.4); rather, he tends to rely on verbal and thematic parallels, delayed explanations (e.g. the reason for the Alcmaeonid curse), or picking up a story where he left off (such as that of the Spartan kings). This relationship also holds true at the broader level of the overall story: “[t]he narrative which begins in 500 BC is both a new narrative beginning, and a near-repetition of a pattern of human behaviour and human response” (7). The section ends with a long list of parallel passages between Books 1 and 5/6.

A short section on the “Causes of the Ionian Revolt” discusses the advantages and disadvantages of the economic explanation proposed by a number of scholars, as well as the possible importance of the recent establishment of democratic governments in Greece (in the first full paragraph on page 17, ‘tyrannies’ and ‘democracies’ should be reversed). Another brief section follows on the “Chronology of Book 5” which presents the main difficulties with Herodotus’ narrative of events, notably the question of what was happening between 497 and 494.

In sections 4 and 5 Hornblower addresses two of his favorite topics, “Kinship Ties” and “Personal Names,” each encompassing Books 5 and 6. On the former, Hornblower notes the importance of such ties between *poleis* not just via mythology (e.g. Thebes and Aegina) but through colonial foundations, the latter sometimes left unstated by Herodotus. The fascinating section on personal names concentrates on the ten named Milesians in Book 5 as evidence for modern historians and for Herodotus’ own research. The onomastic