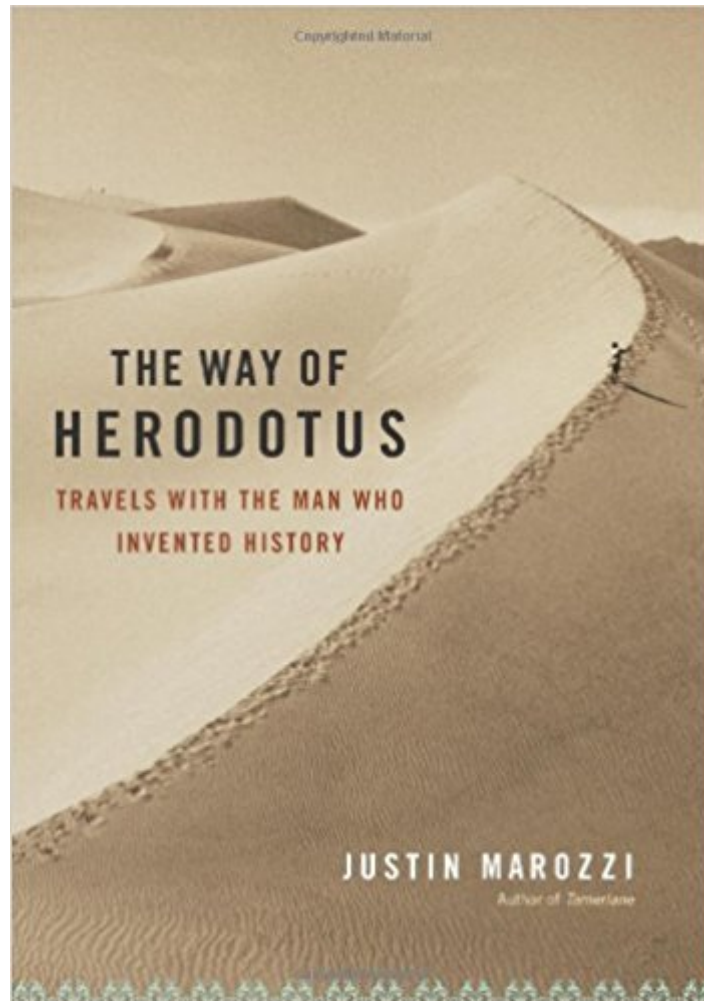


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The Way Of Herodotus: Travels With The Man Who Invented History



Synopsis

During the classical age of Greece, Herodotus wrote the first history text. But what he created was much more than this. Informed by his own travels, his historical work digresses more than it chronicles, with tales of the lands and peoples he visited. As Michael Ondaatje once famously suggested, "What you find in him are the cul-de-sacs within the sweep of history." In *The Way of Herodotus*, intrepid travel historian Justin Marozzi retraces the footsteps of Herodotus through the Mediterranean and Middle East, examining his 2,500-year-old observations about the cultures and places he visited, and finding echoes of his legacy reverberating to this day. It is a lively yet thought-provoking excursion into the world of Herodotus, with the man who invented history ever present, guiding the narrative with his discursive spirit.

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Customer Reviews

When I studied history in graduate school we all had to read Herodotus. It was an obligation and I treated it as such; never much enjoying it but slogging through as best I could. I enjoyed the "father of history's" discussion of the Persian wars, but the travelogue Herodotus provided as an aside to his main story was a distraction for me. Had it been available then, I could have benefited from Justin Marozzi's book, "The Way of Herodotus." In this work Marozzi travels the same path that Herodotus took 2,500 years earlier. It took him to Turkey, Iraq, Egypt, and Greece to visit many of the same places that Herodotus wrote about. By far he spends the majority of the volume, more than 100 pages, discussing Greece. In every case he visits local sites, contacts a large number of people with varying perspectives on the region, the past, or Herodotus. Everywhere, Marozzi finds

remnants of the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cultures that Herodotus perceived. From my perspective the most interesting part of the book was when Marozzi encountered Nenad Sebek, director of the Centre for Democracy and Reconciliation in South-east Europe, in Thessalonki. He describes the Centre's Joint History Project to produce history textbooks for the Balkans. That yielded a fascinating set of discoveries. The first study undertaken by the Centre, "Clio in the Balkans," found that "the rewriting of history in Yugoslavia since 1989 has seen the suppression of those themes and forces that once unified its peoples and a fresh emphasis on those that divide them. Conflicts between them in the present are presented as unchanging throughout the past so that wars and separation are inevitable, what Christina Koulouri, series editor of the new textbooks, calls the 'logic of dissolution'" (p. 250).

It is a pity that this is not a better book. Although (as the bibliography demonstrates) the notion of following the path trod by Herodotus is not original, Marozzi's title is nevertheless promising to history buff and travel/cultural enthusiast alike. But what follows is disappointing. Does the author intend to elucidate contemporary scenes with Herodotus' original observations or aim to provide a fresh take on Herodotus by light of current circumstances? Either could be amusing and possibly insightful. Unfortunately, the book accomplishes neither. The fan of Herodotus can empathize with Marozzi's waxing enthusiasm for this most original historian, but would be better served by simply re-reading the Histories, rather than picked-over extracts. On the other hand, for the reader hoping to gain insight into contemporary affairs in Iraq, Egypt, Greece, Turkey, etc. by contrasting author's reportage with Herodotus, the pickings are slim. It has been said that history (or developing events) quickly make fools of us all: One irony is that developments in most of these locations, even in the less than half-dozen years since the author's visits, already have subverted many of the lessons Marozzi seems to offer. Perhaps this is because his own reporting, much of it anecdotal, is surprisingly time-bound for someone touting historical perspective. Although Marozzi admonishes us at length to respect these diverse cultures (a genuine attribute of Herodotus), the author provides an oddly superficial picture of the contemporary cultures or circumstances being visited. Given his well-traveled resume, perhaps that is only a problem in the editing of this book --but it is striking.

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